Latin Lessons 8-9

The goals of Lessons 8 and 9 are to introduce Latin suffixes and look at how to analyze English words which come from Latin. In addition, we'll also address substantives, that is, adjectives functioning as nouns. And as always, you'll find an accompanying audio presentation on the course web site which addresses the suffixes and bases introduced in these lessons.

What is a suffix? It's "one or more letters added to the end of a word to modify its meaning, and also often change its part of speech." Do you remember what parts of speech are? That's right: nouns, verbs, adjectives and so on. Suffixes are one of the most common and useful elements of language. As such, Latin suffixes are found at the end of many English words. Indeed, they show up about twice as often as their prefix counterparts, so they're well worth the time you spend learning them.

Because they often affect a word's part of speech, suffixes are grouped into categories based on whether they produce nouns, adjectives or verbs, the three major types of suffix. The first and largest of those is adjective-forming. It will take us six lessons in Ayers to get through all of them. While some of these adjective-forming suffixes are very specific (e.g. "having the character of, disposed to"), many do little more than turn a word into an adjective. To these Ayers gives bland definitions like "pertaining to, tending to." So many suffixes belong to this category that we'll use the abbreviations p.t. ("pertaining to") and t.t. ("tending to") which will save us a lot of ink or typing.

The second major category of Latinate suffixes is noun-forming, in other words, suffixes that create and represent nouns. They'll take us another half a dozen lessons to get through. These tend toward more specific meanings (e.g. "a holder of the office of, that which must be done, a little thing" ─ that last suffix definition is called a "diminutive"). This is another large group, only slightly smaller than their adjective-forming cousins.

And finally, English has inherited a handful of Latin suffixes which form verbs, but only a few. It will take us only three lessons to cover them. The reason for this imbalance is obvious. Many Latinate bases already have a verbal sense ("to run, to cut, to follow") and don't need a suffix to turn them into verbs. They are already. So there don't need to be many verb-forming suffixes. Besides that, you've already learned one of them, *-ate* which simply indicates that a word is a verb, assuming, of course, that *-ate* is the final suffix.

On pages 149-150 in the middle of the book, Ayers lists all the Latin suffixes you are required to memorize, putting them very conveniently in alphabetical order and referencing the lesson where each is first introduced. This is very useful if you need to look a suffix up in the textbook. But it's not very helpful in memorizing. On one of the course handouts I provide ─ look on the syllabus web page where it says "Click here for a list of Latin affixes"; then go to page 3 of the handout ─ there you'll find the same suffixes but this time grouped according to their basic meaning. Here is a link to that handout.

Now let's discuss a matter that's not directly pertinent to suffixes but does involve parts of speech, substantives. A substantive is "an adjective which functions as a noun, without changing

the form of the word." Our term "deductible" is a substantive when it's used to refer to an expense you can deduct from your taxes, for instance, "Deductibles often include charitable donations." Here, the word "deductible" which is technically an adjective ─ something is deductible ─ becomes a noun when it is used in the sense of "a deductible." You can easily see that it's a noun because it can be pluralized (deductibles) and only nouns can be pluralized in English. Dictionary definitions don't always make it clear at first sight whether a word is a substantive or not. Context, however, always makes it clear. Does this adjective ─ and you can see it's etymologically an adjective because of its adjective-forming suffix ─ does this adjective have a plural ending such as *-s*, which is distinctive to nouns in English? Or can you make it plural? If you're unclear about the difference between nouns and adjectives, please watch the first Grammar Preview Presentation. Oh! You *are* clear about that? Good!

"Good," for example, is normally an adjective: some people are good and that's a good thing. But if you talk about "the good," meaning "good people," or "the bad" (bad people), or "the ugly" (ugly people), suddenly you don't have adjectives. You have nouns. They're people. People are nouns: the good, the bad and the ugly. Now what you've got are adjectives acting like nouns. You've got substantives, and a very fun movie to boot. Movies for some reason are substantive magnets. They attract them like flies, particularly murder mysteries where a dead person is "a stiff." The bad guy is "the heavy."

