Learning (and Teaching) Latin Verb Tenses: Applying Second Language Acquisition Research and Analyses of Verb Uses in Context[1]

Rebecca Harrison
Truman State University

ABSTRACT

This article uses research from Second Language Acquisition and from analyses of tense and verb uses in Latin authors to shed light on how students acquire verb tenses, especially past tenses, and to show how to enhance student learning of Latin verb tenses. I argue that 1) only one tense and one translation/use of a tense should be taught at a time; 2) the simple past meaning of the perfect should be the first past tense taught, then the stative use of imperfect, followed by the past progressive use, the present perfect, and pluperfect; 3) it makes a difference what verbs are used in teaching a tense; there are different semantic categories of verbs, such as stative, based on their inherent meaning, and tenses are acquired best with the category of verb that best matches the tense aspect; the combination of category of verb and tense can also sometimes aid in distinguishing translations of tenses; and 4) tenses occur in typical semantic and syntactic contexts, and these contexts are important to enhance acquisition and to aid in distinguishing different tense uses/translations. Finally, I provide teaching suggestions, sample exercises, methods for adapting and supplementing textbooks, and a review of textbooks in relation to teaching verb tenses.

KEY WORDS

Verb tenses in Latin, perfect tense, imperfect tense, pluperfect tense, Caesar, Vergil, lexical aspect

Many of today's Latin textbooks present the imperfect as the first past tense, often at the same time as the future, and the perfect tense after the imperfect, sometimes together with the pluperfect and future perfect. They also often teach all the translations/uses for a tense at once. Some textbooks use the same one verb as the

standard in paradigms and in presenting new tenses. These practices seem to have little theoretical basis other than tradition or an assumed ease or efficiency in learning.

In this paper, I argue that only one tense and only one translation/use of a tense should be taught at a time. Further, the first past tense that should be taught is the simple past use of the perfect. After this should be the stative use of the imperfect, which regularly expresses an on-going physical, mental, or sometimes emotional state with (stative) verbs such as *sum*, *iaceō*, *putō*, or *amō*, then the past progressive use of the imperfect, followed by the present perfect use of the perfect, and finally the pluperfect. Second, I argue that the choice of verbs used in examples in teaching a new tense can aid or impede acquisition; tenses are acquired best with the type of verb whose inherent meaning best matches the tense aspect, such as *currō*, an activity, for the progressive use of imperfect. Third, the acquisition of verb tenses within characteristic contexts, such as with associated adverbs, and often certain other tenses, or in certain syntactic constructions, such as a relative clause, etc. is also important in acquiring tenses and developing appropriate expectations for reading.

These arguments rely on two strands of research. First, I reviewed the research findings from Second Language Acquisition (SLA)[2] related to acquiring tenses, especially past tenses, to see how the findings can apply to and enhance teaching Latin verb tenses. In the first part of this article, I present some basic findings and summarize five underlying principles from SLA. Second, I created my own corpus analysis of tense and verb uses in four Latin authors. My research is based on an analysis of uses of indicative tense verbs from a sample of Latin texts, including book 1 of Caesar's *De Bello Gallico,* Cicero's *De Amicitia*, books 1, 2, and 4 of Vergil's *Aeneid*, and Plautus' *Mostellaria*. I chose these as a representative sample of different genres and types from authors that students are likely to read. I also used Oldsjö's analyses of tense uses in Caesar. The emphasis in this study is on indicatives, usually the first forms taught.

These two strands of research provide the empirical evidence for the three major topics in this article.

1. The order of acquisition of past tenses and the factors enhancing or impeding acquisition.

---

2 I use the term SLA in this article to refer to research studies on acquisition by immersion or by instruction or in combination.

2. The categorization of verbs into four semantic types based on their inherent meaning, and the relationship between the semantic category of verb and tense aspect. The combination of type of verb and tense can enhance (or impede) student learning of a tense and can also sometimes aid in distinguishing uses of tenses and translations of verbs and in translating indirect statement.

3. The characteristic contexts for each past tense in Latin so that teachers can provide authentic, quality input for instructional examples and exercises, and so that students can learn to predict and interpret the verbs met in reading.

After discussing the characteristic context results, I then go through each tense in Latin in the recommended order (simple past use of the perfect, stative imperfect, past progressive use of the imperfect, present perfect use of the perfect, and pluperfect) with suggestions for teaching, including sample exercises. Finally, I provide suggestions for adapting and supplementing textbooks and a review of textbooks in relation to teaching verb tenses and aspect.

I will begin with the summary of some basic background findings from SLA research.

Second Language Acquisition Research: Background

Developing an understanding of the temporal system of a second language takes time. It is more than the sum of the individual parts, and it evolves gradually and is revised as more tenses and observations are added (Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 95). The temporal system includes temporal markers, such as adverbs, as well as verb morphology. There are also limits on the memory and processing ability of language learners. Below are summaries of five underlying principles that will recur in discussions of one or more of the three major topics of this article: 1) stages of temporal acquisition, 2) the One to One Principle, 3) processability and Pienemann's teachability hypothesis, 4) the distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge, and 5) the importance of quality input in instruction. I will then discuss applications of SLA research to the common practices of teaching 1) multiple translations/uses of a tense and 2) multiple tenses at the same time as a preliminary to my first major topic, the order of acquisition of past tenses.

1) Stages in Temporal Acquisition: SLA research has shown that when people learn a language, whether by immersion or instruction 1) they rely first on the order in the narrative for temporality, i.e. assuming chronological order; then, 2) they use lexical clues from adverbs, prepositional phrases, etc.; and 3) finally, the morphological forms are learned and used (Ortega 126; Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 111, 414-15, 420-21; Ellis and Sagarra 590).

2) One to One Principle: Andersen's study of learners' limited processing ability and concept development shows that as second language learners try to construct a consistent system, they initially follow what he termed the One to One Principle: one form equals one translation/use, that is, learners need a one to one correspondence as they are first learning (Andersen 77-95).

3) Processability and Pienemann's Teachability Hypothesis: Some features of language, such as vocabulary, are variational in that they do not have to be learned in a certain order. Other things are developmental and are acquired in a certain order (Lightbown and Spada 177-78). For these developmental features, Pienemann has argued that there are certain stages and sequences of learning; learners must learn certain concepts before they are ready to learn the next (or a later) stage in the sequence. This is the Teachability Hypothesis.

4) Explicit vs. Implicit Knowledge: There is a difference between explicit knowledge and implicit learning or understanding and how they are used. It is the difference between what one may **know** vs. what one can **do**. For example, I had students come into intermediate Latin who could identify the tense of a verb form (in isolation) or complete a paradigm (explicit knowledge), but could not translate the verbs correctly in context (implicit understanding). Explicit and implicit knowledge are dissociated in separate parts of the brain and do not always interface (Cintrón-Valentín and Ellis 201). As VanPatten has argued, it is implicit knowledge that is used in reading and comprehension; explicit instruction is not necessarily applied, though it may facilitate learning (VanPatten 29-35, 58-59) when it is provided in teaching a tense that is ready by processability theory to be learned. See more below in the discussion of *Interaction with Input, Salience, L1 Influence and the Role of Explicit Instruction in Temporal Acquisition*.

5) The Importance of Quality Input in Instruction: The quality of the input and intensity of interaction are factors of critical importance that can enhance the speed of (or impede and delay) acquisition (Ortega 141-42, Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 432-33). Authentic or appropriate input is the basis for the development (over time) of the full implicit understanding of each tense and the distinction between that tense and others (VanPatten 29-35, 58-59). Components of input that will be discussed include the frequency of occurrences, the salience (how easy it is to notice the form)

and interaction with input, the semantic aspect of the verbs themselves and the relationship between the verb semantic type and tense aspect, and the various features of context including such things as associations with certain words, syntactic constructions, and other tenses.

Applications to Common Teaching Practices

1) Argument against Teaching Multiple Translations/Uses at the Same Time - One to One Principle and Processability:

Does teaching all the translations/uses of a tense at the same time enhance acquisition? This practice goes against the One to One Principle, which shows the need for one tense form - one translation at first in the development of the temporal system (Ortega 127; Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 425-26). While exposure to the concept that a form does not necessarily have one equivalent translation is important, and a preview of the different uses can give a big picture view, which can benefit certain types of learners, learners initially establish one meaning/translation, which should be the basic, most common one, as their default in working memory. For the Latin perfect, this basic translation is the simple past, which is the first past tense acquired in the order of acquisition, as discussed below; by processability the present perfect use should not be taught until later, after the imperfect and past progressive. Learning a language is like getting directions to a place you have not been. One initial set of directions for the basic route is useful; variations can be confusing at first. With experience, alternatives for special situations, such as rush hour congestion or rain, make more sense and can be processed and remembered more easily.

2) Arguments against Teaching Multiple Tenses at the Same Time:

SLA research also shows that it is best to teach only one tense at a time. One reason is that teaching complete tense systems, such as the perfect, pluperfect, and future perfect together, or the imperfect and future together, can be confusing because of memory overload and confusion of similar forms. Words and forms that are similar in phonetic/orthographic form are more apt to be confused with each other, especially if they are taught at the same time (Sommers and Lewis 83-108; Laufer 153). Differences that are only a different vowel in the same syllable position in words are especially apt to cause confusion (Laufer 146-48). Confusion (by cross association) is also apt to occur when the words are similar or opposites in semantic idea (Schmitt 147; Nation 47). Both problems apply to teaching the imperfect and future at the same time: non-present (essentially similar in being "opposites" of

present and of each other); new tenses marked by a morpheme beginning with "b" in the same syllable differing only by the vowel. Similarly, the pluperfect and perfect tense are both past tenses, with the third person plurals similar except for one vowel and the quantity (and thus the accent): ērunt vs. erant. The future perfect, another non-present tense, is also similar to the pluperfect, except for the vowel in almost all the forms.

So, if possible, it is better to teach the imperfect and the future tenses separately, and, similarly, the perfect, pluperfect and future perfect separately.[3] Nation suggests that presentation of such words or forms should occur weeks to months apart to allow sufficient time after the first form is firmly settled before introducing the second similar word or form; the time needed varies for individuals (Nation 47). If one needs to teach multiple tenses with similar orthography, such as imperfect and future, at the same time or closely together, using illustrative pictures with captions can help reduce the confusion (Schacter, Israel, and Racine 1-24). Mnemonic methods do not work as well with phonologically or orthographically similar words unless the keyword uses a distinguishing characteristic (Hulstijn 203-24). I have used as examples: for the imperfect, -ba- = wa(s) (___ing), vs. future, -bi- = wi(ll), and "Will Bo or Bill bunt the ball to advance the runner from first to second base [conjugations]?"; and for the pluperfect, "If the ERA had passed, women . . ."

A more fundamental reason for not teaching multiple tenses simultaneously is that, by processability theory, teaching the pluperfect together with the perfect does not follow the order in which past tenses are acquired. Textbooks that present the tenses in batches to get through the material as quickly as possible and get to reading real Latin inhibit their goal by their method, which can result in possible confusion and explicit rather than implicit learning, which is needed for processing and reading. The instructional emphasis should be on what students can **do** (implicit knowledge) in reading, rather than on what they **know** (explicit knowledge),

---

3 Insufficient research has been done for the acquisition of the future tense relative to the different past tenses. The future is one of the basic tenses, in Donatus (see below under Suggestions for Instruction) and in SLA research. It is used more frequently in speech than in narrative. The future perfect makes up only about 1% of all verb tense forms, and also occurs most often in subordinate clauses, especially conditions and temporal clauses (Mahoney 102; Haverling 381). Since English does not use a future in subordinate clauses, the most common translation in English is, in fact, not the actual future perfect "will have ___ed," but a "present" or perfective "have ___ed" (see also Wigtil 682, 685). Thus, the future perfect is best learned with or after conditions.

commonly emphasized in grammar textbooks and traditional testing.[4] The most effective instruction follows the order that students need in order to learn, with adequate time for acquisition, which is my first major topic.

