Latin as a Threatened Language

in the Linguistic World of

Early Fifteenth Century Florence

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Abstract

This thesis examines the situation of the Latin language in the unique linguistic environment of early fifteenth century Florence. Florence, at this time, offers an interesting study because of the vernacular language's growing status in the wake of the literary success of vernacular authors Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, and the humanist study of Greek language. Joshua Fishman's theories on threatened languages and Reversing Language Shift are used to examine Latin's position in this environment. Chapter I describes Fishman's theories and applies them to the special situation of Florence, giving a context for the following three chapters. Chapter II offers an original interpretation of Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum,* emphasising the significance of the speaker, Coluccio Salutati, and his apparent message in favour of reviving spoken Latin. Chapter III describes a debate that began in 1435, after the papal Curia moved to Florence and Bruni was drawn into the discussions of the papal humanists. The debate examined whether the Ancient Romans actually spoke Latin in their daily lives, or whether Latin was primarily a written, literary language, and there was a separate, spoken language for domestic environments, as in Florence in the fifteenth century. A number of humanists commented in response to this question. I examine Flavio Biondo's treatise dedicated to Leonardo Bruni, Bruni's letter in response to Biondo, Poggio Bracciolini in the the *Tertiae Convivialis Historiae Disceptatio*, and finally, Leon Battista Alberti's comment in the preface to the third book of the *Della Famiglia*. In Chapter IV, Bruni's vernacular writing, the *Vita di Dante*,is used to establish Bruni's own attitude to language choice as flexible and dependant on the subject matter, genre and intended audience for the work.

Chapter I Introduction: Relationship between modern theory of language recovery for minority languages and the situation of Latin in 15th century Italy

This thesis examines the particular situation of Florence in the Quattrocento with regards to issues of language competition and language choice. I examine Florentine attempts to revive the Latin language in the fifteenth century, in light of modern theories of Reversing Language Shift (hereafter RLS). Peter Burke touched RLS theory,[1] but limited himself to a general comment on Fishman's theories on how language shift spreads if it is perceived to spread. I propose to use modern theory on how to preserve and revive threatened minority languages to examine the actions of the humanists and the specific problem of Renaissance Latin. The RLS model helps to bring into relief specific aspects of the revival of Latin, even without fitting completely into the model. In this sense, I take as a starting point the uniqueness of Florence at that time because of the creation of a vernacular literature in the Tuscan dialect and the fact that Florence was a centre for the revival of Greek and Latin eloquence. I begin my discussion with a summary of the crucial points of RLS theory, which I then apply these to fifteenth century Italy. After this I discuss the unique linguistic position of Florence at this time, and outline a context for each of the subsequent chapters. My chapters each offer a snapshot of attitudes to language choice and to Latin, by examining specific written contributions by humanists, with particular attention to Leonardo Bruni.

Modern Theories of Reversing Language Shift

Latin became increasing threatened as a language-in-use during the period under examination. It is, therefore, desirable to scrutinise it in the context of modern theories on language shift in threatened, or minority languages. The seminal works in this area are Joshua Fishman's "*Reversing Language Shift,*" published in 1991 and a revised book, entitled "*Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing Language Shift, Revisited: A 21st Century Perspective*" in 2001. Fishman is credited with founding the field of study into the process of reversing the shift away from the use of minority threatened languages; Fishman's theories are consistent between the two books published a decade apart.

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[1] Peter Burke, "*Heu Domine, Adsunt Turcae*": a Sketch for a Social History of Post-Medieval Latin" in *The Art of Conversation* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1993) 34-65, reference to Fishman 64.

Fishman establishes the terminology for this area of study. His phrase, "Reversing Language Shift" is abbreviated to RLS; and one who practises RLS, or is pro-RLS, is termed an RLSer.[2] RLS efforts are social policies aimed at intervening in the existing course of events surrounding a language, whether these are implemented by government or the local community.[3] According to Fishman, the purpose of RLS analysis is "to understand, limit, and rectify the societal loss of functionality in the weaker language when two languages interact and compete for the same functions."[4] People who speak a minority language in an example scenario are termed Xmen or Xians, and the non-specific language they speak is termed Xish.[5] The dominant language is Yish, and its speakers are Ymen or Yians. In addition, it is possible to identify as belonging to the group of Xmen, or to be Xian, without speaking Xish, just as it is possible, for instance, to consider yourself a Maori without being able to speak Maori (Te Reo). RLS is difficult because the process of language loss is the result of a much wider process of ongoing departures from traditional culture, creating an Xmen-via-Yish possibility.[6] RLS is about cultural reconstruction and is, therefore, an inherent criticism of society as it exists.[7]

RLS activities involve an element of what is known as language planning. Language planning can involve "status planning" measures, which foster greater use of the language in various societal functions; and "corpus-planning", which involves coining or adopting new terms required for normal language functions, as well as adjusting and monitoring spelling.[8] Language planning is part of the organisation required to effectively revive a threatened language.

The term diglossia is applied to the situation of bilingualism where Xish and Yish have their own domains. These domains are spaces and functions in which languages are expected to be spoken, and these spaces and functions overlap minimally.[9] For a minority language, a situation of diglossia is both necessary and desirable.[10] The minority language must establish

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[2] Joshua Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift* (Great Britain: Multilingual Matters Ltd.,1991) 2, 11
[3] Fishman (1991) 81-82
[4] Joshua Fishman, *Can threatened languages be saved? Reversing Language Shift, Revisited: A 21st Century Perspective* (Great Britain: Multilingual Matters, 2001) 2
[5] Xish and Xmen are terms introduced in Fishman (1991) 11, Xians and Yians appear at Fishman (2001) 451
[6] Fishman (2001) 21
[7] Fishman (1991) 17,19
[8] Fishman (1991) 81, 337, 346-352
[9] Fishman (1991) 84-85, (2001) 9-13
[10] Fishman (2001) 453

boundaries for its use.[11] Language revival is never about the language alone, but encompasses wider cultural goals. The language may be a necessary vehicle for cultural activities, and the clearer the separate functions each language is appropriate or necessary for, the clearer the need for retaining and reviving the minority language becomes.[12] Fishman emphasises that schooling is not enough to maintain and revive threatened languages. A space outside of school and after schooling finishes, where the language is used, must exist.[13]

Fishman sets out the steps of language learning and language acquisition as follows.[14] First comes the ability to understand what is being said. After understanding comes the ability to speak the language. Once understanding and speaking are gained, it is possible to learn to read, and finally to write proficiently (literacy). This process is seen as a progressive scale, where the earliest stages at the start of the list (Understanding and Speaking) do not imply ability in the later stages (Reading and Writing). Ability in Reading and Writing implies ability in Understanding and Speaking, but not vice versa. This scale is also used to determine and measure language loss and language recovery. The number of users who are literate in a threatened language is one way of measuring language erosion. This scale is also used to structure RLS measures, where first the use of the spoken word is emphasised in efforts on behalf of a language, followed by literacy.[15]

A threatened language is one that is not replacing itself demographically, resulting in the numbers of active practitioners or users of that language diminishing.[16] A threatened language is often also suffering from a decreased number of uses or is associated with uses that have little prestige or status in the wider community.[17] Therefore, language revival is often cultural revival and can be viewed by RLSers as a fight against cultural death and obliteration.[18] Modern minority languages have become so for a number of reasons. These may include urbanization, physical dislocation of populations, social dislocation of minority ethno-linguistic groups (resulting in disadvantage economically and educationally) and cultural

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[11] Fishman (1991) 85-86, (2001) 9-13
[12] Fishman (1991) 86-87, (2001) 9-12, 14-17
[13] See especially Fishman (2001) 14-17, 470-471
[14] Fishman (1991) 43-44
[15] See Fishman (1991) for the explanation of the GIDS scale 87-109, Fishman (2001) 465-474
[16] Fishman (1991) 81; language users or practitioners includes speakers, readers, writers and understanders (1991) 1
[17] Fishman (1991) 81
[18] Fishman (2001) 5

dislocation, such as that occurring under repressive regimes.[19] Yish may be associated with economic advantage and social status, whereas Xish with economic disadvantage.[20]

Fishman argues that it is important for those seeking to foster a threatened language to activate intergenerational mother-tongue transmission that is, teaching the young the language as their first language or their co-first language.[21] This will produce a new generation of native speakers. However, to encourage this behavioural pattern and to safeguard mother-tongue transmission, a number of factors ought to be considered. In situations where there are two rival languages, societal bilingualism, or diglossia, is inevitable. For this reason, geographic or physical isolation from the other more dominant language is a huge asset for RLS. Each language must have a space, minimally interfered with by outside languages, in which to have a purpose and to be used. Geographic isolation, most often in rural communities, helps to preserve the distinction between when to use Xish, the minority language, and when to use Yish, the dominant language encroaching on Xish functions. A community that is self-contained as far as possible needs to be created to use Xish and foster Xish use among the young and in education. A community is also useful for maintaining language use in adult speakers.[22]

The home is where RLS begins. The mother is typically seen as most important in guaranteeing the transmission of a language to the children. For example, if the mother speaks Spanish and the father English, the children are more likely to be able to speak Spanish, even if they live in an English dominated environment. Mass media such as television, radio and newspapers, do little to help toddlers learn a minority language, but can provide a positive Xish environment and a domain for engaging adult speakers. Threatened languages will always have the problem of finding quality, qualified teachers for education initiatives. They also frequently suffer from an image problem, as minority languages in the twenty-first century are often associated with disadvantaged groups in society, particularly immigrants and indigenous groups. The rewards in society, be they economic, social, or political, are usually associated with Yish and Yish society, making Xish unnecessary to gain those rewards. As well as the loss of Xish speakers in favour of Yish because of the greater opportunities, the low status of Xish does not attract people to learn about Xish culture or its language. Many minority

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[19] See Fishman (1991) 55-65
[20] Fishman (2001) 452
[21] Fishman (1991, 2001) *passim*
[22] Fishman (1991) 113

languages can be perceived as deficient in their vocabulary and ability to speak about modern technology and modern concepts, and this adds to their negative image.

Ideally, modern activities on behalf of threatened languages begin with an assessment of the current situation regarding language use, followed by the formulation of specific and prioritised goals to further use and increase the number of users.[23] The specific situation of each minority language determines which action is best taken. The focus, by necessity, is on the young, and in particular on the development of intergenerational mother-tongue transmission. Immersion language kindergartens are one example of an activity that provides the young with Xish exposure and provides older users with a language domain. However, parents must also learn and parent in Xish to best promote its use to their children.[24] Parental efforts on their own are not considered enough to maintain Xish language. Home-family-neighbourhood communities, albeit informal, must be established for small-scale interaction to provide a language space.[25]

The Linguistic Situation of Early Quattrocento Italy

There were two main languages-in-use in early fifteenth century Italy: Latin, and the various dialects of the vernacular, or *volgare* languages. The idea of societal bilingualism, or diglossia, is therefore applicable. Latin was preserved as the language of government administration, the Church government and liturgy, education and intellectual life. The users of Latin were an educated, minority group, usually with high social status. For some users, Latin was the ideal medium for expression and the works of classical antiquity were to be emulated wherever possible. These users, known to us as humanists, eventually sought to revive the use of classical Latin over the medieval forms of Latin that had developed. They sought out a wide range of works from Antiquity in order to gain greater knowledge of the style and form employed by classical authors. Not only did humanists advocate the use of classical Latin forms in preference to contemporary dialects of Latin, they also advocated a return to the use of Latin as a spoken vernacular. Regional Italian dialects were primarily used in spoken domains and personal everyday writing, such as letters and shopping lists. There are some particularly interesting features of the linguistic situation of early fifteenth century Italy when examined in the light of Fishman's theories.

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[23] Fishman (2001) 13, 16
[24] Fishman (2001) 14
[25] Fishman (2001) 16

Language acquisition, according to modern theory, begins with Understanding, and from that Speaking is possible, then Reading and Writing.[26] In Medieval and Renaissance education, this progression was reversed. A pupil, normally a boy, would learn how to read and write Latin first, as these were the most useful functions for Latin. Speaking and Understanding came with true proficiency and were only demanded at irregular intervals and in particular settings, such as listening to a lengthy Latin speech, certain intellectual environments or Latin church sermons.

Latin was a high status language associated with an elite minority. Languages are linked to social identity and ethno-cultural identity. Minority languages today are often burdened with a negative image and associated with disadvantaged groups. Speaking the minority language marks the speaker as a member of that disadvantaged group: for example, speaking Spanish in Florida may associate the speaker with Spanish-speaking frequently illegal immigrants of low socio-economic status. As opposed to these modern situations, for a Renaissance person, Latin was associated with wealth and power. It was learned almost exclusively by men, and therefore, had a gender aspect to its use. The group who used Latin in fifteenth century Italy was an advantaged group, a high status elite male minority. This minority had little in common with the disadvantaged groups typical of modern theory. Minority languages today are also better preserved in areas of concentration of certain ethno-cultural groups, particularly in a rural context.[27] For the situation of Latin in the Renaissance, locality was not as important as social class in determining whether people were able to express themselves in Latin. Furthermore, the areas where Latin use and knowledge were highest were usually urban contexts, rather than rural communities.

The symbolic power of Latin was another aspect of the linguistic situation of early fifteenth century Italy. Latin was associated with learning, aesthetic values, the Roman Empire, Italian greatness and unity, and Italian ancestry. The similarities between Latin and Italian, the one having developed from the other, lead to Italian being initially regarded by some as a debased form or a less sophisticated, "ungrammatical" language.[28] Latin, by contrast, was a symbol of order as a language regulated by grammatical convention. Latin was associated with purity and

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[26] Fishman (1991) 43-44
[27] Fishman (1991) 58, 163, 180
[28] Sarah Stever Gravelle "The Latin-Vernacular Question and Humanist Theory of Language and Culture," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49, No. 3 (Jul – Sep 1988) 369

high-culture. Aspects of patriotism and parochialism, also present in modern minority language defences, became part of the fight to save Latin.

RLS and the Linguistic Situation of Latin in Early Fifteenth Century Italy

These various interesting points about the linguistic situation of early fifteenth century Italy make an examination from an RLS perspective profitable. If there was a change in the balance between the two languages, a change which appeared to strengthen the position of the vernacular, how might RLS theory be applied to Latin? What methods might the supporters of Latin undertake to attempt to reverse this language shift away from Latin? The process of language acquisition, fostering mother-tongue transmission, the status of the language and the corpus of words may all pose problems for RLSers for Latin.