Politics, a close relative of murder, is another haven for substantives: conservatives, liberals, moderates, even though there seem to be fewer and fewer of those all the time. Sports teams are often substantives: the Aggies, the Longhorns, the Trojans, along with their mascots like Big Blue. And speaking of Trojans, we tend to favor substantives over true nouns when it comes to … certain devices like trojans, rubbers, prophylactics, all substantives. We'd rather describe those than use the actual word for them "condom." To say condom seems so vivid. No one wants to see one of those, even if just in the mind.

It's also worth noting that certain Latin adjective-forming suffixes produce more nouns (i.e. substantives) than adjectives: *-ian*, for instance, which is seen in words like "barbarian, Virginian, Christian, amphibian, antiquarian," all of which are used almost exclusively as nouns. Their close relatives "historian, librarian" are in fact all but never used as adjectives. The closely related suffix *-ane* which is seen in many scientific terms ─ butane, methane, propane ─ also produces nouns almost without exception. Another suffix *-ary*, seen in English words like "dictionary, granary, commentary, aviary," tends also to generate substantives.

When it all comes down to it, "substantive" really ought to be a fourth part of speech used in this class. We'll see that many substantives. By indicating that a word is a substantive ─ and isn't it rather charming that the word "substantive" when used that way is a substantive? ─ when you show me that you know a substantive if you see one, you're telling me you understand how an adjective can become a noun when deployed a certain way. That's important information and I'd like to know you know it, but I won't impose another part of speech on you. Three is enough, I suppose.

So here's the upshot. When you encounter a substantive, you can call it "substantive" and define it as a noun which it is technically. Or you can call it an adjective which it is etymologically, but

then you have to define it as an adjective which means you will not be able to substitute your definition back into the sentence. You can't replace a noun with an adjective and expect to produce sense. Conversely, you can call it a noun, which it is grammatically, but then be sure to use one of the suffix's substantival meanings ─ for instance, not "pertaining to," but "one connected with" ─ or else your etymology will be out of step with your definition, and that's never good. Those are your three choices. I prefer the first (call a substantive a substantive) but the others are right as well. In the end, learning what substantives are and calling them that is just simply good practice. I encourage you to do it.

And so on to Lesson 9. Now that we have incorporated suffixes into your etymologies, we can address word analysis in full. Note please the proper format for etymologizing words. We'll use this format throughout the class. Prefixes should be written in lower-case letters with a hyphen or dash after the prefix, for example, *con-*. Bases should be written in all capital letters with a hyphen or dash after the base, for example, DUCT-. And suffixes should be written in lower-case letters (the same way prefixes are) with a hyphen or dash before the suffix, as in *-or*. Thus, the word "conductor" properly etymologized will look like this: con-/DUCT-/-or. Be aware that words can have more than one prefix, suffix or base, but each should be written according to the format above. So, for instance, the word "irreconcilability" should be etymologized in this format: ir-/re-/con-/CIL-/-abil/-ity, literally "the state of being unable to be called back together."

And that raises another issue, something I'm sure you're well aware of by now if you've been doing your homework. It's hard, sometimes *very* hard, to see the meaning of a word from its etymological components. That's because there is some sort of metaphor, an implied comparison between things, which links one sense to another. So, for example, in the word we just looked at, "irreconcilability," the literal etymological sense "the inability to be called back together" implies the attitude of someone who doesn't want to get back together and talk with someone else. That suggests hostility, but the jump from the literal meaning "not being called back" to the figurative sense "not willing to get along with" is sometimes tough to make.

It takes practice to see how you should make that connection. In the end, it's an art, not a science, because it depends, as all human communication does, on divining the feeling underlying the literal meaning of a word. The best way to learn this ─ indeed, the only way! ─ is to do it, that is, your homework regularly and thoroughly. With that you'll see patterns and learn to import what you've discovered about one word to another. The metaphorical meaning of some words will be difficult to decipher, such as "precarious," which means literally "full of ─ that is, needing ─ prayer." But its etymological sense ("prayerful") has a very different application in practice. It does not involve religiosity or devotion; instead, it refers to a situation in which your only option is to pray because heaven is the only thing standing between you and disaster, such as not studying in this class. That's a very precarious thing to do.