ORDER OF ACQUISITION OF PAST TENSES

The order of acquisition of past tenses is a developmental feature that follows the Teachability Hypothesis. SLA research has shown that the simple past is the first past tense acquired, with the stative use of the imperfect next, appearing much later (Ortega 127-29; Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 114, 227, 419-22; Andersen and Shirai 559). After these come: 3) past progressive tense (if it is present in the language) or use of the imperfect (with the iterative and habitual developing later); 4) present perfect; and then 5) pluperfect (Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 115, 117, 419-23, 429; Ortega 127). SLA research also shows the following points: 1) This order of acquisition of past tenses of verbs is consistent across languages, including the learning of English and other Germanic languages (German, Dutch, and Swedish), and the Romance languages, including French, the closest to Latin in terms of tenses, as discussed below. 2) This order is consistent whether acquisition is by immersion or by instruction or a combination. 3) The order of acquisition is not affected by the order in which the tenses are taught; instruction can change the rate of learning, but not the order of acquisition of tenses (Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 111-12, 405-06). In particular, learners have been found to acquire and show a real understanding of the concept of the simple past form first, even when other tenses have been introduced (Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 111-12). Bardovi-Harlig attributes this consistent order of acquisition to the order of development of concepts based on Pienemann's teachability hypothesis (*Tense* 392-95), which explains why it holds even when tenses are taught in a different order.

Factors Affecting the Rate of Acquisition

There are also factors that SLA research has identified that can influence the rate of acquisition, either to enhance and speed up learning or delay or impede learning a tense (Ortega 140-42, Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 432-33, Lightbown and Spada 48). These include: 1) the complexity or clarity of the form; 2) the frequency; 3) the quality and intensity of interaction with input; 4) the salience of input; and 5)

---

4 See my article "Exercises for Developing Prediction Skills in Reading Latin Sentences," *TCL* 2.1 (Fall 2010): 1-30.

the similarity or difference between the first (L1) and second language. I will first discuss the complexity of form and then the frequency. I will show in the third major section on characteristic contexts that teaching the simple past use of the perfect before the imperfect in Latin also enhances acquisition because of the salience of the unmarked use of the simple past, and the regular use of the imperfect in context with the perfect (discussion with Table 6), meaning the imperfect cannot be used in appropriate, authentic input contexts without the perfect. In addition, as discussed below in the **Suggestions for Instruction**, the lack of a separate stative imperfect form in English L1 can cause confusion when the imperfect is taught first before the simple past use of the perfect because of the translations, e.g. "was," often being the same.

1) Ease of Form: One common assumption for teaching the imperfect as the first past tense in Latin is the "ease" of the form. However, the "ease" of the form is not the primary consideration in learning tenses, and, in fact, irregular forms of basic tenses are learned before regular ones. Easier forms can speed up learning the forms themselves, but they do not affect the order of the acquisition of tense concepts (Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 112, 420-21). Research in French and Spanish, where the preterite morphology is more difficult or complicated (involving stem changes, etc.) than the imperfect, similar to Latin, shows that the simple past is still acquired first before the imperfect (Bardovi-Harlig, "The Place" 28-29). The simple past, the first past tense acquired, is actually the most often inflected, whereas other tenses may involve paraphrases with auxiliary verbs or similar (Andersen and Shirai 561), reflecting their less basic nature.

Thus, the assumption that the imperfect should be taught first before the perfect in Latin because the imperfect form is easier in that the morphology is consistent and new stem(s) do not have to be learned is not supported by SLA research. Learning the morphological form is not the same as learning the tense concept, and the development of the tense system is implicit, not explicit knowledge (Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 112, 421; VanPatten 22, 42, 58-59). Students can memorize forms and complete paradigms (explicit learning), but if that tense is not what is needed for the first or next tense in the development of the temporal system, the knowledge will not be integrated and used in processing or reading. In particular, students can give/"translate"/identify forms of the imperfect and do exercises using explicit knowledge, or even imitate without really understanding, but they cannot truly acquire the imperfect until they have learned the simple past (Fraser, Bellugi, and Brown 121-35).

2) Frequency: A second factor that can speed or delay learning a tense is the frequency in input. The perfect is the most frequently used past tense according to Oldsjö's study of Caesar (using his data for indicative tenses) and is corroborated by my study of indicative verbs in Caesar, Cicero, Plautus, and Vergil. I also include here in Table 1 Mahoney's comprehensive analysis of tense frequency use in the larger corpus of Latin literature in general, which, however, includes all moods (including participles and infinitives, etc.), but excludes irregular verb forms (Mahoney 102).

	Present	Perfect[a]	Imperfect	Pluperfect	Future
Overall (including all moods, but not irregular forms) (Mahoney 102)	54.0%	29.6%	7%	2.2%	6.3% (+ Future perfect: 0.9%)
Caesar *BG* (Oldsjö 310)	940[b] (= 28%) (+ 200 ambiguous present/perfect = 6%)	955 (= 29%)[c] (+ 200 ambiguous present/perfect); (890 simple past = 27%; 65 present perfect = 2%)	774 (=23%)	463 (= 14%)	NA
Caesar *BG* 1	147 = 26% (+ 34 ambiguous present/perfect = 6%)	196 = 34% (+ 34 ambiguous present/perfect) (193 simple past = 34%; 3 present perfect = 1%)	131= 23%	66 = 11%	0[d]
Cicero *De Am.* 1.1-9.32	204 = 62%	79 = 24% (54 simple past = 16%; 25 present perfect = 8%)	24 = 7% (48 total in the whole *De Am.*)	7 = 2% (10 total in the whole *De Am.*)	13 = 4% (+ 2 future perfect)
Plautus *Most.* (lines 1-531)	355 = 63%	116 = 21% (78 simple past = 14%; 38 present perfect = 7%)	9 = 2% (19 total in the whole work)	5 = 1% (10 total in the whole work)	69 = 12% (+ 10 future perfect)
Vergil *Aen.* book 1	355 = 58% (+ 4 ambiguous present/perfect = 1%)	137 = 22% (+ 4 ambiguous present/perfect) (120 simple past = 20%; 17 present perfect = 3%)	45 = 7% (134 total in books 1, 2, and 4)	17 = 3% (42 total in books 1, 2, and 4)	51 = 8% (+ 2 future perfect)

Table 1: **Relative Frequency of Tenses in Latin**

a. As in Table 4 and Table 7, data for the perfect does not include all of Cicero's *De Amiticia*, Plautus' *Mostellaria*, and books 2 and 4 of Vergil's *Aeneid* because of the sheer number of perfects and the impracticality of using search functions to check that all are accounted for. For the imperfect (Tables 5 and 6) and pluperfect (Table 8), the numbers are totals for the whole work or book(s) indicated. I also include the total figures for imperfect and pluperfect in this table in part to indicate how much more frequently the perfect tense is used.

b. Oldsjö only gives figures for the historic present use, not all present tense verbs. He also does not include the future.

c. For main clauses, which is what learners would be seeing most initially, Oldsjö also gives figures for indicative (and historic infinitive) uses for five different historical authors, with Caesar (BG & BC) the lowest at 33.7% perfect (compared with 21.4% imperfect and 5.6% pluperfect) compared to 61.3% perfect for Livy, 63% for Florus, 79.5% for Velleius Paterculus, and a high of 94.3% for Eutropius (278-80).

d. There were no future indicatives in my analysis. There were future infinitives (and subjunctives) in indirect statement.

Even with the present perfect uses of the perfect accounted for (see the table above), the simple past use of the perfect is still used more frequently than the imperfect, which is, in turn, used more frequently than the pluperfect. Thus, the order by frequency corresponds in general to the order of acquisition of past tenses in SLA research and supports teaching the perfect tense before the imperfect in Latin and teaching the simple past use of the perfect first before the present perfect. The different uses for each tense will be discussed more below.

3-5) Interaction with Input, Salience, L1 Influence, and the Role of Explicit Instruction in Temporal Acquisition:

Salience, another factor in the rate of acquisition, is important in getting learners to notice and acquire information. If learners can get away without learning something by relying on other features, they will (Ortega 126; Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 111, 414-15, 420-21; Ellis and Sagarra 590). As indicated above, the use of chronological order and lexical adverbs, etc. precede the third stage of acquisition, the use of the verb forms themselves. In order to acquire the verb tense form – meaning associations and gain implicit knowledge, learners must pay attention to the verbs.

Ellis and Sagarra's study shows that this preference for lexical temporal cues, such as *herī*, over morphological form, such as *cogitāvī*, applies to the learning of Latin. The study also showed that there is influence from the L1, which, as indicated, is another factor that can enhance or impede acquisition. English L1 learners showed more reliance on temporal adverbs and less on verb morphology than Russian and especially Spanish L1 learners, who had experience with more similar verb morphology in their L1.

Cintrón-Valentín and Ellis then performed a follow-up study to ascertain which method of explicit instruction and/or implicit exposure to input was most effective in overcoming the attention bias to lexical cues and the blocking effects of the use of such cues on learning verb morphology in Latin. The research was based on an experiment with three activities, using three temporal adverbs, *hodie*, *herī*, *cras,* and the first, second, and third person singular forms of *cogitō* in the present, perfect, and future. There was also monitoring of eye-tracking. Their results showed that the control group (with no training other than the feedback, "correct" or "incorrect" plus the correct temporal reference, during the first activity, which involved identifying the temporal reference of adverb-verb/verb-adverb pairs as past, present, or future), as predicted, relied on the lexical adverbs and did not direct sustained attention to or learn the verb forms. Two other groups showed increased reliance on and knowledge of the verb morphology, but with a lower rate of learning the lexical adverbs as shown in subsequent activities, which the authors attributed to limited working memory in processing.[5] The first of these groups had an introductory grammar lesson of four slides (without practice) on the formation of the verb morphology, including the use of blue color for "tense markers" and red for (subject) "agreement markers."[6] The second group had attention directed to the morphemes through highlighting of the inflection with bold and red font during the first activity. The most balanced learning of both the lexical vocabulary and verb morphology (for all three tenses including the future) happened in the third group. This group first had a short multiple choice pre-training session of feedback ("correct" or "incorrect" plus the correct translation) on the present and perfect (but not future) verb forms and their translation (for each of the six verb forms six times in random order) (Cintrón-Valentín and Ellis 203-04, 207-10, 217-18, 223, and 229-32).

Cintrón-Valentín and Ellis' follow-up study confirmed that explicit instruction with practice, especially for formations that are different in the second language than the first, must come before exposure to meaningful input to allow the learners

5 In the second activity, they were given the individual adverbs, individual verbs, and adverb-verb/verb-adverb pairs, which could be matched or mis-matched in time. They were again asked to identify the temporal reference (past, present, both past and present, etc.), but without feedback. This was followed by the third activity asking for written production of translations from English to Latin of just adverbs, just verbs, and adverb-verb sentences (e.g. "Yesterday he thought.") without feedback. (Cintrón-Valentín and Ellis 209-10).

6 I have used similar color highlighting when teaching verb tenses, but I use different colors for the tense markers and subject endings. I use blue for the subject endings, since I also use blue for the nominative case endings. I use green or yellow for the imperfect/future tense inflection marker, and pink for perfect (active) stems. For example, currēbam, vocāvit.

to integrate the processing of both the new forms and new lexical vocabulary (229-32). Thus, presenting the forms and their meaning with practice can enhance learning, if done when the learner is ready to acquire that tense. Knowledge of both the verb forms and context clues, including lexical vocabulary, is important, especially in Latin, as shown below in the third major section on characteristic contexts.

