Latin Lessons 10-11

In Latin Lessons 10 and 11 we begin an extensive review of how words change their form, their function and their meaning. Lesson 10 addresses changes in sound such as dissimilation and various adaptations associated with participles. In Lesson 11 we'll look at the principle of semantic change, that is, the sort of change which can take place in a word's meaning over time. This shift is often based on metaphor, another principle we'll investigate here. As always, following this video presentation is an audio recording examining the suffixes and bases in these lessons as you start the process of memorizing them. Be sure to listen to that audio presentation after you've watched this one.

Before jumping into these lessons, let's take a quick glimpse ahead at the various ways words can change their form, function and meaning. We'll be discussing all these types of change over the next twelve lessons.

- In Lesson 10, for instance, we'll look at how the letters inside a word sometimes change to facilitate pronunciation, for instance, "stellar" which is built on the base STELL- ("star") and the suffix *-al* which changes to *-ar* because "stell-al" is hard to say.

- In Lesson 11, we'll see how words can shift their meaning through metaphor, which involves the implicit comparison of two things, for instance, "surgical bombing," a phrase which refers to the precise targeting of artillery and in an odd and somewhat disturbing way conflates health care and warfare.

- Lesson 12 addresses how words sometimes develop a wider or more specific sense. "Focus," for example, originally meant "a hearth," the fireplace of houses which was often put in the middle of a room so smoke could rise through a hole in the top of the roof. From that custom the word took on a broader sense, referring to the center of anything. Conversely, the base VEST- meant to Romans clothing of any kind, but to us today a "vest" is a specific type of clothing. In this case, the word root has narrowed its meaning.

- Lesson 13 examines how words can change their function, that is, their part of speech. When I was a child, it was felt that the word "impact" should be used only as a noun. You talked about the impact of something. But now "impact" can also be a verb. Something can impact something else. Impact used as a verb is an example of functional change.

- In Lesson 14, we'll observe the process in which words assume a more positive or negative connotation, for instance, "sensual" which means at heart "pertaining to the senses," but has come to have a related but different sensibility, "sexual." Many people view this as a shift toward a more negative sense. Other words, as you'll see, can assume a more positive connotation.

- The way words can move between concrete and abstract meanings will be addressed in Lesson 15, as for instance, how the word "inheritance," originally an abstract principle

("the right to inherit"), has taken on the sense of "things which are inherited," in other words, the stuff you get, not just the right to get it.

- Lesson 16 shows how words can lose their force when they're overused often through exaggeration. To wit, "unique" used to mean "one of a kind, unparalleled, without peer." Now it has a less powerful sense, merely "special, distinctive," allowing us to refer to one thing as "more unique" than another. In its original etymological sense ("one of a kind") that would be impossible. A thing that's all alone can't be more by itself than it already is. Thus, "unique" has undergone weakening.

- In Lesson 17 we'll recognize the simple fact that changing times can affect the meaning of a word. As society and science have developed, so have words. For example, the word "humor," meaning "wit, comedy," evolved from a type of medical care used in the pre-modern age. According to the humors theory, the human body is made up of fluids which regulate its health and thus a person's disposition. These fluids have to be kept in balance or people's attitudes will change. For instance, a person with too much blood becomes cheerful. Thus, "humor" came to mean "cheer."

- Lesson 18 will look into how the meaning of a word can be intentionally distorted to manipulate people's reactions to something. To call what happens in war "death" is accurate but brutal. Instead, referring to deaths as "casualties," a word which originally meant "fall down," which is not untrue of dead people ─ they often do fall down ─ makes death seem so much less offensive. All the same, while it's not exactly lying if you call someone's death a casualty, at best you are distorting the truth by not calling it what it actually is.

- Sometimes words change their form because they're simply misunderstood. Lesson 19 addresses how a general misconception of a word's etymological elements can affect its form. Ever heard the word "laxadaisical"? It means "listless, languid." It was originally "lackadaisical," but because "lackadaisical" sounds like it's related to words like "lax, relaxed," people changed the word's form and turned the "lack-" into "lax-." Ignorance can be as powerful a force in society as knowledge.