A problem attached to the application of RLS theory would be to define which language is Xish and which Yish. In Fishman, a Yish language has all the social privilege and the advantage of opportunities but is usually known and used by the majority of people, whereas Xish is a minority language in terms of user numbers and in terms of the advantages or otherwise for its speakers. Was Latin Xish or Yish? The problem for minority languages is that many are abandoned in favour of the dominant language because that language, for example English, offers greater opportunities: education, work, socially. For Latin, the opportunities came from knowing and using *Latin*, rather than the vernacular, yet those using the *volgare* vastly outnumbered the number of people who were proficient, or even competent, in Latin. Fishman's terminology and indeed his theory of language recovery do not quite fit the situation of Latin language during the fifteenth century. It would be difficult to label Latin as Xish when it held the rewards of Yish society, but it would be equally difficult to label Latin as Yish when it was used by the minority and was perceived as requiring RLS help.

RLSers might debate how appropriate Latin was to be used in a small-scale intimate domain. Humanists actually debated whether Latin was ever a vernacular language. If the possibility of Latin as a vernacular in Antiquity was discussed, the possibility of using Latin as a vernacular among contemporaries was downright controversial. As such, it is necessary to examine whether the humanists wished to revive spoken Latin in both domestic and professional settings. Indeed, attached to the debate over the vernacular nature of Latin was a push to use

Latin in the home. However, humanists did not recognise the need to establish native speakers and ensure intergenerational mother-tongue transmission. Accordingly, the role of the mother in the language education of the young was overlooked. Latin was passed down to the younger generations via formal education and humanists did not appear to have envisaged a change to this system as part of their RLS efforts. The reconstructed Classical Latin was soon in evidence on inscriptions, monuments and works of art and no doubt contributed to a positive environment for Latin.

RLS activities would involve an element of what is known as language planning. Language planning can involve "status planning" (measures to foster greater use of the language in various societal functions) and "corpus planning" (coining or adopting new terms required for normal language functions). Specific activities were undertaken by humanists on behalf of language revival in terms of both status and corpus planning. As for status planning, they adapted and introduced specific domains for Latin, increasing the profile of Latin, for example, through lengthy speeches at courtly celebrations and in written documents. As for corpus planning, involving the linguistic study of the language, great advances were made in the Renaissance in the understanding of concepts such as historical language change. In the period following the present study, figures like Lorenzo Valla used the close exegesis of texts to gain a very specific knowledge of Latin and the development of that language over time. Similarly, the development and potential of the Italian *volgare* was realised in a comparative study.[29]

In modern theory, corpus planning often involves introducing new terms to describe new concepts, frequently related to technology. The revival of Classical Latin in the fifteenth century involved the identification and removal of certain words from Latin that had been introduced during the Middle Ages to describe new technology and concepts.[30] This process became increasingly extreme and developed into Ciceronianism after the period examined in the present work. Ciceronianism involved the careful study of Ciceronian texts and in some cases the rejection of not only vocabulary not contained within his works, but also forms of nouns and verbs that Cicero did not use. Some attempt was made to recover lost words from discovered texts and from other methods; for example, Poggio Bracciolini listens to old women speaking, as he regarded them as conservative in their language and retaining older

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[29] Stever Gravelle (1988) 385-386
[30] I am not largely concerned with the restoration of classical forms of Latin, this occurred in a period much later than the time I intend to examine. It is included here for theoretical understanding only.

words and forms.[31] Strangely enough, Italian was regarded as deficient in comparison to Latin as Latin had a *copia* of vocabulary from which to choose.[32] This is strange only because the minority language was regarded as having more, rather than less vocabulary than the more widely spoken vernacular. This perception would have influenced the corpus planning activities of the humanists, who could therefore refine the vocabulary of Latin without seeing themselves as disadvantaged.

The status of Latin as a threatened language according to Fishman's theory is also difficult to determine. Latin was a well-developed language, the focus of mainly male education, with developed school and community literacy, and used in the highest community functions.[33] In one sense, the shift away from Latin had occurred hundreds of years beforehand. But, a 'revival' was not an appropriate description, as Latin was still in active, if limited use. The 'revernacularisation' of the language was attempted while simultaneously the vocabulary available was reduced by the removal of 'corrupted' words. Revernacularisation was also attempted without recognising the need for intergenerational transmission and increased use in small-scale settings; the home, the street, the pub. Thus, the term 'revitalisation' is also not appropriate, as it is applied to a language that has restored normal intergenerational transmission, something fifteenth century RLSers failed to do.[34] The threatened language status cannot be assessed based on the scale of Understanding, Speaking, Reading, Writing either. Literacy did not need to be developed and inscriptions and publications were already using Latin.[35] RLS activities cannot therefore be implemented as Fishman suggests, as there are no native speakers remaining to begin RLS with. In spite of the problematic application of RLS theory to fifteenth century Italy, I think some valuable information can be gained by examining humanist works through its lenses.

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[31] Mirko Tavoni, *Latino, grammatica, volgare: storia di una questione umanistica* (Padova: Editrice Antenore 1984) 241

[32] Stever Gravelle (1988) 369ff

[33] Here I am particularly comparing the situation of Latin to that of Hebrew in the modern period, as spelled out by B. Spolsky and E. Shohamy "Hebrew After a Century of RLS Efforts" in Fishman (2001) 350-363, here especially 353

[34] Revival/Re-vernacularisation/Revitalisation are terms taken from Spolsky and Shohamy, "Hebrew After a Century of RLS Efforts" in Fishman (2001) 350

[35] Again, compare the situation of Hebrew: Spolsky and Shohamy, "Hebrew After a Century of RLS Efforts" in Fishman (2001) 353

The Unique Linguistic Situation of Trecento and Quattrocento Florence: A Context for Chapters II-IV

Now that the general linguistic situation of Italy has been examined according to Fishman's theories, the particular case of Florence needs to be discussed. Diglossia existed in Florence as for the rest of Italy with one language existing for privileged spheres and the domains of education, church and diplomacy: Latin. The other, more domestic, small-scale domains employed the local *volgare*: Tuscan. In the Trecento, the linguistic situation of Florence began to distinguish itself from that in the rest of Italy. The emergence of a literary form of Tuscan, the revival of Greek learning and the presence in Florence of humanist intellectuals interested in language all combined to create and then recognise a competition between the languages.

In the Trecento, three Florentine authors elevated their local vernacular to literary domains previously reserved for Latin. Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) composed his *Divina Commedia* and other *canzoni*; Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch 1304-1374) composed love poetry dedicated to Laura; and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) wrote the *Decameron*, a book of short stories on largely humorous topics. A critical analysis of the works of these great authors is beyond the scope of the present topic; what concerns us is the impact that these figures had on the linguistic situation of Florence. Tuscan authors writing in the Tuscan dialect had created a literature in the vernacular. By the turn of the century, the problem at Florence was that local, vernacular authors had increased the prestige and viability of the *volgare* in literary domains. This posed a challenge to the Latin language, which had previously dominated the serious literary genres.

Precisely because of this outcome, the intensity of the competition between Latin and the vernacular became unique to Florence. The Trecento authors and their literary achievements led to an unprecedented awareness of language choice and opened up new possibilities for the two languages. Gilson draws a comparison with the other centres of humanist thought, emphasising that this was Florence's individual problem because only Tuscan had developed into a literary form:

In the rest of Italy, the cult of Latinity is such that fifteenth century humanists tend either not to discuss the vernacular or else deny it any potential as a language capable of attaining higher literary and cultural status. [36]

This awareness of language choice and the local prestige of the vernacular created a situation where Latin was becoming less preferred and more threatened.[37] As a result, individuals participated in some activities directed at RLS for Latin. I examine Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum* in Chapter II in this context of an increased following for the Trecento poets and their impact on language choice in Florence in the early years of the Quattrocento.

Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) is a central figure to the present work. Each chapter looks at one of his literary productions. He was a humanist scholar, born at Arezzo. He was educated at Florence, in the household of the Chancellor at the time, Coluccio Salutati. Later he worked in the papal Curia at Rome (1405-1415) before returning to Florence. By 1427, he was Chancellor of Florence, a post he held until his death.[38]

Florence was also the centre for the revival of Greek language learning. Manuel Chrysoloras arrived in Florence in 1397 to begin teaching Greek. A number of interested humanists, Bruni prominent among them, studied Greek, then translated from Greek into Latin. This climate of language-learning peculiar to Florence facilitated more discussion on language and language choice.

If Florence was a flash-point for the confrontation between the two languages, the centre of Latin usage was the papal Curia. It was in the setting of the Curia, among the apostolic secretaries whose polished Latin was a way of life and a meal ticket, that prominent humanists began to debate the linguistic situation of Ancient Rome. When the Curia arrived in Florence in 1434, Bruni found his working environment invaded by the major humanists of the Curia.

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[36] Simon Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence* London: Cambridge University Press 2005 55; Baron also identified Florence as an important centre for humanists due to the "civic humanism" displayed by figures like Bruni. His theories on civic humanism have since largely been discarded and the importance of Florence has, as a corollary, been regarded by scholars as less seminal. (James Hankins, "The "Baron Thesis" after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni" *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 56, No. 2 (Apr. 1995) 309-338) Linguistically, however, Florence was of central importance at this time; although Baron's theories are no longer given credence, the location was still important.

[37] By contrast, Irving Elgar Miller, "The History of the Vernacular in Education. I" *The Elementary School Teacher* Vol. 4 No. 6 (Feb., 1904) 430, claims that outside of Florence the literary vernacular almost disappeared in the face of competition from a revived Latin – the opposite problem to that of Florence.

[38] Gordon Campbell, (editor) *Oxford Dictionary of the Renaissance* New York: Oxford University Press, 2003 118

He found himself engaged in debates on a number of issues, and no one was more prominent than him in the debate over the Latin language. In 1435, the humanists at the Curia and Bruni began to document the debate on whether or not Latin was the sole language of Ancient Rome, or whether the situation stood as it did in their own time, with Latin reserved for formal writing and occasions and a form of the *volgare* employed for day-to-day interaction. Chapter III is an examination of this debate and its RLS repercussions, with contributions from Flavio Biondo, Poggio Bracciolini and Leon Battista Alberti.

The fame of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, and the popularity of their vernacular compositions posed the greatest challenge to the dominance of the Latin language in Florence. The following is essential background information to the situation in Florence, and in particular to Chapter IV on Bruni's *Vita di Dante*. Dante enjoyed a popularity and status unprecedented for a work in the vernacular. Dante was an author-hero who gave Florence status, and is still linked irrevocably with that city. He was extremely popular there in the fifteenth century, and was given the status and respect of an ancient author, even though his *Divina Commedia* was composed in the *volgare*.[39] This was a truly exceptional honour for a vernacular poet. The volume of extant Florentine codices of the *Commedia* that survive from the fifteenth century is evidence that Dante was very popular there at that time. The work had a wide audience and was widely read in the Florentine mercantile environment.[40] Dante's books had a status of their own and, for some merchants, who might never have owned a classical text, owning 'il Dante' was a status symbol.[41] Dante's status at this time is confirmed by the numerous depictions of him and the subjects of his works that are found in painting and sculpture.[42] As Bruni attests:

> *La effigie sua propria si vede nella chiesa di Santa Croce, quasi a mezzo della chiesa, dalla mano sinistra andando verso l'altar maggiore, ed è ritratta al naturale ottimamente per dipintore perfetto del tempo suo.*[43]

> His own likeness is seen in the Church of Santa Croce, almost in the middle of the church, on the left side going toward the great altar; it was excellently drawn in a natural style by an excellent artist of his time.[44]

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[39] Gilson (2005) 66

[40] Gilson (2005) 8

[41] Gilson (2005) 8

[42] Gilson (2005) 14; W.P. Friederich, "Dante through the Centuries" *Comparative Literature* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter, 1949) 47

[43] From the *Vita di Dante* by Leonardo Bruni, in Hans Baron, *Leonardo Bruni Aretino Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften* Berlin: Verlag und Druck von B.G.Teubner 1969 58-59

It was the subject matter of Dante's work, the *Divina Commedia*, that set him apart from his fellow *volgare* authors, Petrarch and Boccaccio. He was the only author to write on serious themes and in a major work in the vernacular.[45] By contrast, Petrarch wrote love poetry and Boccaccio wrote short stories on humorous topics. It was the *Commedia* that led Tuscan into the domain of serious literature and gave Dante the status of a serious author.[46] Dante's foray into serious literature, using the vernacular, gave rise to questions about Latin. Once the vernacular had proved itself in literary domains, Latin was examined for use in domestic spheres.

Dante's own attitudes to language choice and the promotion of the vernacular have been widely discussed by scholars.[47] His work perhaps most relevant to the present discussion, the *De vulgari eloquentia*, was not available to the humanists in the Quattrocento, although they knew of its existence.[48] In his popular *Commedia*, to which fifteenth century readers did have access, Dante imagines that the character of Vergil writes in Latin, but speaks the Lombard *volgare*.[49] Dante's distinction was not between Latin and the *volgare*, but between a dead/artificial language, and a living/natural one.[50] He does not clarify the relationship between Latin and the *volgare*, nor does he say that everything should be written in the *volgare*.[51] Instead, Dante provides an exemplum of vernacular literature for others to build on.

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[44] Thompson and Nagel *The Three Crowns of Florence* New York: Harper&Row 1972 68

[45] Angelo Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories in Dante and the Humanists* Leiden, New York, Koln: E.J. Brill 1993 101

[46] Gilson (2005) for the importance of Dante see 12, but also *passim*

[47] Particularly Dante's work *De vulgari eloquentia* (1302- February 1305) see Steven Botterill, *Dante – De vulgari eloquentia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), a treatise in Latin about the power of the vernacular (xvi); see also www.princeton.edu/dante for a full text online (with thanks to Robert Hollander).

[48] Gilson (2005) 10; Mazzocco (1993) 24-29, 30 note 1 has a different point of view; the title of this work is mentioned by Bruni in the *Vita* – Baron (1969) 62

[49] See Vitale "Le origini del volgare nelle discussioni dei filologi del '400" *Lingua Nostra* 14 (1953) 64-69 see p65 note 9: *Inferno* Canto XXVII 19-21

> << … o tu a cu'io drizzo
> la voce e che parlavi mo' Lombardo
> dicendo <<Istra ten va; più non l'adizzo>> >>

Translation from Mark Musa, *Dante Alighieri – The Divine Comedy Vol. I Inferno* USA: Penguin Books, Indiana University Press 1984 316

> " we heard the words: "O you to whom I point
> my voice, who spoke just now in Lombard, saying:
> 'You many move on, I won't ask more of you…' "

Musa (320) notes that Vergil spoke in the Lombard dialect or with a Lombard accent. It is fitting for Vergil to speak the dialect of his native region.