MATCHING OF TENSE ASPECT AND VERBAL SEMANTIC ASPECT (QUALITY INPUT AND ONE TO ONE PRINCIPLE)

When teaching the verb forms and their associated tense meaning, an important component of the quality of input that has been found to enhance (or delay) acquisition of tenses is the choice of verbs in input, in particular, matching the type of verb used with each tense, which is my second major topic. This is the Lexical Aspect Hypothesis developed by Andersen and Shirai, based on the work of Vendler and extended by others. They distinguish two kinds of aspect: 1) One is based on the grammatical verb tense, including the traditional punctual or aorist, (the simple past use of the Latin perfect), the imperfective, the progressive, and the perfective (with a resulting state) (Latin present perfect use of the perfect). 2) The other kind of aspect is that related to the semantic meaning of the verb itself, the inherent lexical aspect. The four basic semantic categories of verb types originally identified by Vendler, based on whether the inherent verb meaning: expresses punctuality or duration; has a set end point (telic) or not (atelic); and is dynamic (requires energy) or not, are shown in Table 2 (Andersen and Shirai 531-32; Bardovi-Harlig, Tense 193, 214-23, 425):[7] For each category, I include examples of verbs in Latin that are frequently used and common in textbooks that would be a good match in teaching.

Semantic Category of Verb Type	Characteristics	Prototypical Tense Match	Common Latin Verbs
Achievement	punctual (instantaneous event as a whole); telic; dynamic	simple past	*inveniō; relinquō; dō; mittō; (ad)veniō; vocō; reperiō; ponō*
Accomplishment	durative; telic; dynamic; (completion of a process or action with set beginning and end and an outcome)	present perfect	*interficiō; claudō; faciō; occīdō; discō; līberō; intrō; parō*

7 For a five category situation aspect, including more sentence components, see Bachvarova 124-25. See also Oldsjö 161-65, 170-75, 227, 439; Haverling 288-310; and Miller 18-19, 23-24.

Activity	durative; atelic; dynamic	progressive (use of imperfect)	*dūcō; currō; scrībō; cōgitō; eō; audiō; legō* ("read")*; dīcō; teneō; portō; trahō*
Stative	durative; atelic; not dynamic	stative (use of) imperfect	*sum; possum; habeō; vīvō; putō; timeō; iaceō; sedeō; taceō; amō; crēdō*

Table 2: Lexical Aspects of Verbs

Both achievements and accomplishments have an inherent end point, or are "telic," and can be used with an ablative of time, but not an accusative of duration. Achievements express an instantaneous event as a whole and cannot be used with "stop" or "continue" doing it, while accomplishments express more the completion of a process (or action) with a set beginning and end (and an outcome) (Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 215-16; Haverling 305; Andersen and Shirai 531-32; Ortega 127). Verbs of activity, which match most closely with a progressive tense, express a homogeneous process which requires continuing energy. Unlike accomplishments and achievements, they have no set end point and they may be used with an accusative duration of time (Bardovi-Harlig 215-16, 223; Andersen and Shirai 532).

Stative verbs inherently persist over time without continuing energy and without a set end point. Like verbs of activity, they can occur with an accusative duration of time, but unlike activity verbs, they do not tend to occur in the imperative mood, and they are not used in the progressive tense (in languages that have a separate progressive tense) or a progressive use of the imperfect tense. If a state ceases, a different new state becomes (Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 215-16, 223). Note that included in the stative verbs in the table above, some verbs of emotion and mental verbs may express states.[8] Second conjugation verbs are also especially common as intransitive states.

SLA research, especially by Andersen and Shirai, on first and second language acquisition, including classroom instruction and multiple languages, has shown that tenses are acquired first and best with the semantic category of verb that matches most closely with the aspect of the particular verb tense. The lexical aspect type that matches also has the highest frequency with that tense in authentic

---

8 For more on mental states, see Bardovi-Harlig 219 and Oldsjö 438-39.

input, since the correspondence of categorization of verbs with tense also reflects the normal distribution patterns of verbs by tense in the language. This "prototypical" matching is related to the One to One principle: each tense is initially associated with the one lexical category it (cognitively) matches most closely (Andersen and Shirai 548-55). Thus, the match of verb type and tense is important in the examples and sentences/passages when teaching. This means that when presenting a new tense, one should choose example verbs (from the verbs that students have had or are currently learning) from the category that best matches that tense in semantic aspect, such as *mīsit* (achievement) for the simple past use of the perfect, in order to enhance student learning.

Verb Types in Indirect Statement: Note that for indirect statement, the concept of categories of verbs is also useful in understanding when English can "fudge" the tenses of infinitives with secondary main verbs and when not. For example, for perfect infinitives, "He said that he sent (*mīsisse*) it" (achievement), will work instead of the more literal "that he had sent it," but for *vīxisse* (stative), "He said that she lived" will not work for "that she had lived." Conversely, for present infinitives, (*mittere*) "He said that he sent it" will not work for "that he was sending it," but for *vīvere*, either "He said that she lived" or "that she was alive/living" will work.

Extension of Tenses by Verb Types: After learners acquire a tense with the prototypical type of verb, they then may extend their understanding of the tense through the acquisition of other lexical categories of verbs in order, as shown in the table below:

Simple Past:	**Achievement**	Accomplishment	Activity	Stative
Imperfect:	**Stative**	Activity	Accomplishment	Achievement
Progressive:	**Activity**	Accomplishment	Achievement	(xx: no stative)
Present Perfect:	**Accomplishment**	Achievement	(activity/stative)[a]	

Table 3: Acquisition of Lexical Aspect Types by Tense
Sources: Andersen and Shirai 529-30, 555-59; Ortega 114, 127-28; Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 94, 227, 422-30, 434.
a. The sources do not give an order for the extension to verbs of activity vs. statives.

Note that the order of acquisition is the opposite for the simple past and the imperfect. This reflects the correlation between the natures of the verbs and the tenses. For teaching new tenses, using examples of verbs of the type that are learned last (or not used) for that tense do not aid in learning, such as the stative *amāvit* for the simple past. Thus, the same verb that the textbook uses as the standard in its paradigm may not fit well for the particular new tense or new translation being

taught. In general, verbs of activity, such as *dūcō*, match best with the most tenses for a paradigm.

As indicated, after verbs of achievement, the simple past is extended in acquisition to verbs of accomplishment and later of activity, and gradually to stative as the temporal system is developed and refined based on input (Bardovi-Harlig 423; 429; Andersen and Shirai 559). The present perfect is associated most closely, as indicated, with verbs of accomplishment (and achievement) (Ortega 127; Andersen and Shirai 559). Since both uses of the Latin perfect - simple past and present perfect - occur most often with the same two categories of verbs, accomplishment and achievement, the context is the best guide in translation, as discussed below under context uses (Table 7).

The use of the secondary extended verb types often include contextual markings and differences in meaning or tense use. For the imperfect, as indicated, the prototypical match is the stative, then activities (Ortega 114, 128; Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 94, 227, 422, 424, 426, 429, 434; Andersen and Shirai 559). The extension of the imperfect to verbs of activity corresponds initially and most commonly to the progressive use of the imperfect, especially for languages like Latin that did not add a separate progressive tense formation, and it follows the order of acquisition of tenses: first stative imperfect, then progressive. Verbs expressing an activity, which match most closely with the progressive, are the most frequently used type of verb in the progressive use of imperfect in Latin in my analysis. The category of verb, in fact, functions as a guide in the most likely choice of translation of the imperfect: activity as progressive, stative as stative imperfect. When the simple past translation is included for the imperfect in textbooks, it should be noted that it is used mainly for stative verbs and is not the most likely translation for other types of verbs.

Extended Uses of Verbs, Verb Types, and Tense Uses: Another way of looking at the extension of verb types used in tenses is that verb types may sometimes be extended to other tenses that they are not the prototypical match for. These less frequent extended uses are often distinguished by context and/or meaning/tense use, or by voice (as *videō/videor* below). There are often differences when verbs of activity, which match most closely with the progressive (use of imperfect), are used in the perfect. For example, in my analysis, when *currō* occurs in the perfect, there is usually a prepositional phrase, "*per* ____," giving an end point, and the use is often metaphorical with an abstract subject (e.g. *tremor*, *fremor*, *calor*) (e.g. Vergil *Aen.* 2.120-21).

Another example of such extended use is that of achievement and accomplishment verbs, which match most closely with the simple past use of the perfect and the present perfect. In the imperfect, such extended use tends to express iteratives (cf. Oldsjö 227), the repetition of an action by an individual or multiple individuals, or habitual actions. For example, the only example I found of *inveniō* in the imperfect (compared to five perfects in Caesar, two in Cicero, one in Plautus, and nine in Vergil) was iterative (Caesar *BG* 2.16.1 *cum . . ., inveniēbat ex captīvīs* plus an indirect statement).[9] Thus, the type of verb is an important indicator of the iterative or habitual translation for the imperfect.

Verbs can also sometimes belong to more than one category, depending on the meaning or narrative context use (situation aspect), e.g. with a direct object vs. intransitive, or whether the object is concrete or abstract (Bachvarova 125; Oldsjö 151, 165-70).[10] *Videō* is an example of a common, but more complex verb. In my analysis, in the perfect it regularly expresses its basic meaning of physical sight; the uses of *videō* in the imperfect are regularly mental perception (stative), usually with an indirect statement (or an abstract object, such as *ventura* in *Aen*. 2.125), or occasionally iterative (e.g. Vergil *Aen*. 8.360 marked by *passim*: *passimque armenta vidēbant . . . mugīre*), or are most often passive (meaning "seemed," 75% of the imperfects in Cicero, 48% in Caesar, and 40% in Vergil), and are then stative.

Conclusion: The extension of the concept of tenses to include these other semantic types of verbs and uses are part of the gradual expansion and refinement of the development of the temporal system and also sometimes of the vocabulary of the verbs themselves, such as *videō*, and their varied meanings and uses. Such extension is acquired by implicit learning from input when the learner is ready for the next stage; instruction can aid acquisition by providing appropriate input contexts and/or directing attention to them as needed, such as by asking leading questions, which is often more appropriate when students encounter them in reading actual texts. It is like learning to predict a storm based on previous observations of seeing the clouds getting dark, the wind picking up, and hearing rumbling in the distance or seeing lightning.

This variability emphasizes the need for quality input in terms of appropriate contextual usages in examples, exercises, and readings. As argued above with the One to One principle, initial input with the most common use in their characteristic

---

9 Similarly, the only occurrence of the simple verb *mittō* in the imperfect in all of Caesar *BG*, Cicero *De Am*., Plautus *Most*., and Vergil *Aen*., is an iterative in *BG* 5.45.1 (*Quanto . . . tanto crebriores litterae nuntiique ad Caesarem* **mittebantur**).

10 For more on the historical development, complexities, and/or studies on a particular author, see, for example, Oldsjö (on Caesar and as compared to other Latin historians) and Haverling.

context is important: verbs of achievement, such as *inveniō*, for the simple past use of the perfect; stative verbs, such as *sum*, for the imperfect; verbs of activity, such as *legō*, for the progressive use of the imperfect; and verbs of accomplishment, such as *interficiō*, for the present perfect use of the perfect. Less common secondary uses, such as the iterative use of the imperfect, or meanings need to be in their characteristic contexts in order for learners to integrate these later and to develop appropriate expectations. As shown, knowledge of the semantic types of verbs is sometimes useful in distinguishing different uses of tenses in translating. The flexibility in verb meanings and tense uses in Latin may be related to the relatively late position of the verb in Latin clauses, and the role of context in distinguishing these uses also highlights the importance in Latin of reading in order, rather than hunting for the verb first, as is sometimes recommended. Jumping to the verb bypasses the clues from the gathering storm clouds, etc.

CHARACTERISTIC CONTEXTS

My third major topic is what the characteristic contexts are in which each of the different tenses most commonly occur and their relationship to tense uses and semantic verb types. The contexts support the order of acquisition of tenses and can help a reader anticipate what tense a verb will be and/or, as indicated, interpret which use of a tense or the translation of a verb may be. They are based on the findings from my analysis of Latin authors and that of Oldsjö on Caesar. Table 4 below shows the context uses of the simple past verbs, the first tense in the order of acquisition. The context uses of the present perfect use of the perfect will be discussed below (Table 7), after the imperfect (Tables 5 and 6), and lastly the pluperfect (Table 8), following the order of acquisition of tenses.