- Finally, Lessons 20 and 21 survey how words can become shortened by clipping them down and sometimes blending them. Who takes a "psychology examination"? No, you just hope to pass your "psych exam."

Whew! That was a lot of linguistics! Don't be too intimidated. We'll take several weeks to cover all of this. I just thought you'd like to know what lies ahead.

And what lies ahead immediately is Lesson 10 where Mr. Ayers discusses how words can change their sounds. One way is through dissimilation, "the process by which two similar or identical sounds diverge or become unlike, usually in order to facilitate pronunciation." An example of this process is "meridian," a word meaning "mid-day." Originally it comes from the Latin **medi-diem* ─ MEDI- means "middle" and DIEM means "day" ─ but try saying *medidian ten times fast, and you'll end up saying meridian too. It's just really hard to say the two d's in

rapid succession, so we push the first toward the closely related sound /r/ which makes the word slide off the tongue more easily.

The sounds /l/ and /r/ are often linked as you may have noted when we learned the *-al* and *-ar* suffixes. Those variants are the product of dissimilation. There was originally only one suffix *-al*, but when a word has a base with an /l/ sound in it, it's hard to say both l's. "Familiar" is easier to say than "familial," although we use that word too to mean something different. Conversely, "general" causes no problem, because there's no /l/ sound in the base. Now try saying "*lunal" rather than "lunar." You'll go loony. But not so with "renal" where there's only one /l/. No dissimilation necessary there.

Another common form of dissimilation found in Latin derivatives is the *-ety* variant of the *-ity* suffix. When a base ends with the letter -i, adding the suffix *-ity* creates two i's in succession. /ii/ is hard to say, so we make the second an -e, creating *-iety*, as in piety, society, anxiety, and the many other *-ieties* found in English.

Another type of suffix associated with sound change is the *-t-* suffix seen in many, many Latin words. That suffix, originally *-tum*, denoted what grammarians call the past participle. A participle is "an adjective formed from a verb, in English usually by adding *-ing* (the marker for the present participle) or *-ed* (the marker for the past participle) to a verb base." The Latin suffix *-tum* is cognate with English *-ed*. In other words, the same way we typically add *-ed* to make a verb past tense ─ jumped, sailed, started ─ the Romans often added *-t-* which accounts for all the t's you see at the end of bases with verb meanings, such as TEN-/TENT-. TEN- is the present-tense form; TENT- is the past. Likewise, REG-/RECT-, which returns us to the central issue we're discussing here, sound change. That -t suffix can affect the sound of a base. See how REG- (with a *g*) changes to RECT- (with a *c*) when the *-t* is added? That's done to make it easier to pronounce. It's hard to go *-gt-* so we change it to *-ct-* because /g/ and /c/ are closely related sounds.

The *-t* suffix can produce other types of sound change as well. For example, LOQU- will become LOCUT-, where the w-sound in /qu/ is lost. LOQUT- just sounds silly. TANG- will become TACT-. Here two changes happen: the /n/ is lost, and the /g/ turns into /c/ just as it does in REG-/RECT-. On the same principle, when *-t* is appended to the end of the verb base SCRIB-, it will become SCRIPT-. Likewise, FRANG- will become FRACT-.

Other, odder changes can happen too. Sometimes *-t* becomes *-s*, especially if the base ends in -D. That is, -Dt- changes into -S- or -SS-, as when *-t* is added to SED- and turns it into SESS-, or when CID- is followed by *-t* and becomes CIS-. Likewise, bases which ends in -T don't double the t's ─ that would be too easy ─ instead, they have -SS-. PAT-, for instance, has a past-tense form PASS-, and POT- has POSS-. Finally, bases ending in -R or -RR add -s instead of -t. To wit, CURR- becomes CURS-.