[50] Botterill xviii; Cecil Grayson, "*Nobilior eat vulgaris:* Latin and Vernacular in Dante's Thought" in *Centenary Essay on Dante* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1965) Latin = grammar, and grammar = artificial (60, 61, 65, 66, 66 note 1, 70); For the Medieval tradition of Latin as *grammatica* see Giuseppe Patota, *Grammatichetta e altri scritti sul volgare* Rome: Salerno Editrice 1996 xv

[51] Grayson (1965) 57, 73

He also distinguishes a section of the literary domains where the vernacular is preferred: rhyming poetry. Just as Fishman teaches us, it is this linguistic space, safe from the supremacy of Latin, which provided the foundation for the vernacular to build. This very same linguistic space for the vernacular would become another loss to the receding domains for Latin.

Dante's works also allowed the vernacular to play some role in educational domains. There is evidence that the *Commedia* was the means by which some Florentine men and women learned to write and to read.[52] Education was a Latin language domain. Higher knowledge in any subject area was accessed via knowledge of Latin. The introduction of vernacular works to the educational sphere broke with a centuries-old tradition. However, Humanists do not appear to have noted this particular linguistic aspect of changing educational practices.[53] Considering how entrenched Latin remained in a typically conservative syllabus, the impact of vernacular texts on literacy education was probably less than has been imagined, or limited to early stages.[54] Furthermore, the people likely to have learned to read and write using Dante were perhaps not the groups of people who were destined to advance past this limited, basic education. Those who wished to advance still had to engage with Latin in educational domains.

Dante's works promoted growth in scholarship on *volgare* works that was normally reserved for ancient Latin texts and authors. His works, especially the *Commedia*, inspired lectures, commentaries and biographies.[55] Dante himself had encouraged the textual exegesis of his work by emending it himself a great deal during his lifetime.[56] Boccaccio was the first lecturer on Dante (1373-74) to be paid by the Commune of Florence.[57] These public lectures were given in the *volgare*.[58] Benvenuto da Imola wrote a lengthy commentary on Dante, and probably heard some of Boccaccio's lectures (1375 - 1380). Filippo Villani was the third person paid to lecture on Dante and also wrote a commentary (1405).[59]

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[52] Gilson (2005) 8, 8 note 26

[53] C.W. Kallendorf, *Humanist Educational Treatises*, USA: The I Tatti Renaissance Library, Harvard University Press, 2002

[54] See Gilson (2005) 8 for the suggestion that the vernacular played an increasing role in education. For support for my suggestion see Miller (1904) 429, see also 431-433 for the techniques of education (in Latin) at this time.

[55] "Dante and his commentators" Robert Hollander in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante* ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993) 226-236, especially 228-231 for discussion of early commentary tradition.

[56] Botterill (1996) x, xi

[57] "Dante and his commentators" Robert Hollander in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante* ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993) 228-231

[58] James Hankins, "The "Baron Thesis" after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni" *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 56, No. 2 (Apr. 1995) 334

[59] "Dante and his commentators" Robert Hollander in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante* ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993) 228; Gilson (2005) 8 note 23

Most manuscripts of the *Commedia* circulated with a commentary attached in either Latin or the vernacular to facilitate a better understanding of the text.[60] It is the choice of language for these commentaries that is of note for our purposes. Latin commentaries on the *Commedia* were written by Graziolo de Bambaglioli, Guido da Pisa, Benvenuto da Imola and Filippo Villani, to name but a few contemporary examples.[61] Many originally Italian commentaries on Dante were translated into Latin: for example, the commentary of Giacopo della Lana was translated by Alberico di Rosate (d. 1354):[62]

> Explicit comentus comedie Dantis… compositus… in sermone … tusco; et quia tale ydioma non est omnibus notum, ideo, ad utilitatem volencium studere in ipsa comedia, transtuli… in gramaticali scientia literarum ego Albericus de Rox(ate)… Pergamensis…

> The commentary of the Comedy of Dante follows, it was composed in the Tuscan everyday language; and since such an idiom is not known to all, that is why, I, Alberico di Rosate (of Bergamo?), have translated it into Latin for the use of those wishing to apply themselves to this work…

This passage from the colophon uses the word '*tusco*' to describe the language that Dante composed in. The selection of this word, rather than a more general word such as '*vulgus*', emphasises the contrast not just between Latin and the vernacular, but between the different types of vernacular within the Italian peninsula. The commentary was translated into Latin not just for international consumption, but simply for those who did not read Tuscan.[63]

The competition gradually emerging during the fifteenth century between the various Italian *volgari* may also have had effects on Latin language use. A focus on using local vernaculars could have contributed to the shift away from spoken Latin. By the same token, the strengthening differences and competition between the vernaculars may have developed a need

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[60] Gilson (2005) 8; see http://dante.dartmouth.edu/ for an online source of the full text of commentaries on the *Commedia*. Boccaccio wrote in Tuscan, Benvenuto da Imola in Latin, Filippo Villani in Latin. Dante's own son, Pietro Alighieri wrote a commentary in Latin (1340-42), although his elder brother Jacopo wrote one in the vernacular (1322).

[61] Gilson (2005) 8 note 23; Flavio Biondo, writing in 1435 also describes the activity of translating Dante into Latin: Flavio Biondo, *De verbis Romanae locutionis*, from Bartolomeo Nogara, *Scritti inediti e rari di Biondo Flavio* Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana 1927 (IV.) 118

[62] W. Leonard Grant, "European Vernacular Works in Latin Translation" *Studies in the Renaissance* Vol. 1 (1954) 121 note 13, which quotes the colophon stating the intention of the translation.

[63] One subtext to the language choices of Florentine scholars at this time was the competition between various Italian dialects. The Florentines naturally believed theirs to be superior, and had Dante and his works as proof of this. (Mazzocco (1993) 93-94, 98-99, 101, 103, 103 note 119)

for translations of works, such as Dante, into a universal language like Latin. In these cases Latin changes role to serve the *volgare*.

It is interesting to note the language choice of each commentary. While Villani wrote his commentary in Latin, he quoted the *Commedia* in the original *volgare*. Giovanni Bertoldi da Serravalle quotes in his commentary in both the vernacular and Latin (1416-17), doing a line by line translation. Language choice for commentaries reflected the competing claims for linguistic propriety. On the one hand, Latin was the usual language for commentaries, as commentaries were normally composed to accompany ancient texts. On the other hand, the *Commedia* was a *volgare* work, a Tuscan work, and thus, its audience might expect commentary in the vernacular, specifically in Tuscan.

It may have been the act of preparing a commentary on Dante in Latin that necessitated translating his work from the vernacular into Latin. Coluccio Salutati was one of a few who partially translated Dante's work into Latin. Salutati, on several occasions, translated sections of Dante's *Commedia* into Latin hexameters,[64] but it is impossible to tell whether or not these hexameters were part of a larger effort by Salutati to translate Dante.[65] He was not the only one to attempt this task. A prose Latin translation of the *Commedia* was made by Giovanni Bertoldi da Serravalle (1416-17), of which very few manuscripts survive, and a full translation was made by Matteo Ronto (c.1427-31), of which numerous manuscripts are extant.[66] Serravalle (d. 1445) taught theology at the Franciscan *studium* in Florence, and translated Dante into Latin prose.[67] Ronto was born in Crete to Venetian parents, becoming a soldier, then a Benedictine monk at Monte Oliveto near Siena (d. 1442).[68] Both translators were involved in scholarly communities that traditionally use Latin in Tuscan speaking areas. Most translations of Dante into Latin are later than these originals and incomplete.[69] This is either indivates a lack of interest in translating Dante into Latin, or that the original translations from Ronto and Serravalle were sufficient.

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[64] Gilson (2005) 57, 60, 65, see Salutati's *Ep.* III, 141 and *De Fato et Fortuna*
[65] Grant (1954) 121
[66] M. Tagliabue, "Contributo alla biografia di Matteo Ronto, traduttore di Dante." *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 26 (1983) 181-182; Massimo Zaggia, "Il prologis della versione dantesca dantesca di Matteo Ronto." *Studi Danteschi* 65 (2000) 203
[67] Gilson (2005) 8 note 23; Grant (1954) 121
[68] Grant (1954) 121 note 7
[69] Grant (1954) 121-122

Dante was not the only of the three Trecento Tuscan poets to be translated into Latin. A translation of Petrarch's works is attempted in a few places.[70] Bruni himself translated the first tale of the fourth day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*.[71] Poggio's son Jacopo Bracciolini translated the eighth tale of the tenth day of the *Decameron*.[72] The general practice of translating vernacular works of literature into Latin was not limited to Dante and his fellow poets: for example, the works of Marco Polo (c.1254-c.1324) were translated in the early fourteenth century.[73] The existence of translations into Latin of other vernacular works indicates that, while Dante was a special figure for fifteenth century Florence, he was not unique. There was a general interest in translating and disseminating other *volgare* works into Latin.

There can only be speculation in answer to the question of what motivated this interest in translation into Latin. Giovanni Bertoldi da Serravalle lectured on Dante during the Council of Constance, and translated the *Commedia* in 1417 following a request from two English contacts.[74] Scholarly opinion sees the purpose of Latin translations of European vernaculars to have been "to make available to any cultivated reader in Europe works which might otherwise remain unknown or inaccessible to him."[75] In other words, local, vernacular works were translated into an international language, a *lingua franca*, for the benefit of educated mankind. Ronto stated in his prologue that he translated Dante to make his theological work available to Christians everywhere.[76] Additional considerations might be advanced. International readership and appreciation for Dante could have been used to increase the prestige of Florence itself by glorifying its most famous son. Alternatively, Latin may have been perceived as a language of higher prestige, and so Dante was given greater prestige through the translation of his works into Latin.[77] Translators may have been trying to prove that Latin had the vocabulary and was capable of articulating the same sentiments as the vernacular. This

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[70] Grant (1954) 122

[71] Grant (1954) 122-123

[72] This tale is about Titus dying for the love of his friend's betrothed. The friend subsequently gives over his bride to be. There is a lengthy comment on the theme of friendship and a long rhetorical speech in the middle that Jacopo might have felt belonged more rightly in Latin.

[73] Grant (1954) 137 translated by the priest Franciscus Pipinus.

[74] Friederich (1949) 45; Tagliabue (1983) 184-185

[75] Grant (1954) 120, 155-56 Grant seems to have given the question of Why to Translate a great deal of thought and applied his wide experience to the problem over a large time period. My attempts to find an explanation here is limited to Florentine humanists in the fifteenth century. It cannot replace his thorough and wide-ranging analysis.

[76] Tagliabue (1983) 185; it is also worth noting, as Zaggia does, that Ronto wrote in a medieval Latin style, and that he expressed approval for Dante's choice of language, Zaggia (2000) 206-207, 210

[77] Mazzocco (1993) 48 suggests that Flavio Biondo chose to write in Latin due its greater prestige, but also to avoid use of his native vernacular from Forlì.

latter motivation would be particularly relevant from an RLS standpoint. Demonstrating the ample corpus of Latin vocabulary was an exercise designed to enhance the status of Latin.

Ambivalence regarding the language of the *Commedia* is implicit in Salutati's interest in translating passages into Latin.[78] The context of Salutati's translations gives us a clue as to his motivation, as these excerpts from the *Commedia* are found in Latin letters and his Latin prose work *De fato et fortuna* (begun c.1393).[79] It seems likely that Salutati would have put brief quotations into Latin as a matter of linguistic propriety in order to fit them into his own Latin compositions. Flavio Biondo, writing in 1435, suggests that Bruni will have to translate the speeches of his contemporaries into Latin for his upcoming Latin work the *Historiae urbis florentinae*.[80] This suggests that consistency of language within a work was assumed by its readership and its author.[81] Salutati's choice of hexameter in which to translate Dante's *Commedia* is also of note. It is the metre used exclusively for epic poetry, thus, Salutati's transmission of Dante into the Latin domain has the effect of placing Dante on the level of Latin epic poets like Vergil. It is a notable elevation for a *volgare* poet.[82] Individual prestige is not to be underestimated in considering possible motivations for translating vernacular works. Translators like Salutati may simply have been proving their own virtuosity with Latin by producing showpiece works. The use of hexameters, for example by Ronto, suggests showmanship at work.

The co-presence of two languages competing for linguistic domains does seem to have had a stimulating effect on both languages.[83] Contact with the Latin works from Antiquity seems to have spurred vernacular authors, such as Dante and Petrarch, to literary greatness in their mother-tongue. Yet equally it could be argued that competition from the *volgare* inspired authors to compose in Latin. A decline in Dante's popularity is measured after 1500,[84] and this suggests that, to a certain extent, the debate about language choice fuelled Dante's popularity.

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[78] Gilson (2005) 60

[79] Grant (1954) 121

[80] Biondo, Flavio *De verbis Romanae locutionis*, from Nogara (1927) (IV.) 118
> *Id, ut opinor, usu eveniet tibi, si quando in historia Florentina orationem ornate dictam referre et laudare coget necessitas…cum vero ad nostrum veneris aetatem, nullo poterit abesse pacto, quin inter elegantis cuiuspiam orationis commemorationem, eam latine et non vulgariter, ut a ceteris consueverat, ab illo peroratam fuisse scribas.*

[81] Interestingly, Dante himself does not feel compelled to translate Latin into Tuscan every time in the *Commedia*, particularly for short phrases, but does translate some pieces of scripture into Tuscan for use in the work. (Kevin Brownlee, "Why the Angels Speak Italian: Dante as Vernacular Poeta in Paradiso XXV" *Poetics Today* Vol. 5, No. 3, Medieval and Renaissance Representation: New Reflections (1984) especially 598-601)

[82] Hexameter appears to have been favoured by other translators of Dante. Friederich (1949) 122 note 14

[83] Miller (1904) 426

[84] Friederich (1949) 48, 49

Furthermore, Latin was already a language competing with itself. As humanists sought to return to a more Classical style of Latin, they shunned the Medieval, Scholastic form of the language.[85] This competition with Medieval Latin may also have contributed to the revival of Latin composition. As a result of this linguistic competition, authors were inspired to compose texts on serious topics, and texts that simply demonstrated the capabilities of the language; Dante wrote his *Commedia*, Poggio his *Facetiae*. These texts gave readers the opportunity to engage with the language in its written form. The creation of new works promoted the use of the language they were written in and formed part of attempts to preserve or gain ground in various domains for each language.

My final chapter, Chapter IV, examines Bruni's work the *Vita di Dante*, which chronologically follows both the *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum* and his participation in the debate of 1435 on whether Ancient Rome was monolingual or bilingual. I will use this work to illustrate how Bruni's attitude to language choice was flexible and depended on the domain in which he was writing. The preceding discussion of the way in which other authors appropriate the figure of Dante and his works provides a context into which Bruni was writing.