Simple Past Use of the Perfect

Compared to the other past tenses, the simple past use of the perfect, as the basic past tense, does not generally need or have characteristic context markers, making the verb more salient.

	Caesar *BG & BC* (Oldsjö 310, 321, 331, 333, 339)	Caesar *BG* 1	Cicero *De Am*. 1.1-9.32	*Plautus Most.* lines 1-531	Vergil *Aen.* book 1
Main Clause	**1436 = 89%** (+ 335 ambiguous present/perfects)	**176 = 91%** (+ 29 ambiguous present/perfects)	**26 = 48%**	**54 = 69%**	**92 = 77%**
Subordinate clause	**178 = 11%** (+ 30 ambiguous present/perfects)	**17 = 9%** (+ 5 ambiguous present/perfect)	**28 = 52%**	**24 = 31%**	**28 = 23%**
Relative	50 regular + 4 other relative	4 (+1 ambiguous present/perfect)	19	10	8
Temporal	90	11 (including 9 *ubi*) (+ 3 ambiguous present/perfect)	3	8	17
Other	38	2 (+1 ambiguous present/perfect)	6	6	3

Table 4: **Contexts of Simple Past Use of Perfect Indicative Verbs**

For use in subordinate clauses, the frequency of relative clauses reflects the general frequency of relative clauses in Latin, with *qui/quis* being second on Diederich's list of Latin words by frequency (Diederich 115). The relatively higher percentage of subordinate clauses in general for the simple past use of the perfect in Cicero compared to the other authors reflects the relative complexity of his style. Of the 97 occurrences of simple past verbs in a subordinate clause in my analysis of Caesar, Cicero, Plautus, and Vergil, only five of these verbs (in four sentences), had an imperfect verb in the main clause (*erat* in three sentences and *videbatur* in one). The imperfect, by comparison, as shown below, is regularly used in context with a perfect tense verb, which supports teaching the simple past use of the perfect before the imperfect.

Imperfect Tense Uses and Their Characteristic Contexts

As indicated above, the imperfect is the second most frequently used past tense in Latin and includes the prototypical stative and then progressive use, which are the second and third past tenses acquired in SLA. As shown in Table 5 below, the stative is the most frequent use of the Latin imperfect in my analysis of Caesar, Cicero, and Plautus, and second most frequent for Vergil. The habitual and the

iterative uses tend to occur in clusters, so the data by clause rather than by number of verbs would probably reflect a smaller percentage of uses for the habitual/iterative use consistent with the order of frequency and SLA order of acquisition. Cicero's philosophical dialogue, *De Amicitia*, also probably has a higher proportion of habitual/iteratives than his speeches due to the characters, setting, and discussion content. The progressive use is the least common (by number of verbs) in Caesar, Cicero, and Plautus, probably due to Caesar's more informative style and Cicero's more philosophical style; it is the most common in Vergil and may be related to batching and to his higher percentage of uses in main clauses and his poetic tone of narrative.

	Caesar *BG* 1	Cicero *de Am*.	Plautus *Most*.	Vergil *Aen*. books 1, 2, and 4
Stative Imperfect	100 = 76%	24 = 50%	9 = 47%	38 = 28%
Progressive use	9 = 7%	6 = 12.5%	2 = 11%	81 = 60%
Habitual/iterative use	22 = 17%	18 = 37.5%	8 = 42%	15 = 11%

Table 5: **Uses of the Imperfect Indicative Verb Forms**

In all four authors the verb *sum* is the most frequently used verb in the imperfect (twenty-four times = 18% in Caesar *BG* 1, ten times = 21% in Cicero, six = 32% in Plautus, and thirteen = 10% in Vergil), consistent with the relatively high frequency of the stative imperfect use. The next most frequently used verbs in Caesar are also stative: *possum*, compounds of *sum, habeō*, and mental verbs of thinking. Cicero also has mostly stative (and habitual activity, as shown below) verbs after *sum,* with three times each for *habeō, putō, videor* (and *videō* one time) and *dīcō*. Vergil has *teneō, dō, ferō, trahō*, and *eō* for his next most frequently used verbs in the imperfect, reflecting his higher percentage of progressive uses with verbs of activity.

My analysis shows how the context and/or verb type may aid in anticipating an imperfect tense and/or distinguishing between these different uses/translations of the imperfect. Some uses and/or contexts are also more common to certain authors and/or genres.

	Caesar *BG & BC* (Oldsjö 310-11, 315-16, 331-39)	Caesar *BG* 1	Cicero *de Am.*	Plautus *Most.*	Vergil *Aen.* books 1, 2, and 4
Main Clause:	**1,013= 64%**	**75 = 56.5%**	**25 = 52%**	**14 = 74%**	**106 = 79%**
causal: *Nam(que)/enim*		6	1	0	7
Iam(que)/tum/temporal adv.		1	4	3	25
demonstrative/connecting relative		27	6	3	9
hīc/place connector		0	0	1	6
Verb of saying (usually iterative/habitual) or thinking, etc. + ind. statement		20 (+3: *oportebat, volebat, habebat* + acc. + inf.)	4 (+1: *volebat* + acc. + inf.)	4 (*aieba[n]t*)	2
(especially progressive) with pluperfect in same (or coordinate) clause		2	0	0	9
summary *talis*, etc.		0	0	0	15
adversative *autem/immo/at/ sed/vero/tamen*		1	6	1	1
autem (moreover)/*etiam*		6	1	0	0
existential *sum* (+ dative(s))		4 (1)	1 (0)	0 (2)	4 (2)
With inverse *cum* clause		0	0	0	12[a]
ecce		0	0	0	4
Other[b]		15	7	2 (habitual)	23
Subordinate clause:	**573 = 36%**	**57 = 43.5%**	**23 = 48%**	**5 = 26%**	**28 = 21%**
relative	263 = 46%	29 = 52% (including 2 with existential *sum* + dat.; 2 with pluperfect; 1 *praedicabant* + ind. statement)	13 = 54%	1 = 20%	16 = 57% (including 1 with existential *sum* + dative)

(relative) noun		2 (including 1 *volebat* + acc. + inf.)	1	1 = 20%	0
quia	0	0	3 = 12.5%	0	2
causal *quod*	193 = 34%	16 = 29% (including 1 with pluperfect and 1 *volebat* + acc. + inf.)	3 = 12.5%	0	0
Adverbial *ut*	28 = 5%	0	2 = 8%	0	0
etsi	24 = 4%	1 (*videbat* + ind. statement)	0	0	0
dum	1	0	0	0	5 = 18%
quā (where); *ubi* (where); *unde*	6 = 1%; 5; 1	2 *quā*	0	0	3 *quā*; 1 *unde*
cum (+ indic.)	3	1	0	2 = 40%	1
postquam	4	0	0	1 = 20%	0
Other	45	6 (3 in *quod* noun clauses [2 with ind. statement]; 2 comparative clauses; and 1 condition)	1	0	0

Table 6: **Contexts of Imperfect Indicative Verbs**

a. This use is characteristic of Vergil. Cf. Williams (162 note *ad* 36-7).

b. For the main clauses, some have more than one characteristic context, so they may add up to more than the total. The "other" category includes clauses coordinate with or sentences continuing on after a clause with a characteristic context(s), and some iteratives/habituals, which tend to occur in bunches, as shown below, and miscellaneous others (e.g. with *ideo*, *itaque*, *quidem*).

An important thing to note about the imperfect tense is that it is regularly used in contrast with the simple past, often providing background information (cf. Andersen 89-90, Bardovi-Harlig *Tense* 311-16). Thus, imperfects regularly occur after or with a perfect (simple past) verb (or narrative historic present). When an imperfect verb is used in a subordinate clause, the most common tense for the main verb is the perfect in Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil;[11] for Plautus, the main verb is pres-

---

11 Caesar: 30 (+1 present/perfect) vs. 12 imperfect main verbs; Cicero: 9 (+ 5 *meminī*) vs. 2 imperfect; Vergil: 10 vs. 5 imperfect.

ent tense for three and perfect for two. The imperfect occurs more often in the main clause than subordinate clause in Plautus and Vergil, probably reflecting in part the poetic genre, and slightly more often in Caesar; it is about evenly split between main and subordinate clauses in Cicero. Even when used in a main clause, there is usually a connection indicated with the preceding (or following), as discussed below.

Use of the Imperfect in (Background) Relative Clauses:

When the imperfect is found in a subordinate clause, they are most commonly (or tied as most common in Plautus) in a relative clause, usually providing background information, as indicated with imperfects in general. The kinds of imperfects reflect the general frequencies of use in each author. In Caesar, twenty-five of the twenty-nine (86%) relative clauses with the imperfect have stative verbs. In Cicero, ten of the thirteen (77%) relative clause verbs are stative; the remaining three are iterative/habitual. In Vergil, they are more evenly divided regular imperfect, progressives with verbs of activity, and iteratives/habitual. For example:

- Item Allobroges, qui trans Rhodanum vicos possessionesque **habebant**, fuga se ad Caesarem recipiunt et demonstrant sibi praeter agri solum nihil esse reliqui. (Caesar *BG* 1.11.4) (Note the historic present main verbs.)

- tum est Cato locutus, quo **erat** nemo fere senior temporibus illis, nemo prudentior; (Cicero *de Am*. 1.5) (Note the perfect tense main verb.)

- Constitit hīc, arcumque manu celerisque sagittas corripuit, fidus quae tela **gerebat** Achates; (Vergil *Aen*. 1.187-88) (Note the perfect main verbs)

Background Causal/Explanatory Use of the Imperfect:

The imperfect is also often used to give a background cause or explanation, often with a stative, giving a background state of affairs as it were. According to Oldsjö, the imperfect is the most common tense for expressing cause in Caesar (Oldsjö 336). Caesar is unusual in not using the conjunction *quia*, but only *quod*, which, I believe, has influenced textbooks and led to overextended and uncharacteristic uses.[12] Besides *quia* and *quod* subordinate clauses, the cause is often marked

---

12 For example, Wheelock replaced an original *quia* with *quod* in Caput XI, *Sent. Ant.* 4 (Pliny), and *Thirty-Eight Latin Stories* (Groton and May) has *quod* for an original *quia* in #36, line 1 (Petronius) and #40, line 22 (Livy). In my research, *quod* in general is more limited and is used especially with verbs of emotion (cf. OLD s.v.); its causal use is almost always after the main clause, except in Caesar, where it may interrupt the main clause. Sentence initial uses are not characteristic of Latin authors and can lead to inappropriate default expectations. There is not room for a full discussion here. Cf. Fugier and Bokelstein.

in main clauses by *Nam(que)* or *enim*. Following his general use, Vergil has more in the main clause, with mostly stative verbs and progressive verbs of activity. For example:

- Sed ut in Catone Maiore, qui est scriptus ad te de senectute, Catonem induxi senem disputantem, quia nulla **videbatur** aptior persona . . . (Cicero *De Am.* 1.4)

- Caesar, quod neque conloquium interposita causa tolli **volebat** neque salutem suam Gallorum equitatui committere **audebat**, commodissimum esse statuit omnibus equis Gallis equitibus detractis eo legionarios milites legionis decimae, cui quam maxime **confidebat**, imponere, ut praesidium quam amicissimum, si quid opus facto esset, haberet. (Caesar *BG* 1.42.6) (Note *volebat* + acc. + inf.)

- Caesar loquendi finem facit seque ad suos recepit suisque imperavit ne quod omnino telum in hostes reicerent. Nam etsi sine ullo periculo legionis delectae cum equitatu proelium fore **videbat**, tamen committendum non **putabat** . . . (Caesar *BG* 1.46.2-3) (Note also the imperfect in the background *etsi* clause and the indirect statement with the imperfects in both clauses.)