If that helps in shedding a little light on why there are different variants with some bases, that's great! But if it only made you more confused, forget it! I always like to know why things are the way they are. Somehow that makes me feel better, even if it does nothing to simplify the

situation. To me, knowledge offers consolation, as far as I'm concerned, one of its major roles in life.

Now let's go to Lesson 11 and look at another item of linguistic terminology, semantic change. Semantic change has a very simple definition: "the modification of meaning in a word." The base SEMA- comes from Greek and means "significance, meaning." So this is a very broad term for any type of change in a word's meaning.

The general process underlying most instances of semantic change involves another process called similitude ("the perceived likeness in two things") which in turn leads to metaphor ("an implied comparison"). From there a word develops a new meaning. Ayers discusses this process on page 76. There are thousands, if not millions, of examples of this process in English and across the globe. For instance, we associate all sorts of behaviors and characteristics with certain people by calling them a "something-head": a carrothead (if they have red hair), an egghead (if they're an intellectual), a meathead (if they're not).

This rich array of -heads is powered by metaphor, which, as I just said, involves the implied comparison of two things. Though you may not know it, you're very familiar with metaphor. We use it all the time. Shakespeare's poetry, for instance, is full of metaphor. It's the basic engine of his imagery, as in his famous monologue that starts "All the world's a stage …," a long speech comparing life and theatre. What else would you expect from a dramatist?

But metaphors are not just for poets. We use them in everyday speech, in virtually everything we say. We talk, for instance, about the "arm" of a chair. As I'm sure you're aware, chairs aren't people. They don't have arms or fingers or wrists, but the part of the chair where you rest your elbow when you're sitting down is called its arm because it looks a little like an arm, enough that we can tolerate the comparison and we get a useful, easy way of referring to that part of the chair. Likewise, we talk about the "butt" of a rifle. No need to go on about that, other than to say rifles don't have any body parts. They have rifle parts, but "butt" is a clear way of referring to their back end. Ships, we imagine, can "plow" the seas, even though they're not planting any seeds.

Metaphor is so important and pervasive in language, culture and narrative that I can tell your whole future in metaphor. Here you go. After you graduate and start your career, …

- At first, you go with the flow
- but soon you gear up
- and then you have a cow
- you push the envelope
- you go into a feeding frenzy
- to reach for the stars
- to be the top dog
- to be the big cheese
- to eat the whole enchilada
- but then you come unglued
- you push the panic button

- you go into a nose dive
- then you go on a bender
- so you have to go on the wagon
- you have to dry out
- and then you go back to the drawing board.

The world is a giant festival of metaphor. Get the metaphor? The world is a festival? It's actually impossible to speak without using metaphors, nor as we'll see later, even to think. We are creatures who feed our minds on comparison. The philosopher Aristotle called mastering metaphor "the greatest thing by far." He's right.

From that you should expect that old words are built on metaphors just as much as new words are created from them. That means many English words contain what are now "dead" metaphors no longer easily understood, even though the comparison was once quite obvious, often humorous, to our predecessors who coined the term.

- "Inoculate," for instance, meaning originally "to insert the 'eye' of one plant into another, depends on the comparison of the "eyes" (buds) of plants like potatoes to the eyes of animals, as if a potato could wink at you. They can't, strictly speaking, but buds do look like little eyes, hence the metaphor.

- "Delirium" means etymologically "a state of being out of one's furrow." A furrow is the line a plow follows when a farmer is plowing a field. To say "out of one's furrow" when you really mean insane implicitly contrasts erratic behavior with erratic plowing, just as we say someone is "off his rocker." Saying "out of a furrow" as a way of describing irrational action must have tickled some ancient Romans' funny bone.

- Being in the "limelight," meaning "taking center stage," refers to an old form of spotlight used in theatre. Before the introduction of electric lighting, stagehands created limelight, an intense beam of light, by burning lime (calcium oxide). While no working theatres, to my knowledge, use limelight these days, the metaphor between past theatrical practice and people who are seeking attention lives on in this phrase.