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[85] Miller (1904) 430 for Latin as a revitalised language. See also my later discussion of comments made by the character of Niccolo Niccoli in Bruni's *Dialogus* regarding the Latin of monks and of Scholastics.

Chapter II: The *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum* and Reversing Language Shift

The following is a discussion of the *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum* of Leonardo Bruni. I will demonstrate the ways in which its content and form endorse a Reversing Language Shift (RLS) reading of the Florentine humanists' activities and concerns.[86] My arguments will show that the humanists recognised, perhaps for the first time, that Latin could become a minority language and that it was losing ground in the battle for linguistic space as the Italian vernacular gained prestige and credibility. While some scholars have seen this debate as being about the practice of rhetoric and eloquence, no one has looked at the practice of *disputatio* as a tool for language acquisition for Latin. The *Dialogus*, and particularly the contributions of the character of Salutati, can be viewed as an exhortation to write in Latin, and furthermore, to speak in Latin. There is also an antagonism between the supporters of the *volgare* and Latin that emerges from this work.

Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum* has been the subject of a great deal of debate at the time it was written, and also scholarship in the twentieth century. The highly controversial and inflammatory attack on the Trecento poets Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, has received the greater part of attention by scholars. The debate about the character of Niccolo Niccoli and the *Dialogus* has centred on establishing which view of the Trecento poets was Niccoli's own and which was Bruni's. Generally, scholars have focused on the content of Niccoli's second speech, rather than its form. This speech, however, is a relatively small part of the overall design, and its form and the fact it is written in Latin may be more significant than its content.

The scholarship surrounding the *Dialogus* has also highlighted the discussion of language found in the work. Vittorini focused on Niccoli's speeches as an attack on the outmoded

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[86] I have chosen to refer to this work as the *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum* following the primary text in Eugenio Garin, *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento* (Milan: R. Ricciardi 1952) and the analysis of Lars Boje Mortensen, "Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogus* - a Ciceronian Debate on the Literary Culture of Florence." *Classica et Mediaevalia* 37 (1986). This title for the work reflects its structure as one unified composition, which the title the *Dialogi* detracts from.
A Latin text for this work, which shall be hereafter referred to as the *Dialogus*, can be found in Garin (1952) 44-98, and a more critical edition in Stefano Ugo Baldassarri, *Leonardo Bruni Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore 1994) 235-274. A translation by David Thompson can be found in Gordon Griffiths; James Hankins; David Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts* Vol. 46. (New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 1987) 63-84. My translations in this chapter are adapted from this volume.

scholastic Latin used by the Trecento Florentine poets.[87] In the mid-1950s, Hans Baron, focussing on the content of Niccoli's speech, identified the work as reflecting the new concept of civic humanism.[88] He regarded the *Dialogus*' two parts as written at two different times by Bruni. In the following decade, Seigel argued that the discussion was about rhetoric and eloquence, and therefore the work was composed at one time, and highlighted the connection with Ciceronian dialogues, especially *De oratore*.[89] Mortensen argued that Cicero's *De oratore* provided the basis for Bruni's work and that the two books of the dialogue represented a unified whole. In my view, Mortensen had a closer understanding of Bruni's purpose when he discussed the unity of the two parts.

In spite of noting the focus on rhetoric and on eloquence, previous scholars have overlooked the importance of Salutati's opening speech in the *Dialogus*. In this speech he sets out his agenda for the young humanists and emphasises their need to practise Latin language skills.

Coluccio Salutati's speech[90]

Bruni's presentation of the character of Coluccio Salutati is designed to display him as a man of eloquence and intellect. Bruni does this by having the other speakers describe Salutati and be deferential in their behaviour towards him, as well as by writing an eloquent speech for Salutati to deliver. In the *proemium*, Bruni refers to Salutati as if he were a great man known to both himself and his addressee, Pier Paulo Vergerio:[91]

> *Motus profecto fuisses tum rei quae disputabatur, tum etiam personarum dignitate. Scis enim Colucio neminem fere graviorem esse…*[92]

> You certainly would have been influenced by the worthiness of the subject that was debated and the worth of the people who debated; for you know that hardly anyone has greater authority and importance than Coluccio…

This is the first mention for the reader of Coluccio Salutati, and the language is loaded with emphasis. Bruni employs the two Latin terms used to give weight and authority to a figure, literary or political: *dignitas* and *gravitas*. Salutati is characterised as a Roman heavyweight

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[87] Mortensen (1986) 262; Domenico Vittorini, "I Dialogi Ad Petrum Histrum di Leonardo Bruni Aretino (Per la storia del gusto nell'Italia del secolo XV)." *Publications of the Modern Languages Association* 55 (1940) 714-20.
[88] Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*. 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton 1955)
[89] J. Seigel, "Civic Humanism or Ciceronian Rhetoric? The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni." *Past and Present* 34 (1966) 3-48
[90] Baldassarri (1994) 237-241 7.1-13.13
[91] Milan Solymosi, "Pier Paolo Vergerio e Coluccio Salutati" *Verbum; analecta neolatina* 4, 1(2002)147-163, notes Vergerio's own deferential manner towards Salutati in his correspondence.
[92] Garin (1952) 44; Baldassarri (1994) 236 3.6-8

author would have been. This introduction to Salutati is rapidly followed by a further description in the opening of Book I:

> *placuit tum nobis ut ad Colucium Salutatum iremus, virum et sapientia et eloquentia et vitae integritate huius aetatis facile principem.*[93]

> Then it was agreed by us that we would go visit Coluccio Salutati, easily the leading man of this age in wisdom and eloquence and living a full life.

The ancient ideals of wisdom and eloquence are attributed to Salutati, to which are added the Christian virtue of integrity. Salutati's *auctoritas* is constructed through the silence of his interlocutors and his demonstration of his linguistic competence. This depiction of Salutati as a man of authority, both by the ancient criteria and the contemporary, adds weight to his opinion and advice about Latin as a minority language in need of RLS measures.

Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406), Chancellor of Florence, welcomes the younger humanists to his house: Niccolo Niccoli (1364-c.1437), Roberto Rossi (1355-1417) and Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444). A venerable figure, seventy years old at the fictional time of the *Dialogus*, he is significantly older than his visitors. He waits for them to bring up a topic that they have in mind for discussion. However, an awkward silence reigns. After some moments, Salutati expresses his regret that the younger men before him do not practise *disputatio*, that is, discussions in Latin. He informs them that it would be of great advantage to their studies, as *disputatio* invites a variety of opinion and contribution and inspires participants with an enthusiasm for a particular topic. *Disputatio* by its very nature is competitive, and competition challenges participants to do better. Salutati credits discussion in Latin with sharpening the mind. *Disputatio* takes place under time pressure and quick reactions are needed to respond in argument. Salutati criticises those men who, sitting alone in their studies, only read and write Latin and are unable to speak Latin fluently. He compares their neglect of *disputatio* to a farmer who owns fertile land but chooses not to cultivate it.

Salutati then reflects on his own education when he was a young student at Bologna. He relates that every day he engaged in discussion in Latin and emphasises that this was not only something he did at school, but in his adult life as well. He mentions Luigi Marsili, an Augustine monk living in the area of Florence at Santo Spirito, with whom he had wide-ranging conversation in Latin. Salutati describes how he would prepare topics mentally to discuss with Marsili on his way to see him. Salutati uses himself as the exemplum but is

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[93] Garin (1952) 46; Baldassarri (1994) 236 5.3-5

careful to note that many other men of his generation did the same thing. He ends his opening address by urging the younger men in front of him to incorporate the practice of *disputatio* into their studies and daily habits.

In terms of content, it is noteworthy that Salutati's argument in favour of *disputatio* in Latin is never contradicted. The frequency with which Salutati's position is revisited adds weight to this interpretation. For example, at the key point in the very centre of the *Dialogus*, Salutati offers the closing comment for Part I:

> *Simulque illud teneo, et semper tenebo: nullam esse rem quae tantum ad studia nostra quantum disputatio afferat; nec si tempora haec labem aliquam passa sunt, idcirco tamen nobis facultatem eius rei exercendae ademptam esse. Quamobrem non desinam vos cohortari, ut huic exercitationi quam maxime incumbatis.*[94]

> At the same time I hold, and will always hold, that there is no thing which assists our studies as much as disputation; and that if these times have suffered some fall [in standards], we have not on that account been deprived of the possibility of practising it. Therefore, I will not cease to encourage you to apply yourself particularly to this practice.

The endorsement of speaking in Latin as an everyday activity is reiterated as the final thought of the *Dialogus*, at the close of Part II. Rossi invites the others to dinner the next day, and Salutati insists it will be "a twofold banquet – one by which our bodies and the other by which our spirits may be refreshed."[95]

Salutati's speech and the influence of the chreian

A structural analysis of Salutati's speech yields even more information about his intended message. The form of the speech closely resembles that of the *chreian*: a rhetorical structure taught as part of the *ars dictaminis* in ancient education. It is described as suitable for a quick explanation to a person or group.[96] A statement of praise is followed by the *chreian* itself, developed at length, and then followed by the explanation and application of the *chreian*. There should be a series of different arguments; for example a contrast, a comparison, an example, an argument from the authority of others and, finally, the exhortation to the audience that it is advisable to comply with the advice and the example of the anecdote.[97] Salutati's speech conforms to this format. In a standard *chreian* the opening praise would be for the

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[94] Garin (1952) 74-76; Baldassarri (1994) 259 53.4-9

[95] Baldassarri (1994) 274 *Tu autem para duplex convivium: alterum quo corpora. alterum quo animi nostril reficiantur* 91.14-15

[96] Miller; Prosser; Benson *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press 1973) 52-68

[97] Miller; Prosser; Benson (1973) 55-56

person who has said the wise statement or performed an action worthy of imitation. Rather than praising himself, Salutati turns to his audience:

> *<<Haud sane dici posset>>, inquit,<< iuvenes, quam me conventus vester presentiaque delectat: ii enim estis quos ego, vel morum vestrorum gratia, vel studiorum quae vobis mecum communia sunt, vel etiam quia me a vobis observari sentio, egregia quadam benivolentia et caritate complector.>>* [98]

> He said, "It is certainly unable to be described, young men, how your meeting and presence delight me: whether because of your character, or the studies we have in common, or the respect you pay me, I regard you with extraordinary friendship and affection.

Salutati then outlines his main thesis - that the young men in front of him should debate more in Latin. He develops it by describing the advantages to be gained, then offers a contrast, or negative comparison:

> *Vos enim et in plerisque id videre potestis, qui cum litteras scire se profiteantur et libros lectitent, tamen quia se ab hac exercitatione abstinuere nisi cum libris suis latine loqui non possunt.* [99]

> You yourselves can see this in the case of many who, although they read books and profess themselves to know literature, nevertheless they cannot speak Latin except with their books because they have refrained from this practice [of debating in Latin]

Then an argument of comparison:

> *Nam velut is agricola improbandus est, qui cum liceret ei fundum universum excolere, saltus quosdam steriles aret, partem vero quampiam eius fundi pinguissimam atque uberrimam relinquat incultam; sic reprehendendus est is qui, cum omnia studiorum munera adimplere possit, cetera quamvis levia accuratissime obit, disputandi vero exercitationem aspernatur et negligit, ex qua tot fructus colliguntur uberrimi.* [100]

> We should not approve of a farmer who ought to have cultivated his whole estate and instead just ploughed some barren woodlands, leaving the richest part uncultivated. In the same way we ought to blame a man who could perform all the employments called for by his studies but instead devotes great care to the others, however important, while he overlooks the practice of disputation, from which so many rich fruits are gathered.

The comparison with the *agricola* has obvious classical overtones. Moreover, this comparison directly refers to household economy. It, therefore, adds to Salutati's underlying argument for bringing Latin into a more domestic, daily context.

Salutati gives himself as an example to support the argument of the *chreian.* Following this argument from comparison, Salutati passes over the anecdote and instead offers two examples

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[98] Garin (1952) 46; Baldassarri (1994) 237 7.1-5
[99] Garin (1952) 48; Baldassarri (1994) 238 8.17-20
[100] Garin (1952) 48: Baldassarri (1994) 239 9.10-16

from his own experience debating in Latin. He develops these at length, starting from his childhood studies.

> *Equidem memini, cum puer adhuc Bononiae essem, ibique grammaticis operam darem, me solitum quotidie vel aequales lacessendo, vel magistros rogando, nullum tempus vacuum disputationis transisse.*[101]

> I recall that when I was still young, devoting my studies to grammar in Bologna, I spent every hour of every day in disputation. I challenged my comrades and questioned my teachers.

Salutati further supports the *chreian* by citing an authority. He cites Luigi Marsili, a man who was known as learned and respected by the audience gathered before him, and by the readership at large.

> *Scio vos omnes tenere memoria - teque magis, Nicolae, qui pro summa necessitudine, quae tibi cum illo erat, domum illius egregie frequentabas - Ludovicum theologum, acri hominem ingenio et eloquentia singulari, qui abhinc annis septem mortuus est. Ad hunc hominem, dum ille erat in vita, veniebam frequenter, ut ea ipsa quae modo dixi ad eum deferrem...Semper ille Ciceronem, Vergilium, Senecam aliosque veteres habebat in ore.*[102]

> I know that you all remember - especially you, Niccolo, since you were very friendly with him and were often at his house - the theologian Luigi Marsili, a man of sharp mind and remarkable eloquence, who died seven years ago. While he was alive, I often visited him for the purpose I just mentioned [discussions in Latin]… That man always had Cicero, Vergil, Seneca and other ancients on the tip of his tongue.

Rather than quoting Marsili directly, Salutati uses him as an example and as a figure of authority. Finally, Salutati exhorts the audience to follow his advice and his example:

> *Quam ob rem vos obsecro, iuvenes, ut ad vestros laudabiles praeclarosque labores hanc unam, quae adhuc vos fugit, exercitationem addatis, ut utilitatibus undique comparatis facilius eo quo cupitis pervenire possitis.*[103]

> For this reason I implore you, young men, to add to your praiseworthy and splendid labours this one practice which so far has escaped you, so that furnished with its manifold benefits you may the more easily attain your goal.