- Dissimulant, et nube cava speculantur amicti,
  quae fortuna viris, classem quo litore linquant,
  quid veniant; cunctis nam lecti navibus **ibant**,
  orantes veniam, et templum clamore **petebant**.
  (Vergil *Aen.* 1.516-19)

- tum breviter Barcen nutricem adfata Sychaei,
  namque suam patria antiqua cinis ater **habebat**:
  (Vergil *Aen.* 4.632-33)

Other Connections of Imperfect with the Main Narrative:

The imperfect may also show a connection with the main narrative with a temporal adverb or clause, a connecting place indicator, an adversative or concessive (cf. *etsi* above), or an adverbial *ut* clause. These have a similar distribution of

stative imperfect, progressive, and habitual/iterative uses. See below for temporal adverbs with progressives. Vergil frequently uses a summary talis, tantus, etc. For example:

- Latonae tacitum pertemptant gaudia pectus:
  talis **erat** Dido, talem se laeta **ferebat**
  per medios, instans operi regnisque futuris. (Vergil *Aen*. 1.502-04)

- ". . . demoror, ex quo me divum pater atque hominum rex
  fulminis adflavit ventis et contigit igni."
  Talia **perstabat** memorans fixusque **manebat**.
  (Vergil *Aen*. 2.648-50)

- Tantos illa suo **rumpebat** pectore questus: (Vergil *Aen*. 4.553)

- obstipuit retroque pedem cum voce repressit.
  improvisum aspris veluti qui sentibus anguem
  pressit humi nitens trepidusque repente refugit
  attollentem iras et caerula colla tumentem,
  haud secus Androgeos visu tremefactus **abibat**.
  (Vergil *Aen*. 2.378-82)

- hīc Hecuba et natae nequiquam altaria circum,
  praecipites atra ceu tempestate columbae,
  condensae et divum amplexae simulacra **sedebant**.
  (Vergil *Aen*. 2.515-17)

Existential Use of the Imperfect:

One use of the imperfect in a main clause in Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil is that of the existential ("there was" instead of the linking) use of *sum* at or near the beginning of a sentence; there was no such use in Plautus' *Mostellaria*. When it connects with the preceding and does not start a new paragraph, the existential *erat* is usually in its "regular" initial position. However, in my analysis it occurs more often at the beginning of a new paragraph and sets up an extended background description or temporal setting for a following action, again often with perfect tense verbs. The paragraph break is marked by the lack of a connecting adverb or particle and the initial new subject, not just a change to a different, but to a previously unknown one

– "*a ___*" vs. "*the _____*." Note that in these the existential *sum* is thus moved out of initial position and is often between the subject and an adjective that is not a complement, in my observations. In poetry, the non-initial order is also *metri causa*. When it is plural, however, in my analysis it often sets up following sub-group(s), with the existential verb in its "regular" initial position and the subject after.[13] For example:

- **Erat** inter Labienum atque hostem . . . flumen . . . (Caesar *BG* VI.7.5 continuation of the paragraph with Labienus the subject of the previous sentence and *hostes* also old information)

- Planities **erat** magna et in ea tumulus terrenus satis grandis. . . . Eo, ut erat dictum, ad colloquium venerunt. (Caesar *BG* 1.43.1-2 beginning a new paragraph; note the position of the attributive adjective)

- Tempus **erat,** quo prima quies mortalibus aegris
  incipit, et dono divum gratissima serpit.
  In somnis ecce ante oculos maestissimus Hector
  visus [est] adesse mihi largosque effundere fletus,
  (Vergil *Aen*. 2.268-71 new paragraph)

- **Erant** omnino itinera duo quibus . . . unum . . . alterum . . . (Caesar *BG* 1.6.1-2 beginning a new paragraph, but note the initial plural *erant* and following subject setting up the following sub-groups)

Caesar: Imperfect Verbs of Thinking:

As indicated above, mental verbs of thinking (with indirect statement) are among the most frequently used verbs in the imperfect in Caesar. Joseph shows how Caesar contrasts imperfect verbs of thinking with perfect tense verbs in *BG* I.7 by having a paragraph of perfect tense action verbs and beginning of the next paragraph with historic present tense verbs followed by multiple verbs of thinking in the imperfect to slow the pace and thus express the careful, deliberate, and thorough thought process of Caesar (155-56). Compare a similar use also above under the *Background Causal/Explanatory Use of the Imperfect*.

---

13 Cf. new paragraph initial plural present *sunt* in Vergil *Aen*. 6. 893-95 (**sunt** *geminae somni portae,* *quarum* **altera** . . . **altera** . . .). I did not find any examples with the plural imperfect *erant*, which could not be initial *metri causa*, in Vergil.

Progressive Use of the Imperfect:

Besides in other contexts characteristic of imperfects in general, as above, progressives also occur in several specific characteristic contexts. When an imperfect is joined with a preceding **pluperfect** in the same clause (or a coordinate) clause, it is often a progressive, especially with *iam*.[14] For example:

- inde in Allobrogum fines, ab Allobrogibus in Segusiavos exercitum ducit. Hi sunt extra provinciam trans Rhodanum primi. Helvetii iam per angustias et fines Sequanorum suas copias **traduxerant** et in Haeduorum fines **pervenerant** eorumque agros **populabantur**. (Caesar *BG* 1.10.4-11.1)

- Ter circum Iliacos **raptaverat** Hectora muros, exanimumque auro corpus **vendebat** Achilles. (Vergil *Aen*. 1.483-84)

In general, *iam(que)* or other temporal adverbs, such as *intereā*, may anticipate a progressive use for an activity verb or, less often, a verb of accomplishment or achievement, following the typical lexical matching. These often indicate a shift to a more vivid narrative. For example:

- Corripuēre viam interea, quā semita monstrat. Iamque **ascendebant** collem, . . . (Vergil *Aen*. 1.418-19; note the perfect tense before)

- . . . huic cervixque comaeque trahuntur per terram, et versā pulvis inscribitur hastā. Interea ad templum non aequae Palladis **ibant** crinibus Iliades passis peplumque **ferebant** (Vergil *Aen*. 1.477-80)

Vergil regularly uses *ecce* with a progressive in a main clause. For example:

- . . . Stetit illa tremens, uteroque recusso, insonuēre cavae gemitumque dedēre cavernae; . . . Ecce, manus iuvenem interea post terga revinctum pastores magno ad regem clamore **trahebant** Dardanidae, . . . (Vergil *Aen*. 2. 52-53, 57-59)

---

14 Note that in Caesar *BG* 1.40.15, the *et . . . et* marks the imperfect as a non-progressive use.

Iterative and Habitual Uses of the Imperfect:

Iterative or habitual uses of the imperfect typically occur in a context indicating multiple individuals or multiple repetitions, especially of a verb of activity, such as *dīcō* or other verb of saying (with indirect statement), or of achievement, as *inveniō* above, or accomplishment. Sometimes an adverb such as *saepe* or an extended time setting serves as a marker. Note also that a number of these verbs often occur together in the same passage. For example:

- Qui se ex his minus timidos existimari **volebant**, non se hostem vereri, sed [se] angustias itineris et magnitudinem silvarum . . . aut rem frumentariam . . . timere **dicebant**. (Caesar *BG* 1.39.6) (Note the relative noun clause setting up a group of persons and *volebant* with accusative + infinitive and the iterative *dicebant* with indirect statement)

- Genus hoc erat pugnae, quo se Germani exercuerant: equitum milia **erant** VI, totidem numero pedites velocissimi ac fortissimi, quos ex omni copia singuli singulos suae salutis causa delegerant: cum his in proeliis **versabantur**, ad eos se equites **recipiebant**; hi, si quid **erat** durius, **concurrebant**, si qui graviore vulnere accepto equo deciderat, **circumsistebant**; (Caesar *BG* 1.48.4-6 of the habit of the enemy as trained)

- Laelius: Audite vero, optimi viri, ea quae saepissime inter me et Scipionem de amicitia **disserebantur**. Quamquam ille quidem nihil difficilius esse **dicebat**, quam amicitiam usque ad extremum vitae diem permanere. Nam vel ut non idem expediret, incidere saepe, vel ut de re publica non idem sentiretur; mutari etiam mores hominum saepe **dicebat**, alias adversis rebus, alias aetate ingravescente. Atque earum rerum exemplum ex similitudine **capiebat** ineuntis aetatis, quod summi puerorum amores saepe una cum praetexta toga ponerentur. (Cicero *de Am.* 10.33) (Note the habitual *dicebat* twice with indirect statement)

- Discō, hastīs, pilā, cursū, armīs, equō
  Victitabam volup, . . .

. . .

Optimi quique **expetebant** tum a me doctrinam sibi.
(Plautus *Most*. 152-53,155) (Note also the frequentative suffix on
victitabam)

- dixit, et extemplo (neque enim responsa **dabantur**
  fida satis) sensit medios delapsus in hostis.
  (Vergil *Aen*. 2.376-77 the Greek, Androgeos, amid Trojans, whom
  he had mistaken for Greeks) (Note the plurals expressing multiple
  persons and their responses)

Summary: Contexts and Uses of Imperfect:

In summary, the (stative) imperfect tense is often used to provide background, usually in context with a simple past use of the perfect (or historic present). Thus, it is best taught after the simple past use of the perfect. When the imperfect is used in the main clause, there is often an explanatory causal connection or, especially for progressive imperfects, a temporal adverb indicating a shift from a simple past narrative to a more vivid highlight. Even the existential use of *sum* usually introduces an ecphrasis or temporal setting, which as a whole provides background. The most common subordinate clauses, relative clauses and causal clauses, also provide background, as do the temporal clauses, giving the situational context. The imperfect of *sum* (and other stative verbs) are the most frequently used verbs in the imperfect, expressing the first use acquired. The progressive and iterative or habitual uses are marked by context and by the lexical types of verbs, with verbs of activity most frequently as progressive, and verbs of accomplishment (and often achievement) or sometimes activity as iterative/habitual. Progressives are more common in Vergil, as are summative imperfects with *talis* or similar. Vergil and Plautus have fewer imperfects in subordinate clauses, probably indicative of the relatively lower proportion of subordinate clauses in general in poetry.

Present Perfect Verbs and Their Contexts:

The verbs occurring in the present perfect tense use, as expected, were usually verbs of accomplishment or achievement, such as *occīdo*, *facio*, (*ad*)*venio*, *do*, *reperio*, *invenio*, or sometimes verbs of activity. In my analysis, all the occurrences of the present perfect use were in direct speech (or literary dialogue) or as authorial comments. It occurs more often in main clauses in speech and in subordinate clauses in authorial comments.