No one has said it better than Ralph Waldo Emerson in his Second Series, "The Poet":

> For though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency because for the moment it symbolized the world to the first speaker and to the hearer. The etymologist finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry. As the limestone of the continent consists of infinite masses of the shells of animalcules, so language is made up of images or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their origin.

Language as "fossil poetry" sums up the situation beautifully, but all these age-old linguistic images can make it difficult to understand how the pieces of a word add up the whole. That is, what the etymology tells you in a literal fashion can all too often be garbled by some fanciful comparison of things long past. Making sense of a word's components requires understanding its

history, where and why it was created, and by whom. Some words are whole lessons in history and much as I'd like to investigate them all with you, that's not feasible here.

Fortunately, at the moment we're dealing with only one major ancient culture, the Romans, whose sense of metaphor is not only embedded in many of our words but has shaped our very perspective of life. We are in so many ways modern Romans, not just in language but government, finance, entertainment, sports ─ you name it. Like us, the Romans were deeply invested in agriculture and military affairs. They saw themselves as farmers and fighters, but also lawyers, doctors, engineers, priests and traders. So it's natural that their metaphors come from these spheres of life and conform as well as they do with ours. Later in the class, we'll look at metaphor as such, and in particular those which are seen often in Latin derivatives.

For the time being, however, let's look at two exercises about metaphor in Ayers' textbook. The first is on page 75, exercise 4. We don't have time here in this presentation to do all of these, though you'd do yourself a favor if you did them all on your own, so let's examine a few of the words in this exercise which are built on interesting metaphors.

The first is number 4, "impediment." Can you see the base there? You know it. Yes, PED- meaning "foot." And the prefix? *im-* (or *in-*) meaning "on." So an "impediment" is originally something that was "on your foot," that is, it stopped you from moving forward.

The next word, "impend," number 5, means literally "hang on" (PEND- plus *in-*). You know those components too. So if something "impends," it literally "hangs on or over you."

Next, let's look at number 7, "incubate." Etymologically, it means "lie on" (CUB- plus *in-*) which is exactly what chickens do when they incubate eggs. Later, the word's sense was extended to imply any sort of fostering process.

And what about number 8, "invent"? It comes from elements that mean "come upon" (VENT- and *in-*) as if inventions already existed before their inventors invented them but instead the inventor simply "found" the invention sitting somewhere. Note the presumption there that discovery and progress are somehow inevitable. You just have to go looking for them.

Number 11, "obvious," is another word you can etymologize: "face-to-face (*ob-*) in the way (VI-)." If it's obvious, it's right in your path looking at you face to face, obviously.

Finally, if you "segregate" things, number 14, what do you do? You put them "apart" (*se-*) into different "flocks" (GREG-), like separating sheep and cows, something many Roman farmers must have done just as their modern counterparts still do.

Please turn now to page 82 where Mr. Ayers gives another list of words built on even more interesting metaphors. I'll leave it to you look these up and uncover the metaphor, but I can't resist calling a few of them to your attention briefly.

- "Cancer," for instance, the first word on this list, means "crab" because of the appearance of skin cancers which are often hard to the touch and have swollen veins which vaguely resemble crab legs.
- "Gland," number 6, was named for "acorns," because tonsils, in particular, looked like little nuts to early doctors.
- When you "insult" someone (number 7), you literally "jump on" them. That's hardly a metaphor at all.
- "Muscles," number 8, are "little mice" because they look like rodents, running under a carpet, I suppose. Mine certainly do, very tiny mice.
- "Remorse," number 10, means "bite back." Remorse literally gnaws on your soul.
- A "scruple," number 11, was originally a pebble in your shoe, which stopped you from going forward, just like your guilty conscience that tells you there are some things you shouldn't do. Oh dear, I think I have a pebble in my conscience.
- And finally, number 12, a "seminary" is a seed-garden where the church "grows" holy people.