It is not surprising that Bruni chose to depict Salutati using the structure of the *chreian* since this was in use in ancient rhetorical education. Interestingly, this speech demonstrates that the debate in Latin was an occasion where the *chreian* structure could be put to use as a means for

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[101] Garin (1952) 48; Baldassarri (1994) 239 10.1-4
[102] Garin (1952) 50; Baldassarri (1994) 239-240 11.1-6, 12.10-11
[103] Garin (1952) 52; Baldassarri (1994) 241 13.10-13

structuring the speech while using a second language. The use of a known structure had the benefit of allowing the audience to anticipate the progress of the speech. This would have increased their comprehension of a language they may not have often heard. Using the same structure would have allowed a certain amount of repetition of vocabulary and grammatical structures, making the composition more formulaic, and easier to comprehend as well. Speakers of Latin could follow Salutati's example when practising their own spoken Latin. Salutati's speech itself shows little evidence of repeated vocabulary and structures, further emphasising his own Latin-speaking prowess and constructing his *auctoritas* as main speaker for the *Dialogus.*

The *chreian* may have come into Bruni's repertoire with his study of Greek language and rhetoric with Chrysoloras. Part of a rhetorical education was the ability to speak *ex tempore* having learned all the rhetorical structures. This is the whole point for Salutati, who wanted the students to be able to speak off the cuff in Latin. Inherited from the ancient rhetorical education system, the humanists were eager to replicate it. By the same token, the use of the *chreian* constructs the *auctoritas* of Salutati's character in the dialogue, and, at the same time, reinforces Bruni's ability as the author. Salutati is recommending the *chreian* to the audience - both within the dialogue and to Bruni's audience outside the dialogue. Practice with the *chreian* was one way of making Latin debate more effective, but also easier to compose and understand. In a number of ways, then, the form of the *Dialogus* reinforces its message. It is constructed as a debate in Latin that recommends the practice of debating in Latin. It depicts a group of educated males in a relaxed setting conversing in Latin, and the exhortation by the most authoritative participant to converse in Latin in similar situations. Furthermore, the use of the *chreian* by Salutati in his opening speech is a form of recommendation to readers to use the *chreian* in their own speaking and writing. The form of the *Dialogus* constantly reinforces the message.

The Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum Viewed Through RLS Theory

It has been well documented that Bruni wrote a dialogue in the Ciceronian style. Mortensen and Seigel have both pointed out that the *Dialogus* has affinities with Cicero's dialogue on oratory, the *De oratore*.[104] In Ciceronian dialogues, an older man typically uses his authority and *gravitas* to set the agenda for the discussion.[105] Salutati is that figure for Bruni's *Dialogus*. He is the most authoritative figure in the *Dialogus*, he introduces the topic for discussion and

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[104] Seigel (1966) 3-48; Mortensen (1986) 259-301
[105] For example see Crassus in Cicero *De oratore* I.VIII.29ff, Cicero himself in Cicero *Brutus* II.10ff

he gives a lengthy opening speech on the value of verbal debate in Latin. It is reasonable to assume that Bruni meant his readers to pay attention to Salutati and his speech as the subject of the dialogue.

The *Dialogus* opens with the meeting of friends, an exchange of greetings, followed by silence. This silence is highly unusual in relation to Bruni's Ciceronian models.[106] Normally the presiding figure introduces a topic which leads to discussion. Conversely, here it is the silence that prompts Salutati to act on behalf of the Latin language. He reminisces about walking to visit his friend Luigi Marsili, and mentally preparing en route for the topic to be discussed in Latin at their meeting.[107] This is an implicit criticism of the young humanists in front of him who have prepared nothing for discussion. The silence further illustrates a general declining ability with Latin language. Unlike Salutati, the members of the younger generation are not confident in speaking Latin, and are not prepared to hold a debate in Latin.

The apparent message of the opening speech of the *Dialogus* is an exhortation by Salutati for those present to debate in Latin. Salutati behaves like a proponent of Reversing Language Shift (RLS) theory. *Disputatio*, as Salutati describes it, is an RLS activity aimed at increasing spoken Latin-language use. It is shown as taking place in personal, small-scale settings such as private gardens and dining rooms. This small scale setting was typical in ancient dialogues as an expression of elite *otium*. Here Salutati uses this setting to emulate ancient behaviour, in this way elevating the behaviour he is describing as an activity of the revered ancients. Furthermore, small-scale, domestic settings are the ideal place to foster language use for threatened languages, and so Salutati is placing Latin in a setting where its use can grow. The encouragement of Latin in a non-professional environment is reinforced when the reader is told that the action of the *Dialogus* takes place during the Easter holidays.[108] Salutati is promoting the practice of *disputatio* in small-scale, domestic settings as a means of recovering Latin as a medium for conversation.[109]

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[106] This does not happen in any of Cicero's dialogues that I have been able to find. See for example the *Brutus*, where at X-XXIV the interlocutors are introduced and have no difficulty responding to the comments of the others.

[107] Salutati describes walking to visit Marsili at Santo Spirito and thinking of a topic to discuss after he crossed the river Arno. A walk of this length would only have given him a matter of perhaps ten minutes to consider a topic and the language he needed. This implies that his level of Latin fluency was very high, as relatively little preparation time was required for an extended discussion in Latin.

[108] Baldassarri (1994) 236 5.1-2

[109] *Disputatio* has been identified in the past with the medieval university practice of paired speeches. I think that Salutati is using the word *disputatio* in a conversational sense, see Garin (1952) 50; Baldassarri (1994) 240: *sive disceptationibus sive collocutionibus, quas disputationes appello.*

In terms of conventional RLS theory, this passage of the *Dialogus* would indicate that Latin was becoming a threatened, minority language, and that this was recognised by Salutati. As a young boy (c.1340s), Salutati studied at Bologna and we infer that his education there took place in Latin as he refers to Latin discussions with his classmates and teachers. He refers to his friendship with Luigi Marsili, "who died just 7 years ago."[110] When he was alive, Salutati and Marsili would speak together in Latin. He comments: "I could have named a great many [people] who did the same thing."[111] Likewise, Niccolo Niccoli, the elder of the younger generation present, mentions that Marsili and Chrysoloras, men of the generation older than Niccoli, both told him to practise his spoken language in disputation.[112] This passage might then be taken as evidence of Latin having been a common, or relatively common, spoken language for at least fifty years of Salutati's life, and that, in the recent past, Latin had a spoken language community and a conversational domain. Niccoli, who bridges the generation gap among the participants of the *Dialogus*, is old enough to have witnessed the original Latin conversations, and young enough to take part in the attempted revival. The silence that blights the opening of the discussion is a reflection of the reluctance of the younger generation to speak Latin, as they are unpractised and lacking in confidence.[113] The speakers themselves, as we will see, also voice their insecurities about speaking Latin: for example, Niccoli; Bruni, who is silent as a character almost throughout the work; and Rossi, who falls silent in the midst of an exchange with Salutati.[114]

The situation that is depicted corresponds to the criteria for Stage 7 of the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) scale in Fishman's Reversing Language Shift theory. The GIDS scale measures the sociolinguistic disruption of language communities. The scale is one to eight; the higher the rating, the lower the intergenerational continuity and the lower the maintenance prospects for a language community.[115] Stage 7 is a set of circumstances where speakers of a language are of an older generation. Whilst they are still

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[110] Baldassarri (1994) 239 *qui abhinc annis septem mortuus est* (11.4-5)

[111] Baldassarri (1994) 240 *Nam permultos memorare potui, qui haec eadem factitarunt* (13.2-3) Marsili and Salutati were both members of an earlier intellectual circle, depicted in Giovanni da Prato's *Paradiso degli Alberti*, a work of the 1420s, which showed gatherings in Antonio Alberti's villa. This earlier circle is described again in Leon Battista Alberti's preface to the third book of his *Della famiglia* (1436) and so must have been fairly well known (Angelo Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories in Dante and the Humanists* (Leiden, New York, Koln: E.J. Brill 1993) 86)

[112] Baldassarri (1994) 241

[113] Baldassarri (1994) 237

[114] Baldassarri (1994) Niccoli 241-242; Bruni, by his silence *passim*, noted by Salutati 250; Roberto Rossi drops a line of conversation at 251 *Hic cum sileret Robertus, certaque vultus significatione assentiretur* 36.1

[115] Joshua Fishman, *Reversing Language Shift* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd 1991) 87

socially integrated, they are aging and beyond child-rearing age. In this situation, in order to preserve the language, younger people must be persuaded to learn to speak it.[116] Once the young are speaking the threatened language, Fishman envisages them speaking the minority language in their homes and raising their own children as native-speakers.

The situation of Latin language in fifteenth century Italy contrasts with Fishman's theories on a number of points. The normal order by which people learn the threatened language is reversed. RLS theory depends on the assumption that understanding and speaking the language precede the skills of writing and reading. Many of those who speak and understand the language will not be able to read or write it. As a result, the conversational use of a language in domestic situations may endure when the literary use has died out. In the case of Latin in the Medieval and Early Modern periods, the reverse was true. Students learned Latin as a language that was written and read. Only the more talented students would develop the ability to understand spoken Latin or become accomplished Latin speakers. Furthermore, Latin was a language used almost exclusively by males, and transmitted entirely via male education rather than in the home.[117] Latin was often described simply as *grammatica*, that is, as an artificial, grammatical language which was learned in schools, as opposed to the easily acquired mother-tongue, the *volgare*.

Fishman's emphasis on the vital role of the mother and the child-rearing process in RLS is negated by the predominance of males and the almost complete absence of females in the Latin language community in fifteenth century Italy. Fishman sees the role of the mother and the child-rearing process as central to language acquisition and the survival of minority languages.[118] This early contact with the Latin language in the family environment had been unknown for Latin for centuries; as a consequence it had become irrelevant to the perceived survival of the language in use. There were no native speakers of Latin whatsoever, as every user learned Latin as a second language. Therefore, there was no intergenerational mother-tongue transmission and had not been for hundreds of years. Latin was in fact a 'father-tongue'. It was a language taught by older men to younger men and preserved in certain

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[116] Fishman (1991) For GIDS Scale see 87-109, Stage 7 89-92

[117] Fishman (1991) "Limitations on School Effectiveness in Connection with Mother-Tongue Transmission" 368-380

[118] Fishman (1991) 162

functions and domains. Salutati was not seeking to restore intergenerational mother-tongue transmission.[119] He was seeking to revive Latin among the male, cultural elite.

The GIDS scale is useful as an assessment of a modern language community. However, it should be regarded with caution in the present case. Because of this, the GIDS scale put forward by Fishman to measure the disruption of language domains and mother-tongue language transmission, must be seriously revised if it is to be applied effectively to the situation of Latin in early fifteenth century Italy. Latin was in use in the so-called higher spheres, such as government, university and literature (Stage 1), but there were no native-speakers. So it is simultaneously at Stage 1 on the GIDS scale, and at Stage 8, an extinct language. According to the GIDS scale, normally Latin would be regarded as a language that is critically threatened as there are no native speakers, no intergenerational mother-tongue transmission and a diminishing speaking community. However, for Latin, the slight shrinking of its spoken language domains represents a limited challenge to its share of language domains in general. Latin was not primarily a spoken language, so a slight reduction in spoken use would not have interfered with the main functions of Latin and therefore would not have been severely in danger. It did, however, threaten to create a situation of readers and writers only.

Salutati's realisation that the spoken domain of Latin was being eroded suggests that he perceived a potential for Latin to be pushed out of all the language domains where it had dominated. In the *Dialogus*, the figure of Salutati began to publicise the importance and the benefits of speaking Latin. He disparages the practice of solo engagement with the language in written form only.

> *Etenim absurdum est intra parietes atque in solitudine secum loqui multaque agitare, in oculis autem hominum atque in coetu veluti nihil sapias obmutescere.[120]*

> In fact, it is absurd to talk to yourself and deliberate upon many things when you are alone and surrounded by walls, however to grow dumb, as if you knew nothing, when in a gathering before men's eyes.

In Salutati's view, reading and writing in Latin on one's own is useless if one cannot then speak the language. He advocates a community-based approach to RLS.[121] The solo practice of

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[119] In fact, they would debate whether intergenerational transmission and spoken Latin had ever existed (see my Chapter III on the debate that occurred in 1435).
[120] Garin (1952) 48; Baldassarri (1994) 238 9.4-7

reading and writing is, in his view, the basis for debating in Latin verbally in groups. According to Fishman's language acquisition theory, language competence begins with understanding, then speaking, then reading and writing.[122] Salutati's comments above reinforce the assessment of Latin learning in fifteenth century Italy as prioritising writing and reading ahead of speaking and understanding. What is interesting here, then, is Salutati's insistence that users of Latin develop their skills to encompass speaking and understanding in order to use Latin in a spoken language community. In this respect, Salutati is in accord with Fishman's views. There is no substitute for interaction with other people speaking the language. This interaction in the spoken language, according to Fishman's RLS theory, is the basis for reviving endangered languages. For the character of Salutati, interpersonal interaction, or *disputatio*, is the way to consolidate the language competence of users of Latin.

Salutati attempts to prove to his audience that they should participate in Latin disputation for the good of their studies. He requests that they expand the domains in which they are already using Latin to include *disputatio*, or serious conversation in Latin.[123] In my view, Salutati considers the activity of *disputatio* impossible to engage in without speaking in Latin. Salutati is attempting to extend Latin into the everyday domains. Bruni has the character of Salutati interpret a once rhetorical exercise, the *disputatio*, as the means for resurrecting spoken Latin. This reading of the *Dialogus* offers an overall aim to what may appear, due to the content of the arguments, to be a purely rhetorical exercise. If the *Dialogus* is read with *disputatio* as a Latin-speaking activity, then it becomes an even clearer statement of RLS intention. Salutati censures the younger humanists for not speaking enough Latin. He views the younger generation as being, in Fishman's terms, humanists-via-*volgare* not humanists-via-Latin. That is, Salutati views Latin language as an essential component of the new revival of ancient learning, and the thoughts and discoveries of this revival must be expressed in Latin. To discuss ideas from ancient learning via the *volgare* is unacceptable to Salutati. He wishes the younger generation to be humanists-via-Latin only.[124]

However, Fishman's vision of what constitutes a small-scale, domestic, spoken language domain is quite different from that of Salutati. Fishman's emphasis on the role of the mother in

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[121] Baldassarri (1994) 237ff.; Joshua Fishman, *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved?* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd. 2001) 60 a virtual community cannot replace a real one.
[122] Fishman (1991) 43-44
[123] Baldassarri (1994) 237-238
[124] Niccoli takes up this point later to express reproval for Dante and Petrarch as not true students of the *studia humanitatis* as they are humanists-via-*volgare*.

language transmission is born from the observation of children talking with their mother in the home. Many of Fishman's RLS efforts are therefore directed at restoring a threatened language to the everyday activities of the home and family, and transactions at the corner shop. According to the view expressed by Bruni's Salutati, Latin was not an appropriate language for these settings. Latin was a language used by adult males in professional settings outside the home. It would very rarely have been understood by women, children and unskilled workers. The Latin conversation that Salutati is encouraging is the informal conversation between men. It is not Latin conversation between two women doing the washing. In the *Dialogus*, Salutati describes Latin conversation as taking place among men in relaxed environments. This is reinforced also by the way in which Bruni places Latin conversation within the *Dialogus* in Salutati's house (the opening scene Part I), and in the house of another intellectual (Marsili, whom both Salutati and Niccoli visit and converse with in Latin), and in a private garden (opening scene Part II), and there is an indication that Latin conversation will happen over dinner in another private home (looking forward to the next day, end of Part II). It is in such limited small-scale domestic domains that fifteenth-century males would have been able to perform spoken Latin debates.