	Caesar *BG* & *BC* (Oldsjö 310, 319-21, 333)	Caesar *BG* 1	Cicero *De Am.* 1.1-9.32	Plautus *Most.* lines 1-531	Vergil *Aen.* book 1
Main Clause	**22 = 21%**	**0**	**5 = 20%** (+ 2 *meminī*)	**30 = 79%**	**10 = 59%**
Subordinate Clause	**85 = 79%**	**3**	**20 = 80%** (+ 1 *meminī*)	**8 = 21%**	**7 = 41%**
Relative clause	56	1	11	1	2
Adverbial *ut*	25	2	3 (+ 1 *meminī*)	0	0
Causal (esp. *quoniam*)	3 (*quod*)	0	1 (*quoniam*)	3 (*quoniam, quia, ut*)	0
Condition		0	2	0	5
Temporal		0	1	4	0
Concessive		0	2	0	0
Other	1 (*quo*)	0	0	0	0

Table 7: **Contexts of Present Perfect Indicative Verbs**

Thus, as shown in Table 1 above, the present perfect use is relatively more frequent (33% of the perfect forms are present perfect according to my analysis) in Plautus' *Mostellaria* than in the other authors. Of these, fourteen (37%) were first person, six (16%) were second person, and eighteen (47%) were third person, which, contrary to expectation, was about the same as for the simple past use of the perfect in Plautus, which had 36% first person, 16% second, and 49% third. Cicero's literary dialogue has 32% present perfect. Book 1 of Vergil's *Aeneid*, which includes a mix of narrative and direct speech, is next highest (12%), with all the present perfects in direct speech. For Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, Oldsjö identifies only 7% of the perfects as present perfect, all of which he characterizes as authorial (first person) comments, with 79% occurring in subordinate clauses (almost all relative or adverbial *ut*)(Oldsjö 310-11, 315, 319-21, 333). For example for an authorial comment:

- Cassivellaunus, *ut* supra **demonstravimus**, . . . (Caesar *BG* 5.19.1)

In direct speech, a characteristic context is in conjunction with a (non-historic) present tense verb. Other possible markers are *nunc*, *iam*, *nuper*, or other present impact modifiers (cf. Wigtil 684), or *adhuc*, *numquam* or other negatives. These often indicate the recent change expressed by the present perfect: *iam*, "now"

vs. before, or "not"/negative until now or as of now. *Quoniam* (< *quom-iam)*, according to my research, is also especially used with the present perfect of past tenses and predicts a present perfect translation of the perfect. For example:

- [Fannius] Istuc quidem, Laeli, ita necesse est. sed quoniam amicitiae mentionem **fecisti** et sumus otiosi, . . . (Cicero *De Am*. 4.16)

- [Laelius] Plus apud me antiquorum auctoritas valet, vel nostrorum maiorum, . . . vel eorum qui in hac terra fuerunt magnamque Graeciam, quae nunc quidem **deleta est**, tum florebat, institutis et praeceptis suis erudierunt, . . . (Cicero *De Am*. 4.13) (Note *tum* setting up the change to imperfect tense, *florebat*)

- Recordatus multum et diu cogitavi

  . . .

  id **repperi** iam exemplum. (Plautus *Most*. 84, 90)

- [Laelius] Quod si tanta vis probitatis est ut eam vel in iis quos numquam **vidimus**, vel, quod maius est, in hoste etiam diligamus, quid mirum est, . . . ? (Cicero *De Am*. 9.29) (also with present tense verb)

Another context, especially common in Vergil, is in conditions, often with an indefinite and/or a negative. For example:

- . . . "Heus, . . . iuvenes, monstrate, mearum **vidistis** si quam hic errantem forte sororum. . ." (Venus, disguised as a maiden, to Aeneas and Achates; Vergil *Aen*. 1.321-22)

- "Nulla tuarum **audita [est]** mihi neque **visa** sororum." (Aeneas' reply; Vergil *Aen*. 1.326)

- [Laelius] Nihil mali accidisse Scipioni puto, mihi **accidit** si quid **accidit**. (Cicero *de Am*. 3.10)

The present perfect also sometimes occurs in context with a pluperfect verb (in a different clause, as opposed to progressive use imperfects joined with a preceding pluperfect(s) in the same clause, as above), as shown in examples in the following section on the pluperfect.

Pluperfect Contexts

The pluperfect tense is also used in contrast with the simple past and sometimes the present perfect, often providing background information, especially in a relative clause, more so even than the imperfect (cf. Table 6).

	Caesar *BG* & *BC* (Oldsjö 310-11, 315-16, 331-39)	Caesar *BG* 1	Cicero *de Am.*	Plautus *Most.*	Vergil *Aen.* 1, 2, and 4
Main Clause	**271 = 30%**	**7 = 11%**	**4 = 40%**	**5 = 50%**	**24 = 57%**
Nam(*que*)/*enim*		0	0	0	5 (2 with *nondum*)
iam		2 (with imperfect)	0	0	0
adversative *verum, sed*		0	0	0	2
verb of saying after direct quotation		0	0	0	7
(connecting) demonstrative		3	0	0 (1 with pronoun)	0 (2 with pronoun)
(continuing) *autem*		1	1	0	0
nondum/*necdum*		0	0	0	3 (2 with *nam*)
Other		1 (with *etiam*)	3 (1 = *memineram*)	5 (3 in direct question)	7 (6 with imperfect; 1 in vivid contrary to fact condition)
Subordinate Clause	**629 = 70%**	**59 = 89%**	**6 = 60%**	**5 = 50%**	**18 = 43%**
Relative	424 = 67%	42 = 71% (1 with *nondum*) (+ 3 noun clauses)	5 = 83%	3 = 60% (1 = noun clause)	17 = 94%
quod causal	93 = 15%	5 = 9%	0	0	0
adverbial *ut*	41 = 7%	6 = 10%	1 = 17%	1 = 20%	0
cum	7 = 1%	0	0	0	1 = 6%
ubi (when)	4	0	0	0	0
ubi (where); *quō; unde*	11 = 2%; 7 = 1%; 4	2 *unde* = 3%	0	0 1 *unde* =20%	0
Other	38	1 (condition)	0	0	0

Table 8: **Contexts of Pluperfect Indicative Verbs**

Note also that the pluperfect verb often occurs in reverse chronological order in sentences (cf. Bardovi-Harlig 110-11). For example:

- Ubi per exploratores Caesar certior factus est tres iam partes copiarum Helvetios id flumen traduxisse, quartam vero partem citra flumen Ararim reliquam esse, de tertia vigilia cum legionibus tribus e castris profectus ad eam partem pervenit quae nondum flumen **transierat**. (Caesar *BG* 1.12.2) (Note the preceding perfects and also nondum)

- fecit idem, quod xx annis ante apud nos **fecerat** Coriolanus. (Cicero *De Am.* 12.42) (Note the preceding perfect tense in the main clause)

- ". . . quod **promiseram** tibi dono, perdidisti." (Plautus *Most.* 185) (Note the present perfect in the main clause in direct speech)

- [Dido] "Vixi et quem **dederat** cursum Fortuna peregi, . . ." (Vergil *Aen.* 4.653) (Note the present perfects in the main clauses in direct speech)

The pluperfect is also used to express a background cause, though less often than the imperfect. As with the imperfect above, so with the pluperfect, Caesar again prefers causal quod (and not *quia*) subordinate clauses (Oldsjö 310-11, 315-16, 337), while Vergil prefers main clauses marked by Nam(que) or enim. There were none in my sample from Cicero and Plautus. For example:

- Caesar singulis legionibus singulos legatos et quaestorem praefecit, uti eos testes suae quisque virtutis haberet; ipse a dextro cornu, quod eam partem minime firmam hostium esse **animadverterat**, proelium commisit. (Caesar *BG* 1.52.1-2)

- Cui mater media sese tulit obvia silva,
  virginis os habitumque gerens, et virginis arma
  Spartanae, vel qualis equos Threissa fatigat
  Harpalyce, volucremque fuga praevertitur Hebrum.
  Namque umeris de more habilem **suspenderat** arcum
  venatrix, **dederatque** comam diffundere ventis,
  nuda genu, nodoque sinus collecta fluentis. (Vergil *Aen.*1.314-20)

- Tum Iuno omnipotens longum miserata dolorem
  difficilisque obitus Irim demisit Olympo
  quae luctantem animam nexosque resolveret artus.
  Nam quia nec fato merita nec morte peribat,
  sed misera ante diem subitoque accensa furore,
  nondum illi flavum Proserpina vertice crinem
  abstulerat Stygioque caput **damnaverat** Orco. (Vergil *Aen*.
  4.693-99) (Note *nondum* and the causal *quia* with the imperfect)

It is also common in adverbial *ut* clauses, especially in Caesar (for Caesar: Oldsjö 310-11, 315-16, 339). For example:

- Eorum qui domum redierunt censu habito, ut Caesar **imperaverat**,
  repertus est numerus milium C et X. (Caesar *BG* 1.29.3)

- . . . Ut forīs **cēnāverat**
  Tuos gnatus, postquam rediit ā cenā domum,
  Abīmus [= perfect] omnēs cubitum.
  (Plautus *Most*. 484-86) (temporal *ut* clause)

There are also some variations by author. For example, in Vergil, about a third of the pluperfects in main clauses are a formulaic marking of the end of a direct quotation. For example:

- ". . . aut quae machina belli?"/ **dixerat**. (Vergil *Aen*. 2.151-52)

- ". . ."/ Vix ea **fatus erat**, cum circumfusa repente
  scindit se nubes et in aethera purgat apertum.
  (Vergil *Aen*.1.586-87)

Conclusion: Characteristic Contexts and Instruction:

In summary, note that some of the characteristic contexts, especially relative clauses and causal main or subordinate clauses, and adverbial *ut* clauses, are the same for the imperfect and pluperfect, and that especially in relative and main clauses, either or both tenses can occur in the same clause. This shows the need for attention to both verb forms and context. Hence, while Latin, with its late position of the verb and its relatively greater flexibility in verb meanings and uses, tends to rely more than some languages on context for setting up tense expectations, there is

still need to learn and use the verb morphology. This means that instruction needs to have quality input with authentic characteristic contexts but also ensure that there are activities with practice where the verb form is salient to prevent relying on only context clues.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INSTRUCTION AND SAMPLE EXERCISES

The need to learn the verb forms and their tense uses in the appropriate order with appropriate input contexts and instructional support brings us to the final section.

1) Simple Past Use of Perfect

As shown above, the simple past use of the perfect should be the first past tense taught in Latin, before the imperfect. Note that the use of the term "perfect" can itself be confusing for English-speaking students because of its use in English for the present perfect. Given the learner's need for one translation per form initially, however, the present perfect use, which is "marked," and less common, should be taught later, where it would occur in the order of acquisition of tenses. This possible confusion in name is worth pointing out to students. One can mention, for those students that have had Spanish, that the simple past use of the perfect corresponds to the *pretérito*, which got its name from Latin. One can also use the Latin name for the tense and explain the etymology. Bardovi-Harlig recommends using the L2's own terms for tenses to avoid such assumptions that the L2 tense is an exact equivalent to the English L1 grammatical tense (*Tense* 101). A useful source is Donatus, who taught in Rome in the fourth century AD and was the author of the earliest (extant) and one of the most influential Latin textbooks. In his *De Partibus Orationis Ars Minor*, Donatus asks (in the standard question and answer format) about the tenses of verbs, "*Tempora verbōrum quot sunt*?" The answer: "*Tria.*" He continues: "*Quae? Praesens, ut legō, praeteritum, ut lēgī, futūrum, ut legam.*" (Keil 360).[15] Note that this also shows that the perfect was considered the basic past tense.

As shown above, Latin textbooks that present the simple past use of perfect tense as the first past tense can provide authentic examples of past time narratives and individual sentences using only the perfect tense. The fact that reading based

15 Donatus then goes on to distinguish three past tenses in the *declinatio* of verbs: "*praeteritum imperfectum, ut legēbam, praeteritum perfectum, ut lēgī, praeteritum plusquamperfectum, ut lēgeram*" (Keil 360). Cf. Isidore Origines 1.9.2: "*Grammaticorum* [*verborum*] *in tria cadunt tempora: praeteritum, instans, futurum, ut fēcit, facit, faciet.*"

textbooks tend to introduce the perfect tense first more often than the grammar based textbooks reflects this point. The imperfect, however, as shown above, regularly occurs in contexts also containing perfect verbs and has characteristic context markers, often indicating a change in tense from the simple past. This means that textbooks that teach the imperfect tense prior to the perfect often cannot provide sentences or narratives without omitting relevant context text (including perfects) or including perfects with glossing. This does not help learners develop sensitivity to the markings and contexts for the imperfect or to develop appropriate expectations. If using such a textbook, one can adapt the order of tenses, as discussed below, or supplement by providing oral background information or written notes.