And that's the end of this video presentation on the linguistic principles covered in Lessons 10 and 11 of Ayers' textbook. Next please listen to the audio presentation for these same lessons in which I'll discuss the suffixes and bases you're asked to memorize here. You'll find a link to that audio presentation on the course web site.

Happy etymologizing!

ASSIGNMENT

This audio presentation covers the exercises in Lessons 10 and 11, in particular, the suffixes and bases in the assignments starting on page 72. Please turn to that page in your textbook.

The first suffix toward the top of page 72 is *-ine*, a +0 suffix used to concoct some excellent adjectives and insults based on animals, not just the ones Ayers mentions ─ canine, feline, bovine, asinine and aquiline ─ but also ovine ("like sheep") and porcine ("like pigs"). Divine!

The next suffix *-ate*, which has a variant *-ite*, is the adjective counterpart of another suffix you've learned, the one that creates verbs and means "to." We'll learn yet another *-ate*/*-ite* suffix in Lesson 15, a noun-forming suffix meaning "the office of." The way to distinguish these is to look at how the word which has this suffix is functioning. If the word is a verb or has a verbal sense, use the verb-forming suffix's definition ("to"). Likewise, for adjectives or nouns. In practice, the noun suffix is relatively rare and usually stands out because the word refers to a legislature or something political. The real choice is between the adjective sense ("being") and the verb sense ("to"), neither of which affect the word's meaning very much, so even if you make the wrong choice ─ and you'll never lose points for doing that here ─ it won't throw off your etymology.

The last suffix in this lesson is a very, very important one: *-ant*/*-ent*/*-ient*. It's the Latin equivalent of the English ending *-ing*, which is how you should memorize it. Put a big star ─ no, two!! ─ next to this suffix. You're going to see it a lot.

The bases in this lesson are pretty straightforward so I'll leave it to you to memorize them. All I want to do here is add one more base, PLAC- meaning "please." This base is seen in English words like "placate, placid, placebo." What's a placebo? It's a pill your doctor gives you with no medicine in it. He's just giving you a pill to "please" you so you'll think you're getting medicine. Literally in Latin, *placebo* is a whole verb, meaning "I will please (you)."

To end this presentation, let's turn to Lesson 11 and look at the suffixes on page 79. Put a star by -*able*/-*ible*. You'll see it a lot! Note that it can mean "able to" or "able to be." The latter ("able to be") is more common. Memorize that as the primary meaning. Also note the paragraph at the bottom of the page where Mr. Ayers says, "If this suffix is followed by an additional element, it becomes -*abil*-, -*ibil*-."

The next suffix -*ile* means the same thing. It's really just a variant of -*ible* without its -b-. And the last suffix -*acious* is another +1 suffix meaning "tending to."

The bases in this lesson include some very important ones such as FAB- which has a number of variants: FA-, FAT-, FESS- and FAM-. So, what is an "infant" etymologically? A baby which is as yet "not (*in*-) speak- (FA-) -ing (-*nt*)." It's not talking yet. But it will. Watch out!

To the next base FALL-/FALS- (and its French variants), add the meaning "be mistaken." A "fallacy," for instance, is a "mistake," usually in logic or argumentation.

MOD-, another base on this list, means "measure," but often that's "measure" in the sense of "good measure, well-measured." It's often applied to things that are "fit, suitable." They measure up well with their surroundings. From that sense we get words like "modesty, moderation."

To TANG-/TING-/TACT-, add two more variants TIG-/TAG- (i.e. no n's). Those forms are seen in English derivatives like "contiguous, contagion (a disease that passed by touching)."

And finally let's add one more base to this lesson: CULP-, meaning "blame." People who are "culpable" are "able to be blamed." They're "culprits" and should say *mea culpa*!

That's it for this audio presentation about the assignments in Lessons 10 and 11. Be sure to memorize all the suffixes and bases in these lessons.

Happy etymologizing!