Part I of the *Dialogus* in particular is full of small encouragements and reinforcements of the importance and rewards of a Latinate education. Salutati reminisces about Marsili, for example, he mentions how Marsili's engagement with ancient texts led to a greater ability with Latin:

> *Nec solum eorum opiniones atque sententias, sed etiam verba persaepe sic proferebat, ut non ab alio sumpta, sed ab ipso facta viderentur.*[125]

> He often cited not only their opinions and sayings [of the ancient authors] but also their very words in such a way that they seemed not taken from another but rather his own productions.

Marsili is able to acquire the learning and the wisdom of the ancients due to his reading and, for Salutati's purposes, had enriched his active use of Latin in this way. This activity is similar to Salutati's appropriation of the *chreian* in his own speech. Once again, an exercise based on rhetorical practices is transformed into a language acquisition and language learning tool. Salutati urges the younger humanists to make the jump from writing and reading Latin to speaking. Repeating and copying the words and phrases of the ancients was not regarded as a

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[125] Garin (1952) 50; Baldassarri (1994) 240 12.11-14

derivative, secondary exercise, but as a form of appropriation that empowered the user with greater skill in Latin language.[126]

In the rhetorically based environment for language learning constructed in the *Dialogus*, Salutati regards himself as an older man, passing on an important message about the state of Latin language to a group of younger men. Indeed, it is interesting to note that Salutati characterises the audience before him as *iuvenes*, or young men.[127] In this sense, Salutati takes on the role of the mother, a crucial position for language acquisition and use emphasised in RLS theory. He transforms the gender of this role according to Latin's contemporary gender distinction that limited use to males. He is the paternal figure, speaking in a domestic domain. Salutati gains even more importance in this role by having the advantage of *auctoritas*, an attribute that is not required or implied by the RLS model, but adds greatly to his influence on the younger generation and gives weight to the course of action he is endorsing. His position in a parental role is emphasised by the generation gap between Salutati and Marsili and the younger humanists Bruni, Niccoli and Rossi. Salutati contrasts the practice of his own generation with that of the younger generation seated in front of him.

Niccolo Niccoli's First Speech[128]

Niccoli opens by agreeing wholeheartedly with Salutati as to the value of Latin debate, and he maintains throughout that Latin discussion is worthwhile and useful. Marsili, Salutati's fellow-disputant, had also recommended the practice to Niccoli. Salutati, Niccoli says, has explained the value of Latin discussion so clearly that its utility is evident. Niccoli had heard the Byzantine teacher, Manual Chrysoloras, recommend that his students of Greek language engage in Greek debate to further their language skills.[129] This parallel with Greek language learning adds weight to Salutati's original thesis.

The reasons for the language shift away from Latin are then explored. Niccoli's response to Salutati includes a description of socio-environmental reasons for the decline in spoken Latin, such as the loss of ancient learning and books.[130] Niccoli defends himself and his companions

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[126] Note the absence of our modern concept of plagiarism from both ancient and Renaissance thinking.
[127] Garin (1952) 46; Baldassarri (1994) 237 7.1
[128] Baldassarri (1994) 241-249 14.1-29.14
[129] Baldassarri (1994) 241
[130] Baldassarri (1994) 243

against the charge that they have neglected their studies by pointing to the state of the times. He cannot, he claims, be expected to be proficient in Latin debate when many valuable books from Antiquity are not extant.[131] Even great ability and desire to learn were not enough to learn Latin, or the arts of dialectic, grammar, or rhetoric through Latin, when the roads to learning were closed by lack of books, teachers, and commendable institutions. Niccoli is lamenting, as modern proponents of RLS do, the lack of qualified and suitable teachers and resources.[132]

> *… in hac faece temporum atque in hac tanta librorum desideratione, quam quis facultatem disputandi assequi possit non video. Nam quae bona ars, quae doctrina reperiri potest in hoc tempore, quae non aut loco mota sit, aut omnino profligata?[133]*

> …in this miserable age and amid such a dearth of books, I do not see how anyone would be able to gain ability with disputation. At this time what art, what learning can be found which has not been displaced or completely corrupted?

This loss of knowledge meant that no one could claim to have true knowledge of anything, and thus could not ever be regarded as truly eloquent. For, following Cicero, no man can be eloquent who is not also a wise philosopher, and much of the material written in Antiquity about philosophy was lost to Niccoli and his companions. Therefore, according to Niccoli they cannot be eloquent. Just as Salutati uses the *chreian*, Niccoli borrows the syllogism from ancient and medieval rhetoric to respond.

Niccoli quotes Cicero as an opponent of the Scholastic school. He sees this as authoritative because it comes from a time when learned men where bilingual in Greek and Latin and could judge the original Greek philosophical works. According to Niccoli, knowledge of Latin, or better yet, Greek, was a prerequisite to understanding and appreciating philosophy and philosophers such as Aristotle.[134] With this comment, the character of Niccoli places philosophy in a domain accessible only through knowledge of Greek or Latin.

Niccoli also makes some especially negative comments about the Scholastic philosophers, the language these philosophers use and their reliance on poor translations. He makes the claim that Aristotle would not be able to recognise his own works if he saw them in Niccoli's time,

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[131] Baldassarri (1994) 241-243
[132] Baldassarri (1994) 247-248 *Non enim potest quisquam sine doctrina, sine magistris, sine libris aliquid excellens in studiis suis ostendere* 26.11-13
[133] Garin (1952) 54; Baldassarri (1994) 243 17.2-6
[134] Baldassarri (1994) 246 23.1-19

so great has been the corruption caused by transmission and translation. To avoid the contemporary Scholastics' reliance on translation, knowing and using the original language well needed to be a priority, whether that language was Greek or Latin. Thus, Niccoli's criticism of the Scholastics acts to reinforce Salutati's argument for using and engaging with the languages of learning, be it Greek of Latin. Niccoli's periodic references to Chrysoloras and the study of Greek strengthen this underlying parallel.

At this point Niccoli must acknowledge the *sapiens* sitting in front of him. He concedes that Salutati himself is an exception to his rule and that it is only Salutati's extraordinary nature and ability which has allowed him to achieve so much wisdom and eloquence. Salutati is a problem for Niccoli's argument. He seems to contradict the points that Niccoli was trying to make because of his learning and wisdom. Niccoli explains that Salutati is extraordinary under the circumstances. However, this is perhaps a deliberately weak argument that the reader is intended to see through. For, just as Niccoli protests that he cannot speak well in the most elegant language, he protests that no man can become wise like the ancients in the presence of a recognised *sapiens*. Niccoli states that he and others of his generation have no hope of appearing eloquent or wise, and so they keep silent and do not practise *disputatio*. Niccoli concludes by demurring to Salutati for his opinion, and another brief silence ensues.

In fact, Niccoli's argument only acts to increase the *auctoritas* of Salutati, who was able to appear both eloquent and wise. With every increase to Salutati's *auctoritas*, his argument in favour of *disputatio* gains increased authority. Niccoli is able to do what Salutati recommends. His demonstration is all the more powerful because the content of the argument declares that he cannot do what he is, in fact, doing. Niccoli is described by Bruni as *in dicendo est promptus, et in lacessendo acerrimus* (is a ready speaker and a very spirited, sharp challenger).[135] There is no escaping the fact that, inside the reality of the *Dialogus*, Niccoli can actually speak Latin very well. He gives impromptu speeches in grammatical Latin and his audience praise him for doing so. Bruni puts a quick succession of classical imagery into the mouth of Niccoli at one point, which could only be fully appreciated by the reader if they had also read classical texts. Actaeon, Cicero, the Sibyl, and Oedipus are a quick succession of esoteric references requiring a classical education.[136] Bruni is reinforcing the ideal of the *studia humanitatis* and the education based on ancient literature. His readers are rewarded for

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[135] Garin (1952) 44; Baldassarri (1994) 236 3.9-10
[136] Baldassarri (1994) 246-247 23.18, 24.2, 24.5-6

their general knowledge of Antiquity by being able to follow his allusions and his argument. Niccoli's speech is to a large extent a success. The practice of *disputatio* is possible for Niccoli in spite of Salutati's expectation that the younger humanists cannot practise *disputatio* and in spite of Niccoli's own protests that he lacks the ability.

Coluccio Salutati's Response[137]

Immediately following Niccoli's speech there is another silence:

> *Haec sum Nicolaus dixisset magnaque esset omnium attentione auditus, Paulo silentium factum est. Tum Salutatus eum intuens...inquit...*[138]

> When Niccolo had spoken and had been heard with the great attention of all, a brief silence ensued. Then looking at him Salutati said…

Once again, it is up to Salutati to break the silence of his younger companions and restart the conversation. Salutati responds to Niccoli briefly but pointedly. He highlights the fact that Niccoli has contradicted himself by speaking so eloquently about the impossibility of eloquence. In other words, Niccoli's ability with the spoken word demonstrates that learning is possible, contrary to his own argument. After Niccoli's lamentation about the state of liberal studies in their own time, Salutati says that Niccoli's ability with the spoken word has exceeded his expectations and therefore they can leave off their discussion. Has Niccoli's ability to speak in Latin satisfied Salutati that spoken Latin is not as threatened as first imagined? Salutati says simply: "Let us abandon this whole disputation about disputation."[139] However, it is the topic of the disputation (that of whether or not to practise disputation) that Salutati wishes to stop. He does not call for an end to the practice itself. Rather, Niccoli's ability has demonstrated the achievability of the RLS goal of promoting spoken Latin. Salutati endorses the value of constant practice to Rossi and Niccoli, in order to get better and to benefit by improving both disputation skills and Latin speaking:

> *Est autem exercitatio studiorum nostrorum collocutio, perquisitio, agitatioque earum rerum quae in studiis nostris versantur: quam ego uno verbo disputationem appello.*[140]

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[137] Baldassarri (1994) 249-252 30.2-40.17 including some incidental comment from Rossi.

[138] Baldassarri (1994) 249 30.1-3

[139] Garin (1952) 62; Baldassarri (1994) 249 *Itaque relinquamus, si placet, hanc totam de disputando disputationem* 30.8-9

[140] Garin (1952) 66; Baldassarri (1994) 252 37.1-3

> The practice of our studies moreover is conversation, inquiry and the pursuit of those things that are deliberated in our studies – which I call, in a word, disputation.

Salutati is again in accord with RLS theory, where languages need to be constantly used in order to be recovered. The emphasis on the practice of speaking helps to maintain a language as a living language.[141]

Salutati asks Niccoli to appreciate what does remain from Antiquity. Salutati tells Niccoli to acknowledge the brilliance of learning and eloquence achieved by the three Trecento Florentine poets: Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. If Dante had "employed another style of writing", Salutati would rate him above the Greeks themselves:

> *Dantem vero, si alio genere scribendi usus esset, non eo contentus forem ut illum cum antiques nostris compararem, sed et ipsis et Graecis etiam enteponerem.* [142]

This comment serves a number of purposes. It prolongs the *disputatio* – without this final comment by Salutati it would have ended here. Moreover, it also serves to praise the vernacular authors, while undermining their worth at the same time. The implications of Salutati's comment on their *genus scribendi* are that classical languages, such as Latin or Greek, would have been a better choice for a serious author, as they are superior to the vernacular. For Salutati, however, the Trecento poets represent a threatening model for the resurrection of Latin as a language-in-use, as they raise the profile of the *volgare* as a literary challenge to Latin.

Niccolo Niccoli's Second Speech[143]

Niccoli responds to Salutati's suggestion of the greatness of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio with scorn. He is moved by the suggestion that they are more eloquent than the ancient authors to denounce them individually on a number of counts.[144] Dante, in particular, is criticized.[145] But Petrarch is criticized as well both for his disappointing Latin epic, *Africa*, which followed a heavy promotional campaign and his other Latin works. Boccaccio is bracketed with the

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[141] Fishman (1991) *passim* see especially 92-95, 132-136

[142] Baldassarri (1994) 40.10-13

[143] Baldassarri (1994) 253-258 41.1-50.11

[144] Garin (1952): Niccoli's tirade against the poets Dante 68-70; Petrarch 70-72; and to a lesser extent, Boccaccio 72-74. Baldassarri (1994): Dante 254-256; Petrarch 256-257; Boccaccio 257-258.

[145] For misinterpreting Vergil (*Purgatorio* 22,40); for confusing the two Catos by describing Marcus Cato, who died aged 48, as an old man (*Purgatorio* 1); and for placing Marcus Brutus in the lowest region of Hell (*Inferno* 34): See Baldassarri (1994) 254-255 for Niccoli's scathing remarks.

other two and summarised more briefly. Niccoli states that they lacked Latinity, a statement implying that they lacked the ability to read and write in Latin proficiently. Dante is disparaged for having read too many *quodlibets* of the monks in his Latin education. His Latin style, where he did write in Latin, was so lacking in eloquence that Niccoli could not bring himself to describe Dante as a poet.[146] In fact, Niccoli ends his tirade against Dante by consigning him to the belt makers and bakers to whom his writings are directed. Niccoli acknowledges the popularity of the poets, but asserts that he himself is not guided by the opinion of the masses. It is interesting that this attack is put in the mouth of Niccoli, one of the *iuvenes*, and therefore a participant in the *disputatio* with lesser cultural authority. This directly undermines the weight given to the attacks that Niccoli makes, as they are contrary to the opinion of Salutati, the character given the most *auctoritas* in the work.

Niccoli realises that his comments will be unpopular with the crowds in Florence, and asks for the content of the current *disputatio* to be private, and confined to the assembled group.[147] This fear of the populace, however, does not deter his stinging attacks:

> *...ut mihi sit etiam universi populi impetus pertimescendus, quem isti tui praeclari vates, nugis nescio quibus - neque enim aliter appellanda sunt, quae isti in vulgus legenda tradiderunt - devinctum habent.*[148]

> …so that I must be very afraid of attacks from the whole public, who those famous distinguished poets of yours have all caught up with nonsense which I am ignorant of (and there is no other name more fitting for what those men handed down to the public to be read).