      As an additional benefit, learning the perfect tense sooner allows students to understand the third form of the principal parts sooner; they also have fewer verbs from previous chapters to learn the perfect stems of. The *Oxford Latin Course* does a good job of grouping verbs by perfect stem types (e.g. –s perfects, reduplicated, lengthened stem vowels, etc.) for learning (Balme and Morwood *Part II* and *College Edition: Grammar*). See also my [*Cogitatorium*](#) website page on types of perfect stems.

2) Imperfect with stative verbs and 3) progressive use of imperfect

      The second most frequently used tense in Latin is the imperfect. Given that the stative use of the imperfect tense is acquired before the past progressive (and iterative/habitual) according to SLA research and given that the stative imperfect use is more frequent in Latin than the progressive in most authors, it would seem best to teach the stative use first. Given that *sum* is the verb most frequently found in the imperfect in Latin (and the learning of irregular before regular forms), as indicated above, it would also seem best to teach the imperfect of *sum* (and *possum*) first and explain the concept of the imperfect tense as an ongoing state (that is not ended). Then the *-ba-* formation could be taught and the progressive use taught with verbs of activity, which are the first type acquired in the progressive. The progressive use would also help reinforce the concept of the imperfect as continuing and not completed. Using the *-ba-* only for progressives initially would preserve one form - one translation: (irregular *sum*) for stative imperfect vs. *-ba-* progressive. Instructing students about the different kinds of verbs and the characteristic contexts can also help them learn to distinguish the uses and translations of the imperfect. The iterative and habitual uses are best left for later, as they would be acquired later based on studies on the order of acquisition.

The imperfect tense is also an example of the lack of a one to one correspondence between Latin and English, and this difference between the L1 and L2 can impede acquisition of the imperfect. The idea that there is not always a one to one correspondence is an important concept for students to learn. English, like other Germanic languages, does not distinguish in form and translation for many verbs between the simple past and the stative imperfect (e.g. "was" for both *fuit* and *erat*) as they do in some other languages (see Table 9 below). For the concept of the imperfect, one can note the correspondence with the imperfect tense in Spanish, *imperfecto,* or Italian, *imperfetto*, or French, *imparfait,* for students that have studied those. Of the Romance languages, French is closest to Latin in having an imperfect, but not a separate (paraphrastic) past progressive, which Spanish and Italian have added, though they continue to use the imperfect also sometimes as progressive. A table can help visualize the differences:

Latin	Perfect		Imperfect		
French	Present Perfect	Simple past	Imperfect		
Spanish and Italian	Present Perfect	Simple past	Imperfect		Past Progressive
English	Present Perfect ("has ___ed")	Past ("___ed")	Habitual/iterative ("used to ___"/ "would ___"/ "kept ___ing"/ ("often," etc.) "___ed")	Past Progressive ("was ___ing")	

Table 9: Comparison of Languages and their Tenses

Thus, the Latin perfect tense coincides with both the (present) perfect and the regular past of English, which also overlaps with the imperfect of Latin. The Latin imperfect tense, in turn, coincides with the English past, as well as the past progressive, etc.[16] The fact that the translation for the imperfect of many stative verbs, e.g. *habēbat*, "s/he had," *amābat*, "s/he loved," is the same in English as the simple past (Bachvarova 124) is a greater problem when the imperfect is taught first before the simple past. Teaching the imperfect tense before the perfect can thus

16 In general, English is more complex than Latin in the number of ways of expressing the tenses, including progressives, emphatics, etc. Wigtil in his article describes the complexities of the possible translations in English and some context markers of different Latin tenses; this can be helpful for more advanced students, teachers, and for composition. It is less useful in providing guidance for the basic uses and translations for beginning students.

result in a conflation of these tenses and cause confusion for students. I have had students come in who translated all imperfects as simple past, at least some of whom I know had learned the imperfect before the perfect.

If the simple past use of the perfect is taught first and is already established, the similarity in translation for stative verbs should not be a great problem. The concept of the imperfect is inherent to stative verbs, so the distinction with the simple past really becomes an issue only when contrasted with perfect uses of stative verbs, which are not as frequent, and stative verbs come last in the acquisition of the perfect/simple past tense. The distinction between the imperfect and the simple past for stative verbs is a nuance in reading or an issue only for composition or translation from English to Latin.[17] Part of acquiring tenses is learning to distinguish them from other tenses (Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 186).

One way to extend understanding of the Latin perfect tense (as simple past) to stative verbs and to introduce and/or reinforce the concept of the stative imperfect vs. simple past is to give comparative sentences with perfect and imperfect verbs and have students answer questions to help them learn the difference for themselves.[18] For example:

Exercitatio I. **Imperfect by comparison with perfect**:

Read the following sentences. Although the verbs may be translated the same in English, the tenses in Latin are different. Given that the perfect tense, the simple completed past, comes from *per-faciō* "to (do through), complete," as you have learned, what would the im-perfect, represent? What is the difference in each of these?

1 A. Urbs antiqua **fuit**. (*There was an ancient city*.) (Did Carthage still exist when Vergil was writing?) (Vergil *Aen*. 1.12)

B. Pompeius tum **erat** consul. (*Pompeius was consul then*.) (What does the *tum* do for the temporal reference?*)* (cf. Cicero *de Am*. 1.2)

2 A. (Epitaph) **Vīxit** annōs IIII mensēs VI. (*He lived 4 years, 6 months*.) (Was he still alive?) (cf. CIL 6.12156)

---

17 Rosi's book shows that this can be an issue; native German speakers (compared to native Spanish speakers who have an imperfect tense) overextended the use of perfective past verbs in production in imperfect contexts when learning Italian.

18 For more on the use of the perfect (and imperfect) tense in Latin with stative verbs, with examples, see Haverling 455-58.

B. Quam bene Saturnō **vīvēbant** rege, . . . (*How well they lived, when Saturnus was king*) (Tibullus 1.3.35)

3 A. Nam . . . hostem vidēre nemō **potuit**. (*For no one was able to see the enemy.*) (of a later report of a battle that lasted until evening) (cf. Caesar *BG* 1.26.2)

B. Pugnāre nōn **poterant**. (*They were not able to fight.*) (because their overlapping shields were stuck together with enemy spears; part of an ongoing description of the battle) (cf. Caesar *BG* 1.25.3)

Progressive use of imperfect: After the stative use of the imperfect has been learned and one is moving on to teach the progressive use, one can help develop and practice and test the concept of the Latin imperfect/progressive vs. the simple past (and future) without requiring a translation by matching pictures with captions or using written scenarios. For example:
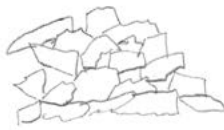
Exercitatio II. Matching the concept:
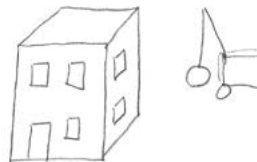Choose the caption that best fits each picture.

1. A) dēlēbātur   B) dēlēbitur   C) dēlētum est
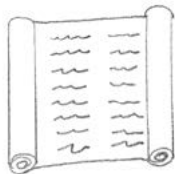[or for active: A) aedificium dēlēbant B) aedificium dēlēbunt C) aedificium dēlēvērunt]

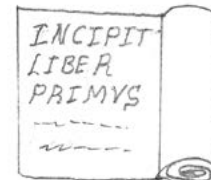2. A) librum lēgit   B) librum leget   C) librum legēbat
[or: A) librum scrīpsit B) librum scrībet C) librum scrībēbat]

Exercitatio III. Recognizing and understanding tenses Scenario: You want to discuss the end of a novel/movie with someone for writing a paper. You contact some of your friends. Read the results and tell which person you would follow up with and why.

> Iordanus librum nōn lēgit.
> Aemilia librum legēbat.
> David librum leget.
> Sandra librum lēgit.

Rewriting as a Practice Exercise: Having students take an earlier passage (or sentences) that were in the present and rewrite it/them in the past tense is also a good exercise, which can be done or started in class in groups or as an assignment, especially as a review for intermediate students or composition classes. This helps students think about which verbs should be perfect and which imperfect and about revising context adverbs, etc. as necessary. It also allows the focus to be on the verbs and more time can be devoted to them compared to straight English to Latin translation exercises of complete sentences. One could indicate which tense to use for elementary classes and/or for some of the more difficult (stative) ones or edit out some of the extended lexical aspect verb types. For example, one could use the first reading ("Scintilla in casa laborat") in Balme and Morwood's *Oxford Latin Course: College Edition: Readings and Vocabulary* (or the reading from Chapter 2 in the *Oxford Latin Course: Part 1,* 2nd ed.), which would work well, or the first reading ("Pandora's Box") in Groton and May's *Thirty-Eight Latin Stories* (with some possible editing/help).[19] As Ortega has noted, while characteristic contexts in input help in the acquisition of a tense concept, reliance on the context slows acquisition of the morphological forms, so exercises involving production can "push" students to the next level (62-64).

4) Present Perfect

According to the order of acquisition in SLA, as indicated above, after the imperfect (both the stative imperfect and the progressive use), would be the most appropriate time to introduce the present perfect translation/use of the Latin perfect. Teaching the imperfect second, after the simple past use of the perfect, *i.e.* between

---

19 E.g. *saepe* in line 4 sets up an iterative imperfect for "*monet*." There are also several stative verbs whose past translation (if part of the thinking process) could sound like a (simple past use of) perfect tense. Lines 10-11 would be a nice place to add a *iam* to mark a change from simple past (for *provolant*) to imperfect (for *errant*) (or even keep the present).

the two uses of the perfect, also helps learners preserve the one to one translation of the perfect longer to avoid confusion. Given that the present perfect occurs most often in direct speech, including some oral conversation or written dialogues for the present perfect could be helpful. For example:

- "Ivistīne umquam Rōmam?"

- "Numquam īvī." or

- "Vīdistīne umquam mare?"

One can also give students sets of sentences with simple past uses of perfects and present perfects and ask students to think about what context clues may indicate a present perfect translation. For example:

Exercitatio IV: Perfect or Present Perfect?
Read through the following pairs of sentences with perfect verbs, one simple past (A) and one present perfect (B). What context clues help you know when to use a present perfect translation?

1. A. Rōmam īvimus.   B. "Ivistīne umquam Rōmam?
2. A. Deinde canem invēnit.   B. "Canem meum nōndum invēnī."
3. A. Itaque pēnsum confēcit.   B. "Iam pēnsum confēcī."
4. A. Monstrum vīdērunt.   B. Nēmō id adhūc vīdit.

One can also have students look at sentences in the textbook or that the teacher provides and have them consider what context clues the sentences have in common. How can one predict that the verb will be x tense/translation?

5) Pluperfect:

The frequent use of the pluperfect in relative clauses, as shown above, means it would be best taught after, or at the same time as, relative clauses. There are no reasons in its use in Latin to argue for moving the pluperfect up earlier than its order last in the acquisition of past tenses in SLA research. The pluperfect tense can also be difficult for students today, who do not always have a firm grasp of the pluperfect in English and do not always use it themselves. The pluperfect, expressing background information, as discussed above, also regularly occurs in non-chronological order in a narrative, e.g. following a perfect tense verb. (Bardovi-Harlig, *Tense* 110-11). One can give students two separate sentences that show chronological actions,

and then combine them into one sentence using a relative clause with the pluperfect, or *v.v.*, break a complex sentence apart into two separate sentences in chronological order. For example:

> Marcus epistulam scrīpsit. Gaius eam lēgit.

> \> Gaius epistulam lēgit, quam Marcus **scrīpserat**.

One can also have students practice by numbering sentences in chronological order without having to translate. For example:

Exercitatio V. Ordering by tense:

Number the sentences in chronological order (from most past #1 to future) based on the action of the verbs:

A. _____ Lucius librum legit.

_____ Gaius librum quaerēbat.

_____ (Nam) Marcus librum habuerat.

[One can include the characteristic *Nam* marker or not.]