I'll make you two promises here. The words I choose to put on tests and quizzes will not be heavily metaphorical in sense. You *will* be able to deduce what they mean, and even if you have to make a jump from the literal to the metaphorical meaning, it will be obvious from the context of the sentence the word is in. Remember that you'll never have to define words outside of a sentence ─ etymologize them, yes! ─ but never define them without some sort of hint about their applied meaning. That's the skill we're building here. You see a word you don't know in

something you're reading, and you figure out what it means by etymologizing it. This is my promise: I'll give you words with easy meanings to decrypt. In return, I expect you to give me this: hard work! Do every sentence in every lesson! Because the more you practice, the faster you'll figure out how to make the metaphorical leaps underlying the meanings of many words. In a lesson or two, we'll look at metaphor itself after you've tackled enough of them to be frustrated and eager for tips and hints about how to make the metaphorical jump. But like all good horror shows, let's build up some tension first.

That's the end of this video presentation on the linguistic principles covered in Lessons 8 and 9 of Ayers' textbook. Now that you're done here, you should next listen to the audio presentation about the assignments in these same lessons, in particular, the 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 Latin Lessons 8 and 9 of your textbook. Please open your book to page 61 and let's look at the suffixes assigned to you in Lesson 8. First (at the bottom of the page), please note that *-al* is one of the commonest Latin suffixes found in English derivatives. Note also that sometimes it has an *-e-* or an *-i-* in front of it.

On the next page at the top is another very popular suffix, *-an*, which is its basic form. Other less common variants are *-ean*, *-ane*, *-ian*, and *-ain*. Please pay careful attention to the paragraph below this suffix where Mr. Ayers says that *-an* "frequently forms words which are used as nouns and so comes to mean 'one connected with.'" What do we call an adjective which functions as a noun? A substantive, of course. So this suffix regularly produces substantives, for example, "librarian, barbarian, historian."

The suffix *-ar* is really not a separate suffix. It's a variant of *-al*. That's why its meanings are the same as *-al*. My advice is to put them on the same flash card and learn them together.

The next suffixes are also a pair, sharing the basic definition "full of," although the second variant *-ous* can also have the sense "having the character of, like."

And let's be honest here. These suffix definitions are sometimes so bland they're hard to remember, so here's a better way of looking at them. Latin suffixes come in, if anything, degrees. Some are very neutral; they carry only a connotation of "pertaining to, like." Into this category belong *-al*/*-ar*. These suffixes don't add any new sense to the base they're attached to; they only make it an adjective. Others are very strong and have a sense of "full of," such as *-ous*/*-ose*. These add a sense of intensifying the base. They say "lots of" whatever the base is. To highlight the difference, consider "offici*al*" which just means "*pertaining to* some office or bureaucracy," whereas "offic*ious*" means "*overly* concerned with some service or duty," that is, "meddlesome, full of oneself." It's often applied to someone who's a stickler for detail. In sum, the first (offic*ial*) is neutral and doesn't strength the base; the second (offic*ious*) suggests an unwarranted abundance of officiality.

Later we'll learn that yet other suffixes fall in between these two and have a sense of "tending to." So, rather than memorize complicated definitions like "having the character of, belonging to," I'd like to suggest using a simpler notation system. For *-al*/*-ar* and all other neutral suffixes that mean "pertaining to," let's call them "+0." In other words, they add no force to the base. For middle-level suffixes that mean "tending to" ─ we haven't run into any of those yet but we will soon ─ let's call them "+1." For strongly intensifying suffixes like *-ous*, let's call them "+2." Now some prefixes have special senses that don't fall into this category, meanings like "able to be" or "-ing." These need to be memorized exactly the way they are in Ayers. But as long as you identify that a suffix is adjective-forming and, if its basic meaning belongs to one of the degree levels we just discussed ─ "pertaining to" or "tending to" or "full of" ─ you can just say "+0" or "+1" or "+2," and I'll give you some credit for knowing that. Seriously, why make things more complicated than they need to be?