This quote reinforces the popularity of the works that Niccoli is criticising. He is aware that public opinion would be against him. The easier access provided by the *volgare*, in which the works are composed, led to their wide dissemination and appreciation. The overwhelming majority of members of the public are users and defenders of the vernacular. Niccoli asks that his opinions be kept among the group present in order to avoid public outcry against him personally.[149]

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[146] This question of what it is to be a poet is revisited by Bruni in his *Vita di Dante*: Hans Baron, *Leonardo Bruni Aretino Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften* (Berlin: Verlag und Druck von B.G.Teubner 1969) 60-62

[147] There is a strange contradiction here in requesting that his comments remain private in a document intended for dissemination. There is also implied flattery for Pier Paulo Vergerio, the dedicatee of the work, who is being included in this group.

[148] Garin (1952) 70; Baldassarri (1994) 256 45.3-6

[149] That the reputations of the Trecento poets were already under discussion by the characters involved in the *Dialogus* is attested by a Letter of Salutati's of 1401. This letter praises Dante but expresses reservations that the *Commedia* was written in the vernacular rather than Latin. (Simon Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*

Niccoli's statement also disparages the content of vernacular literature (described as *nugae* or trifles, nonsense). While Salutati is enumerating the benefits of Latin disputation and the appropriate intellectual topics for discussion, Niccoli is diminishing the value of the topics dealt with by the poets in the *volgare*. It is suggested that more worthwhile domains for the members of the audience are found in Latin:

> *Ego istum poetam tuum a concilio litteratorum seiungam, atque eum zonariis, pistoribus atque eiusmodi turbae relinquam. Sic enim locutus est ut videatur voluisse huic generi hominum esse familiaris.*[150]

> I shall remove that poet [Dante] of yours from the company of the literate and leave him to belt makers, bakers and the like; for he has spoken in such a way that he seems to have wished to be familiar to these sorts of men.

Niccoli identifies the craftsmen and workers for whom the *volgare* was the means of communication - both written, in book-keeping and personal papers, and spoken in their day-to-day lives. Niccoli disparages the imagined audience of Dante's poetry by describing them as groups of people who were the least likely to have a Latin education. The knowledge of Latin language was bought by those who could afford it, the wealthier groups in society. Latin was being used by Niccoli as a class or a society marker to attack the author and his audience. The identification of a language, such as Latin, with a particular class or group in a society is a contrast to the geographical or ethnicity-based identification with minority languages that is common in modern RLS theory. Niccoli aimed to discredit Dante by association with his audience. Dante is called unlettered and uneducated because he wrote in the *volgare* for an audience that in the most part did not know Latin. In Part I, Dante's Latinity is repeatedly called into question during Niccoli's stinging attacks on his works. However, Niccoli does not discuss his ability with the vernacular:

> *…certe latinitas defuit. Nos vero non pudebit eum poetam appellare, et Vergilio etiam anteponere, qui latine loqui non possit?*[151]

(London: Cambridge University Press 2005) 61 *Ep.* III, 491) It would be interesting to use the existence of this letter to help date the *Dialogus* itself, but this work does not have the scope or the requirement to include such a discussion. See James Hankins, "Review: Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum, Ed. Stefano Ugo Baldassarri" *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 51, No. 3 (Autumn, 1998) 964-966 for a useful, brief review of the debate about dating the *Dialogus*, concluding a date of late 1405-1406.

[150] Garin (1952) 70 reads *lanariis, pistoribus atque eiusmodi turbae*, the difference is only between a wool worker and a belt maker, either of which conveys the same social status and probable lack of Latin education; Baldassarri (1994) 255-256 44.12-16

[151] Garin (1952) 70; Baldassarri (1994) 255 44.7-9

> …he surely lacked Latinity. Will we not be ashamed to call him a poet, and even prefer him to Vergil, he who could not speak Latin?

Dante is also lambasted by Niccoli for not reading enough of the books of the ancients, and for only reading what he was given by the monks. Niccoli criticizes all these poets primarily and finally for their lack of Latinity by the contemporary standards of learned men. However, he deliberately fails to mention that they all have reputations based on the vernacular. Niccoli mentions the works of Petrarch, but his Latin works only: Bucolic song, Invectives, *Africa*. He rewrites the careers of the triumvirate to edit out the vernacular language. Niccoli criticises Dante and Petrarch for being humanists-via-*volgare* and therefore not true humanists.

Salutati finishes the day and for Part I by reminding his audience of their duty to speak Latin. He suggests they reconvene on a future occasion to continue the practice of disputation.[152]

Part II of the Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum[153]

In Part II, the same group of disputants meet again, in the setting of Roberto Rossi's private gardens. The discussion is opened by Salutati, just as he broke the silence on the previous day. This may be further evidence that the younger members of the group are still reluctant to open a conversation in Latin, or, a reflection of the deference they display towards Salutati by waiting for him to speak first. After Salutati's prompting, they praise Florence and Bruni's other Latin work the *Laudatio florentinae urbis*.[154] This self-praise by Bruni is another way in which he constructs his *auctoritas* as the author. They quickly return to the subject of yesterday's debate: the three Trecento poets of Florence. It is speculated that Niccoli denigrated Dante and the other Trecento poets the day before to provoke Salutati into praising them. Salutati suggests Bruni is conspiring with Niccoli, as Bruni has been requesting an encomium of the three poets. Salutati is inclined to acquiesce, as Bruni is busy translating Greek works into Latin so that the rest of the group can benefit. Once again, the mention of Bruni's activity of translating Greek within the *Dialogus* adds to his *auctoritas* as author. This is particularly evident following the emphasis in Niccoli's first speech on the previous day on

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[152] Baldassarri (1994) 259
[153] Baldassarri (1994) 259-274
[154] Salutati links the celebrity of Dante to the city of Florence in his own works; here Bruni inserts an advertisement for his work in praise of Florence into his discussion of the merit of Dante. For a contemporary reader these two ideals, Dante and Florence, would have been inexorably linked.

the importance of Greek knowledge for true wisdom.[155] Salutati steadfastly refuses to speak on behalf of the Trecento poets and Bruni is selected, after some debate, to settle the matter. Rather than attempt it himself, he chooses Niccoli to respond to his own charges, neatly displaying the model of *disputatio* and an argument *in utramque partem*.

The opening of Part II introduces Piero Sermini, a "young friend" of the other scholars.[156] Sermini is introduced as being even younger than Rossi and Bruni. Salutati is the eldest participant in Bruni's *Dialogus*, and he refers to Marsili, an even older man now dead.[157] Niccoli straddles the generation between Salutati and Rossi and Bruni. Sermini's inclusion accords with an RLS effort to bring the younger generation to Latin activities and to demonstrate the value of spoken Latin and Latin-related culture. Sermini can be regarded as a representative of the younger generation of humanists whom Salutati and Bruni are targeting. Sermini is constructed as a young person who, *adolescens impiger atque facundus inprimisque*,[158] already reads the works of Cicero and Lactantius Firmianus.[159] Salutati and the other participants in the *Dialogus* seem to have recognised that a living language must be in the mouths of the young, and here Salutati's message is being passed on observably to a young person. This ploy makes the overall message of the *Dialogus* relevant for a wider age group.

Niccoli opens his third speech of the *Dialogus* by reminding his companions of his real devotion to the three poets - for example, his memorisation of Dante, his journey to Padua to transcribe Petrarch and the adornment of Boccaccio's personal library. Niccoli begins with Dante in a systematic destruction of his previous arguments. Dante is above all described as eloquent, learned, and a master craftsman poet. Niccoli explains away his criticisms of Dante's accuracy. In response to the argument that Dante lacked Latinity, Niccoli somewhat weakly

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[155] Baldassarri (1994) 241

[156] Garin (1952) 76ff; Baldassarri (1994) 259ff

[157] Salutati's generation has been named by some as the generation most favourable to Dante (Mazzocco (1993) 85)

[158] Garin (1952) 76; Baldassarri (1994) 259 54.3

[159] Garin (1952) 76-78; Baldassarri (1994) 261. Ser Pietro di Ser Lorenzo Sermini da Montevarchi succeeded Salutati after the brief tenure of Benedetto Fortini in 1406, see Griffiths; Hankins; Thompson (1987) 76 note 10; Garin (1952) 76 note 1; Eugenio Garin, "I cancellieri umanisti della repubblica fiorentina da Coluccio Salutati a Bartolomeo Scala" in *La cultura filosofica del rinascimento italiano* Firenze: Sansori 1961 18; Robert Black, "The Political Thought of the Florentine Chancellors" *The Historical Journal* Vol. 29, No. 4 (Dec. 1986) 1001; the fullest account of Sermini's succession to Salutati's post is in Paolo Viti, *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze: Studi sulle lettere pubbliche e private* San Gimignano: Bulzoni Editore 1992 391-392. While Sermini is constructed as a youth for Bruni's purposes, in reality he succeeded Salutati as the next Chancellor of Florence. The people of Florence would not have appointed someone they regarded as an *adulescens* to the highest office in the Republic. The date of Sermini's birth is currently unknown. He was old enough to be elected chancellor for the Guelphs in 1394. He died in 1425. (Viti (1992) 392). In the economy of the *Dialogus* he may have constructed Sermini as a youth simply to provide him as a role model for the younger generation, as discussed above.

argues, "well everybody knows that's not true." On Petrarch's behalf, Niccoli lists his accomplishments in writing, explaining that his genius could even embrace the popular *volgare* writings. Petrarch is celebrated for restoring humanistic studies and opening the way for present humanists to learn and study. Boccaccio's humour and eloquence are quickly summed up and his redemption is as swift as his condemnation was.

Salutati and Sermini are particularly effusive in their praise of Niccoli's laudatory speech of Dante and his fellow poets. Rossi welcomes Niccoli back to the consensus of the group and invites them all to dine with him the next day. Salutati accepts on behalf of the group and anticipates a banquet for both mind and body. Niccoli's praise for Dante is as exuberant as the earlier denunciations:

> *Melliflua enim verborum flumina illaborate fluunt omniaque sensa sic exprimunt quasi oculis audientium aut legentium subiciantur; nec ulla est tanta obscuritas, quam eius non illuminet aperiatque oratio. Nam quod omnium difficillimum est, acutissimas theologiae philosophiaeque sententias limatissimis illis ternariis ita commode pronuntiat atque disceptat, ut ab ipsis theologis vel philosophis in scholis atque in otio vix queant pronuntiari.*[160]

> Mellifluous streams of words flow forth spontaneously and express all his perceptions as if they were placed under the listeners' or readers' eyes. Nor is there any obscurity so great that his discourse does not illumine and explain it; for, most difficult of all, in those polished *terzine* he relates and discusses the most acute thoughts of theology and philosophy so aptly that it could hardly be done better by theologians and philosophers themselves in learned discussion and at leisure.

The above passage not only fails to mention any problems that Dante may have encountered discussing theology and philosophy in the *volgare*, but also claims he dealt with the topics better than the theologians and philosophers themselves. The domains of theology and philosophy were Latin language domains,[161] but were also dominated by the Scholastics at this time. Niccoli's reference to *scholae* is a swipe at the Scholastics, who could not use classical Latin, either in their disputations or written works.

This work is about extending the range of Latin into the spoken domains; at the same time it seems to be acknowledging the legitimacy of a literary form of the vernacular.

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[160] Garin (1952) 86; Baldassarri (1994) 266 71.13-20

[161] W. Leonard Grant, "European Vernacular Works in Latin Translation" *Studies in the Renaissance* Vol. 1 (1954) 120, for theology 147-148

Legite, quaeso, ea carmina in quibus amorem, odium, formidinem ceterasque animi perturbationes exprimit; legite descriptiones temporum, legite caelorum motus, legite stellarum ortus atque occasus, legite arithmeticas computationes, legite adhortationes, iurgationes, consolationes, deinde vobiscum reputate quid sapientia perfectius aut eloquentia expolitius quisquam poeta queat proferre.[162]

Read, please, those verses in which he portrays love, hate, fear and the rest of the disturbances of the spirit; read his descriptions of times, the movement of the heavens, the risings and settings of the stars, the arithmetical computations; read the exhortations, the invectives, the consolations – then ask yourself what any poet could bring forth more perfect in wisdom and more polished in elegance.

The Latin of Niccoli repeats the imperative "read" (*legite*). In so doing, he is emphasising the written form of Dante's works. He is crediting Dante with the ability to discuss in the *volgare* a wide range of topics, some of which would normally be reserved for Latin, such as astronomy and arithmetic.[163] He also he describes Dante's work as *eloquentia*. Although this term is normally reserved for Latin literature, here Niccoli applies it to Dante's Tuscan dialect. The domains of the vernacular are being extended to include scientific topics usually reserved for Latin, personal emotions (*amor, odium*), and specific genres where Latin is regularly employed (*iurgationes, consolationes*). Written vernacular work is praised in the same terms as a classical work and is even explicitly compared to ancient literary superheroes Homer and Vergil.[164]

The defence of Petrarch discusses his poems and letters in the vernacular, just as Niccoli had done on behalf of Dante.[165]

Adeo autem illum ad omne genus scribendi ingenium accomodasse, ut ne populari dicendi genere se abstinuerit, sed in hoc, ut in ceteris quoque, elegantissimum et facundissimum videri.[166]

Moreover, his genius was so accommodated to every type of composition that he did not refrain from the popular sort of writing; but in this, as in the others, he appears most elegant and eloquent.

Again writing in the vernacular (*populari dicendi*) is praised, and this is achieved using terms normally applied to Latin literature: *elegantissimum et facundissimum*. At the same time, his

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[162] Garin (1952) 86; Baldassarri (1994) 267 73.1-7 emphasis added.
[163] Grant (1954) 120
[164] Garin (1952) 86; Baldassarri (1994) 267 72.7-9
[165] Baldassarri (1994) 269-272
[166] Garin (1952) 92; Baldassarri (1994) 271 83.8-11

disastrous Latin epic attempt, the *Africa*, is excused by the death of Petrarch, which prevented him from finishing it.[167] Boccaccio too, as in the first half, is dealt with in a single paragraph and in the second part of the *Dialogus* his vernacular works are admitted for consideration, thus vindicating him from criticism.

Considering the pro-Latin bias so inherent in the first half of the *Dialogus*, it seems incredible that Niccoli could now be advocating the vernacular as an alternative, and not just as a possible alternative, but one that might be superior to Latin. Or is it? Bearing in mind that the purpose of this work is to demonstrate an effective and convincing Latin disputation, Niccoli is arguing the other side of every argument contained in the first half. He demolishes his earlier objections to Dante based on his lack of historical knowledge and proceeds to attack the argument at its very base by defending the legitimacy of vernacular poetic composition. The first attack on Dante and the other Trecento poets considered only Latin works to be worthy achievements, now the discussion on vernacular works serves to bolster the beleaguered reputations of Florence's literary greats.