_____ Aemilia librum habēbit.

B. _____ Amīcum iuvābit.

_____ Hoc dīxerat.

_____ Marcum vident.

_____ Gaius eum nōn audīvit.

Adapting, Supplementing, and Choosing Textbooks

One can also adapt and supplement textbooks as needed. If the textbook does not present the simple past use of the perfect first, one can introduce it earlier by adapting the textbook and/or supplementing with material from other textbooks or sources, adapting or glossing vocabulary as needed, or at least teach the simple past use of the perfect earlier in relation to the principal parts of verbs. For example, my students showed a better understanding of past tenses with Wheelock when I taught just the future (without the imperfect) in Caput V and then taught the perfect in Caput VI (after the present and future of *sum* and *possum)*. I did this by rewriting some of the sentences in the perfect. I glossed the two imperfects in Groton and May's *Thirty-Eight Latin Stories* reading for VI and then picked up the reading for V, which already had five perfect tense verbs; I glossed the imperfect verbs and supplemented with content questions including perfect verbs. The reading for VII had two perfect verbs, and I again glossed the imperfect ones. I then taught the imperfect in Caput VIII, where it was presented with third conjugation verbs. Similarly, with

the first edition of Shelmerdine's *Introduction to Latin*, one could delay teaching the imperfect until chapter 11 (after the perfect in chapter 8), where 3rd conjugation verbs are taught.[20]

If the pluperfect is taught together with the perfect, one can also delay teaching the pluperfect and gloss as needed until an appropriate time to teach it. One can also adapt sentences with an unmarked pluperfect in the main clause by adding a *nam* or another appropriate introductory marker, or perhaps, as an exercise, have students choose from a list of possible markers once they have seen enough examples and have achieved the first level of acquisition. For example, in *Thirty-Eight Latin Stories* #15, the story of how the Aegean got its name, it describes that the sails were black, not white on the return. "[Nam] stultus Theseus suum cōnsilium memoriā nōn tenuerat; vēla nōn mūtāverat." (Groton and May 26).

One can also delay teaching secondary uses of tenses, such as the present perfect for the perfect or the iterative for the imperfect. One can also supplement and adapt translations given in the book, e.g. by telling students that the simple past translation given for the imperfect is most frequently used for stative verbs and less frequently than the "was ___ing" for other verbs, or by clarifying that a description of the perfect as "recently" completed or translated as "has/have" is not the most frequent and applies to the present perfect use (to be taught later, if possible). As indicated above, one can use pictures and mnemonics to help, especially if one is teaching multiple tenses at the same time. The "v" mnemonic based on the "v" in some perfect stems and the "have" translation works for the present perfect use, but it can be overextended to the simple past use if not used with caution, especially if both uses are taught at the same time.[21]

If one is considering choosing a (new) textbook, the ones that present the tenses in the order that fits best with student learning tend to be reading based, as indicated above. In particular, *Disce!: An Introductory Latin Course* (Kitchell and Sienkewicz), Jones and Sidwell's Cambridge *Reading Latin*, and *Latin for Reading* (Knudsvig, Seligson, and Craig) present the tenses in the order that fits best with principles of SLA. The Cambridge *Reading Latin* has good, clear descriptions of the perfect (though with both uses) (in 2D) and imperfect (in 4A); it teaches the pluperfect and relative clauses in 4C. The future perfect is appropriately separated from the

---

20 The second edition (2013) postpones the perfect to chapter 11 and moves the pluperfect and future perfect up from chapter 15, putting them all in the same chapter (before the relative).

21 I had a student that placed into Latin who translated all perfect tense verbs as "has/have __ed" and said that he did not know that they could be translated as simple past.

pluperfect near the end, in 5C (Jones and Sidwell). In *Disce*!, the perfect is taught first (in chapter 8 in third person, then in chapter 11 for the other persons), though both translations, the simple past "___ed" and the present perfect "has/have ___ed" are given to be used. There are several chapters of noun material plus infinitives; then, although without much time for consolidating learning between new tenses, in chapter 16, the future tense is presented followed by present participles in chapter 17. Chapter 18 introduces the imperfect (as well as relative and interrogative pronouns), giving "used to ___" and "was/were ___ing" for translations, in that order. It discusses aspect and compares imperfect and perfect, though only in terms of continuing vs. single action without including in-completed vs. completed. It also gives some examples, perhaps providing too many details and exceptions at this stage (Kitchell and Sienkewicz 220).[22] The following chapter (19) has the pluperfect, and the future perfect is next in chapter 20 (Kitchell and Sienkewicz). McKeown's *Classical Latin*, though it teaches the imperfect (chapter 3 with the future) before the perfect (chapter 7, including the pluperfect and an introduction to the future perfect), has good examples and guidelines in chapter 7 for when to use which translation for the perfect and in differentiating from the imperfect.

Conclusion

In summary, it does make a difference in which order the tenses are taught and which verbs are used in instruction. The simple past use of the perfect should be the first past tense taught, before the imperfect. It takes time for students to acquire a temporal system, and the emphasis should be on developing implicit knowledge. Knowledge of both lexical and other context markers as well as verb morphology is important in Latin. Although teaching cannot change the order of acquisition, instruction can change the rate of learning. Students best learn one tense at a time and the basic, most common translation/use for each tense form at first. After these are firmly established, they can add other less common uses later through authentic contexts and instruction with questions or exercises drawing attention to them. Allowing time for processing and integration between stages, especially of forms that are easily confused because of similarity in orthography, is also important.

As indicated, one can adapt textbooks by rearranging the order, delaying/ splitting up teaching certain tenses or translations, and adapting sentences to reflect

---

22 For example, instances where English uses a different tense/translation than the Latin, including in *dum* clauses, though *dum* is not a vocabulary word until chapter 33.

more authentic contexts, e.g. by adding appropriate markers or subordination, and glossing as needed. Exercises requiring attention to form, like matching with pictures, numbering in chronological order, or producing, e.g. composing based on pictures or rewriting passages, can help "push" students in their development.

WORKS CITED

Andersen, Roger W. "The One to One Principle of Interlanguage Construction." *Language Learning* 34 (1984): 77-95.

Andersen, Roger W., and Yasuhiro Shirai. "The Primacy of Aspect in First and Second Language Acquisition: The Pidgin-Creole Connection." *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*. Ed. William C. Ritchie and Tej K. Bhatia. San Diego: Academic Press, 1996. 527-70.

Bachvarova, Mary. "Actions and Attitudes: Understanding Greek (and Latin) Verbal Paradigms." *Classical World* 100.2 (2007): 123-32.

Balme, Maurice, and James Morwood. *College Edition: Grammar, Exercises, Context*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.

-----. *Oxford Latin Course: College Edition: Readings and Vocabulary*. New York: Oxford UP, 2012.

-----. *Oxford Latin Course: Part I – II*. 2nd edition. New York: Oxford UP, 1996.

Bardovi-Harlig, Kathleen. "The Place of Second Language Acquisition Theory in Language Teacher Preparation." *Beyond Methods: Components of Second Language Teacher Education*. Ed. Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig and Beverly Hartford. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997. 18-38.

-----. *Tense and Aspect in Second Language Acquisition: Form, Meaning, and Use*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Bokelstein, A. Machtelt. "Causally Related Predications and the Choice between Parataxis and Hypotaxis in Latin." *New Studies in Latin Linguistics*. Ed. Robert Coleman. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1991. 427-451.

Cintrón-Valentín, Myrna, and Nick C. Ellis. "Exploring the Interface: Explicit Focus-on-Form Instruction and Learned Attentional Biases in L2 Latin." *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 37 (2015): 107-235.

Diederich, Paul Bernard. *The Frequency of Latin Words and their Endings*. Diss. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1939.

Ellis, Nick C., and Nuria Sagarra. "Learned Attention in Adult Language Acquisition." *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 33 (2011): 589-624.

Fraser, Colin, Ursula Bellugi, and Roger Brown. "Control of Grammar in Imitation, Comprehension and Production." *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 2 (1963): 121-35.

Fugier, Huguette. "Quod, quia, quoniam et leurs effets textuels chez Cicéron." *Subordination and Other Topics in Latin.* Ed. Gualtiero Calboli. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1989. 91-119.

Groton, Anne H., and James M. May. *Thirty-Eight Latin Stories*. 5th edition. Wauconda, Il: Bolchazy-Carducci Publ., 1995.

Harrison, Rebecca. "Exercises for Developing Prediction Skills in Reading Latin Sentences." *Teaching Classical Languages* 2.1 (Fall 2010): 1-30.

-----. "Types of Perfect Active Stems." *Cogitatorium*.

Haverling, Gerd V. M. "Actionality, Tense, and Viewpoint." *Constituent Syntax: Adverbial Phrases, Adverbs, Mood, Tense*. Ed. Philip Baldi and Pierluigi Cuzzolin. New York: de Gruyter, 2009. 277-523. Vol. 2 of *New Perspectives on Historical Latin Syntax.*

Hulstijn, Jan H. "Mnemonic Methods in Foreign Language Vocabulary Learning." *Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition*: *A Rationale for Pedagogy*. Ed. James Coady and Thomas Huckin. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 1997. 203-224.

Jones, Peter V., and Keith C. Sidwell. *Reading Latin: Grammar, Vocabulary and Exercises*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986.

Joseph, Timothy. "The Verbs Make the Man: A Reading of Caesar, *Gallic War* I.7 and *Civil War* I.I and 3.2." *New England Classical Journal* 44.3 (2017): 150-161.

Keil, Heinrich, ed. *Grammatici Latini*. Vol. 4. Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1981.

Kitchell, Kenneth F., and Thomas J. Sienkewicz. *Disce*! *An Introductory Latin Course*. Vol. 1. Boston: Prentice Hall, 2011.

Knudsvig, Glenn M., Gerda M. Seligson, and Ruth S. Craig. *Latin for Reading: A Beginner's Textbook with Exercises*. Rev. ed. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1986.

Laufer, Batia. "What's in a Word That Makes It Hard or Easy: Some Intralexical Factors That Affect the Learning of Words." *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*. Ed. Norbert Schmitt and Michael McCarthy. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 140-55.

Lightbown, Patsy M. and Nina Spada. *How Languages Are Learned*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013.

Mahoney, Anne. "The Forms You Really Need to Know." *Classical Outlook* 81 (2004): 101-05.

McKeown, J. C. *Classical Latin: An Introductory Course*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010.

Miller, D. Gary. *Latin Suffixal Derivatives in English and their Indo-European Ancestry.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006.

Nation, I. S. P. *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. New York: Newbury House Publ., 1990.

Oldsjö, Fredrik. *Tense and Aspect in Caesar's Narrative*. Studia Latina Upsaliensis 26. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2001.

Ortega, Lourdes. *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. London: Hodder Education, 2009.

Pienemann, Manfred. *Language Processing and Second Language Development: Processability Theory*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1998.

Rosi, Fabiana. *Learning Aspect in Italian L2: Corpus Annotation, Acquisitional Patterns, and Connectionist Modeling*. Milan: Francoangeli, 2009.

Schacter, Daniel L., Lana Israel, and Carrie Racine. "Suppressing False Recognition in Younger and Older Adults: The Distinctiveness Heuristic." *Journal of Memory and Language* 40 (1999): 1-24.

Schmitt, Norbert. *Vocabulary in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Shelmerdine, Susan C. *Introduction to Latin*. Rev. 1st ed. Newburyport: Focus, 2007.

Sommers, Mitchell S., and Bryan P. Lewis. "Who Really Lives Next Door: Creating False Memories with Phonological Neighbors." *Journal of Memory and Language* 40 (1999): 83-108.

VanPatten, Bill. *From Input to Output: A Teacher's Guide to Second Language Acquisition*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003.

Wheelock, Frederic M. Rev. by Richard A. LaFleur. *Wheelock's Latin*. 7th ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2011.

Wigtil, David N. "Translating Latin Tenses into English." *Classical World* 85 (1992): 675-86.

Williams, R. D. *The Aeneid of Virgil: Books 1-6*. London: Macmillan, 1972.