Now let's look at some of the bases in Lesson 8. You'll find those on page 63. The first one I want to discuss ─ and remember you need to memorize *all* the bases here, even the ones I don't talk about! ─ is SIMIL-/SIMUL- meaning "like, similar." The first thing to note here is that the meaning "like" also carries with it the sense of "not the real thing": it's like something, but not actually that thing, as seen in our word "simulation." The SIMUL- form, however, has another connotation, "at the same time." Please add that definition. This produces English derivatives like "simultaneous." This SIMUL- base is linguistically related to the SIMIL- base but in Latin they produced different words which is why SIMIL- (the variant with two i's) doesn't generate derivatives which mean "at the same time."

The next base TEMPER-/TEMPOR- is much the same, the conflation of two different Latin bases. One, TEMPOR-, conveyed to the Romans the sense "time, due season" and gives us words like "temporary, contemporary." The other, TEMPER-, had the sense in Latin of "set bounds, due measure." That gives us our words like "temperate, temperature." To this base add two more variants: TEMP- seen in "tempo" (an Italian-based Latin derivative) and TENS- seen in "tense" ─ like verb tense, not nervous-tense ─ a French-based Latin derivative.

The next two bases, and the last ones I'll comment on here, share a variant form, TENT-. So when you encounter a word with the base TENT-, you can't tell if it means "hold" or "stretch." As with CUR- which can mean "run" or "cure," you'll have to test out which of the meanings makes more sense in context. And as always in this class, you'll never be punished for guessing wrong when there are two identical forms to choose between. Follow the rules and you will get full credit.

Finally, let's go to Lesson 9 and look at the suffixes there.

The first suffix on page 67 is *-ulent*/*-olent*. It's a "tending to" (+2) suffix. The *-ulent* variant occurs more often which is why it's listed first.

Below that, *-ic*/*-tic* is a +0 suffix ("pertaining to, like"), as is the next suffix *-ary*. Don't overlook the paragraph below this suffix: "If this suffix is followed by an additional element, the final *y* appears as *i*." In other words, this suffix could be written with two dashes, one before and one

after: *-ari-*. The second dash indicates that the suffix in this form is not the final suffix in the word. Note also the paragraph that follows: "The suffix *-ary* frequently forms words which are used as nouns and so comes to mean 'one connected with.'" What's the term for adjectives which function as nouns? That's right! Substantives.

The next suffix *-ile* is another +0 suffix. Note that there is an identical-looking suffix *-ile* which means "able to." We'll learn that suffix in Lesson 11. These two *-ile* suffixes may look alike, but they come from different sources linguistically. When you encounter *-ile*, you'll just have to guess which one is being used in any particular word, and as always I will never take off points for choosing the wrong option when you've followed the rules. But note that often the *-ile* which means "able" really stands out, so if there's not a clear "able" sense in an *-ile* word, go with "pertaining to."

Let's end this presentation by looking at the bases in Lesson 9.

As I did in Lesson 7, I want to add a base here, one that Mr. Ayers does not include in his book but which shows up in a lot of English words and so you should know it. BELL- means two different things: "war" as in "bellicose, belligerent," and "beautiful" as in "embellish, belle (like a southern belle)." It has these two meanings not because the bases are related, but because two different Latin words with different meanings by chance ended up looking the same. And let me be clear about this: these two BELL-'s are not some abstract comment of the loveliness of combat. Though the Romans did engage in a lot of martial activity, they didn't like war really any more than we do. They admired courage, but conflict itself was not beautiful to them.

Just a few quick notes about some of the other bases here. Note that GEN-/GENER- meaning "race, kind, origin" is a noun base, whereas the next base on this list just GEN- meaning "give birth to, produce" is a verb base. They are really the same base but one has a noun connotation and the other a verb sense.

Be especially careful with LATER- ("side"). It looks like a base we learned in Lesson 7, LAT- ("bear"). But make a note that, if LAT- is followed by -ER-, creating LATER-, it means "side," not "bear."

Finally, the last base on this list SERV- is another example of a Latin homonym, that is, two different bases that by chance ended up looking alike. One base means "serve" and gives us words like "servant, service, serve." The other means "save, keep" and gives us words like "conservation, preservation." There's a nifty way to distinguish these. In English derivatives the "save" SERV- base always has a prefix in front of it, as in "reserve, observe." The "serve" SERV- base only rarely does. That's useful!

And that's all for this audio presentation! Happy etymologizing!