Although Niccoli defends some examples of vernacular literature, his position in the *Dialogus* is not contradictory. Niccoli is still engaging in Latin disputation which, as has been examined, is an RLS exercise in recovering spoken Latin activity. Perhaps it was not a situation of absolutes, and one can imagine this applied particularly to Florence. A man like Niccoli did not have to choose between appreciating the vernacular or Latin literature, but was free to enjoy both. Societal diglossia or bilingualism was expected from the audience of the *Dialogus*. Readers could obviously enjoy Latin; the very ability to read Latin was a prerequisite for enjoying Bruni's works. However, the reader was also expected to be familiar with Dante in order to appreciate and evaluate their criticism and praise. Therefore, readers of Bruni's *Dialogus* were urged to use their Latin as a spoken medium while acknowledging the validity of reading the vernacular. This particular promotion is a contradiction of the situation as we understand it: that Latin was a written and read medium of literature and the vernacular was the spoken form of communication. In the *Dialogus*, the assumed roles of each language are inverted in order to give Latin a spoken domain and thus decrease the shift away from its use. At the same time, the room that is allowed to the vernacular, the works of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, is an acknowledgment after the popular success that those literary works had already enjoyed.

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[167] Baldassarri (1994) 271

Finally, the *Dialogus* closes with an invitation from Roberto for the others to dine with him:

> *ut cras apud me omnes cenetis; habeo enim nonnulla quae sermone convivali celebrari cupiam.*[168]

> [Promise] that you will all dine at my house tomorrow; for I have something I would like to be celebrated with genial discussion.

With this, the RLS activity of Latin disputation is extended outside the frame of the *Dialogus* and into a specified future time. Roberto's invitation for tomorrow (*cras*) gives an impression of a regular activity. The *Dialogus* represents two days, both of which are taken up by Latin disputation, and the final remarks ensure the third day will also feature some small-scale, spoken Latin. The reader or audience may imagine the disputations are still taking place. Spoken Latin activity is the final emphasis for the *Dialogus* and therefore the last idea with which a reader is presented. This reiteration of the purpose of the *Dialogus* is placed so that it reinforces the idea of spoken Latin activity as a priority.

What is particularly striking is the geographical coincidence of the rise of the vernacular language's prestige and the growing attempts to revive Latin language in the city of Florence. Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio all raised the profile and the value of the vernacular by producing works of merit that were widely popular in their native Tuscan *volgare*. It is intriguing, and perhaps not so surprising, that the emergence of Latin as a threatened language was first recognised in Florence, the same centre of vernacular literature. RLS for Latin in Florence may be a response to the growing power and preference Tuscan was receiving. Indeed, as Tuscan pushed at the boundaries of literary domains, proponents of Latin responded by pushing at spoken language domains. However, the attitude displayed in the *Dialogus* towards the vernacular is not a denigration of Tuscan, but rather, a relegation of it to specific spheres or domains. By praising the works of the three Tuscan poets, there is perhaps an attempt to limit the vernacular to the genres of love poetry and epic. By allowing the *volgare* some of the space previously occupied only by Latin, Bruni is acknowledging a demonstrable reality in the libraries and living rooms of Florence. It also allows him to control the extent of that acknowledgment and thereby limit the credit he gives to vernacular literature. In this sense, Niccoli's praise of Dante's works in the *volgare* is so strong in the second half of the

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[168] Garin (1952) 98; Baldassarri (1994) 91.9-10

Dialogus that any backhanded compliment given in the first half is erased from memory.[169] Increased competition from the vernacular language with Latin created a geographical flash point for the RLS struggle for Latin to begin. Therefore, the discussion of Florence in the opening of Part II of the *Dialogus* is perhaps not just an advertisement for Bruni's *Laudatio florentinae urbis*; it also draws the reader's attention to the geographical hot-spot for linguistic competition.[170]

To put it another way, Florence became the perfect setting for the *volgare* to challenge Latin for literary domains. To this the humanists responded by challenging the *volgare* with Latin in spoken domains. The competition between the two languages may have been heating up to a level where the *volgare* no longer needed to be nourished and justified, but needed to be reminded of its subordination to Latin. The humanists had obviously undertaken positive actions towards the Trecento poets previously in order to encourage the growth of vernacular literature. In this sense, Niccoli, who confesses his own actions, makes the reader aware of the positive attitudes the *Dialogus* speakers have towards the Trecento poets:

> *Sed difficile erat assequi, ut vir omnium prudentissimus ex vero animo loqui me, ac non fictum esse sermonem meum arbitraretur. Nam viderat ille quidem me in omni aetate <u>studiosum</u> fuisse, et <u>inter libros litterasque</u> semper vixisse; meminisse poterat, me istos ipsos florentinos vates unice dilexisse.*
> *Nam et Dantem ipsum quodam tempore ita memoriae mandavi, ut ne hodie quidem sim oblitus, sed etiam nunc magnam partem illius praeclari ac luculenti poematis sine ullis libris referre queo: quod facere non possem sine singulari quadam affectione. Franciscum vero Petrarcham tanti semper feci, ut usque in Patavium profectus sim, ut ex proprio exemplari libros suos transcriberem. Ego enim primus omnium <u>Africam</u> illam huc adduxi, cuius quidem rei iste Colucius testis est. Iohannem autem Boccatium quomodo odisse possum, qui bibliothecam eius meis sumptibus ornarim propter memoriam doctissimi viri…?[171]*

But it was difficult to make the wisest of men think I was speaking sincerely, not making it up. For he had seen that I was always <u>studious</u> and always lived <u>among books and letters</u>; he could remember that I had a singular esteem for those very Florentine poets. Dante himself at one time I committed to memory so well that not even today have I forgotten it: even now I can quote without books a great part of that magnificent and excellent poem – which I could not do without a singular love for it. I always esteemed Francesco Petrarch so highly that I went all the way to Padua to transcribe his books from his own

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[169] See Garin (1952) 84-98; Baldassarri (1994) 264-269
[170] Baldassarri (1994) 259ff.
[171] Garin (1952) 82-84; Baldassarri (1994) 264 66.10-67.11

> original. In fact I was the first to bring *Africa* here, as Coluccio will testify. And how can I hate Giovanni Boccaccio, I who at my own expense adorned his library to honour the memory of so great a man…?[172]

Niccoli tells of his past actions on behalf of the vernacular works, actions that included copying (and thereby transmitting or disseminating) the works and glorifying the authors themselves. He elevates the genre of vernacular poetry from entertainment to literature worthy of study when he describes himself as *studiosus* and *inter libros litterasque semper.*[173] Niccoli relates these facts as if to an audience who already knows and has witnessed his activities with regard to vernacular literature. He even implies Coluccio Salutati has been involved with him. Only now that vernacular literature is strong enough to challenge Latin without being overtly promoted, the reality of the threat this poses to Latin is made clear.

Conclusions

Salutati's opinion, in favour of *disputatio* in Latin, is never contradicted. The frequency with which Salutati's position is revisited adds weight to the identification of his thesis as the main argument for the *Dialogus* - for example, it recurs at the close of Part I and again at the close of Part II as the final thought for the reader. Bruni uses the literary genre of the dialogue to present Salutati as promoting the practice of *disputatio* as a means of recovering spoken Latin. The RLS goal for Salutati, who recognised the diminishing state of the Latin language, was to develop a group of younger speakers. He does this by encouraging the men he has in front of him within the reality of the work and also by reaching out to the readership. The reluctance of the participants to begin speaking in Latin is evidence for the paucity of occasions when Latin was spoken at this time.

The work provides a snapshot of the humanists and the realisation that Latin needed to recover its spoken domains in order to maintain its position against the vernacular. Salutati particularly is depicted as proficient in Latin-speaking and desirous of reversing the contemporary shift away from Latin usage. In the *Dialogus* Bruni barely utters a word – is this because he is uncomfortable speaking in Latin? He could write very proficiently in Latin but may have had restricted abilities in speaking Latin. It is interesting to note that the only Latin the character of Bruni utters during the *Dialogus* is that Niccoli speaks for him, perhaps because he himself was unable to be articulate in spoken Latin. Bruni may have been unwilling to depict himself

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[172] Griffiths; Hankins; Thompson (1987) 78

[173] Garin (1952) 82; Baldassarri (1994) 264 66.13-14: *inter libros litterasque* could also be translated "amongst books and literature".

as speaking Latin in the work in case he should then be expected to speak such fluent Latin in person. Bruni's attitude to the choice of language between Latin and the *volgare* appears difficult to measure. In this early work, he appears to favour Salutati's promotion of Latin; he composes the dialogue in Latin, refers to ancient Latin works and seems to promote the practice of *disputatio* as a means of recovering spoken language domains for Latin. However, there is a certain ambivalence in his treatment of Dante and the other vernacular poets; first condemning, then praising them. Bruni also limits each language to certain domains; the vernacular is allowed space in the domain of poetry, but the *disputatio* is Latin-only. Later works by Bruni will be shown to cast doubt on Bruni's belief in Reversing Language Shift for Latin and to imply a confidence in the *volgare*, the roots of this confidence may be found in the *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum*.

Dante is used by Niccolo Niccoli in his argument to explain why true eloquence and wisdom cannot be achieved in his own time: if even the great Dante cannot get Latin right, how can they? Dante is criticized for his lack of Latinity by the character of Niccoli and then vindicated on the basis of his vernacular work. Dante's lack of Latinity is never refuted even though his knowledge of classical history is both criticised and defended. Dante is therefore both a hero and an object of criticism depending on which half of the *Dialogus* he appears in. The criticism is deliberately inflammatory in order to stir up publicity for the work, which actually promotes Latin dialogue writing and Latin-speaking. The figure of Dante is unassailable to contemporary Florentines. Thus, the critical content is perfect for kindling controversy and publicity. The attention-grabbing content was an aid to encourage the circulation of the works. Bruni would have wished his work to be read, talked about and copied. However, the content of Niccoli's speeches must have provided an incentive for contemporaries to read the *Dialogus* and absorb its other messages. The medium was the message and the content was the enticement.

Chapter III: The Debate on the Latin Language of 1435: Did the Romans Actually Speak Latin?

Introduction

There were continuing attempts by humanists to revive both the usage and purity of Latin after Bruni wrote the *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum*, especially in Florence. This process was marked by the recovery of the text of Quintilian in 1416, and, in 1421, the recovery of Cicero's *Brutus*, *Orator* and the *De oratore*. These activities sparked a debate about the possibility of speaking in Latin. Leonardo Bruni was a prominent figure in the activities of humanists using Latin in Florence. His translations of Greek works into Latin opened up another area of knowledge accessible only to the Latinate.[174] The humanists at the Curia arrived in Florence in 1434 and drew Bruni into a debate about whether or not Latin was the sole language of Ancient Rome, or whether the situation stood as it did in their own time, with Latin reserved for formal writing and occasions and a vernacular language employed for day-to-day interaction. The main participants in the 1435 debate whose views survive are Flavio Biondo and Leonardo Bruni. However, the debate continued over a number of years, allowing for contributions from Leon Battista Alberti and Poggio Bracciolini.[175]

The combination of the unique linguistic situation that existed in Florence and the arrival of the Latin-using Curia gave rise to the debate on Latin language. Eugenius IV (Pope 1431-47) fled Rome in disguise amid rioting in 1434.[176] He arrived at Florence shortly afterwards on 23 June

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[174] Contrast Bruni's translations from Greek for the Latinate with the behaviour of the monk Ambrogio Traversari, who translated a life of St Peter from Greek to Latin and then had his monastery translate some texts into the *volgare* in order to make them accessible to the multitude, and Leon Battista Alberti, who composed texts in the *volgare* with the stated intention of being accessible to as many people as possible.

[175] The debate is summarised briefly in (Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* USA: Harvard University Press 2002) 168-170

[176] Eugenius' predecessor, Martin V, had abused his cardinals and favoured his family during his pontificate. Consequently, the cardinals wished to impose limitations on his successor, Eugenius. The capture of a Papal Bull proclaiming a crusade at Taus combined with agitation from the dissolved Council of Basle (1431-1432) lead to public support for ecclesiastical reform. Condottieri working for the Duke Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan made rapid advances to the gates of Rome. Eugenius beat a hasty retreat. He returned and conceded to the demands of the council but was constantly under threat. 29 May 1434 the Capitol at Rome was stormed, the

1434. The Papal Curia was then housed at Santa Maria Novella, the Dominican monastery in Florence until 1443.[177] The arrival of the papal Curia - including many significant humanists and the leading Latinists of the time - meant that Bruni was confronted with the unique linguistic situation of the Curia and drawn into debate about the nature of the Latin language. The debate centered on the question of whether the Latin language had ever been a true vernacular language in Antiquity, or whether there had been two languages: one spoken and one written. This question had resonances for contemporaries in a climate of language change. If Latin had never been a spoken language, then attempts to revive it as a spoken language lacked any historical basis and were doomed to fail. The view that a spoken language, separate from Latin as the written language, had existed in Antiquity gave the contemporary Italian *volgare* a legitimacy it had not been granted previously. If, in Antiquity, Latin had been both the spoken language of everyday life and the written, literary language, then the revival of Latin to be spoken by contemporaries was a possibility. However, establishing Latin as the spoken language of Antiquity also offered the contemporary *volgare* considerable potential; it too could grow and establish itself from a spoken language to a literary language as Latin had done before it.

The debate beginning in 1435 is documented by a series of texts. Flavio Biondo writes the *De verbis Romanae locutionis* in the form of a treatise addressed to Leonardo Bruni. Bruni then writes a relatively brief letter in response to Biondo. Poggio Bracciolini later writes in the third part of his *Convivialis Historiae Disceptatio* that he is writing in response to Bruni's letter. Poggio's *Facetiae*, although not made public until 1451, can also been seen in the context of this particular debate. Leon Battista Alberti, having watched the debate from a distance, responds to it in the preface to the third book of his *Della Famiglia*, written between 1435 and 1444.

The members of the 1435 debate represent an intellectual circle, similar to the earlier circle depicted in the *Dialogus*, where the subject of discussion is the status of Latin and of the vernacular. The original group pictured in the *Dialogus* was based in Florence. Some of its

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Pope's nephew imprisoned, and a Republic proclaimed. The Florentines had already offered their city to the Pope in December 1433, so Eugenius resolved to flee to that city. He escaped disguised as a Benedictine monk on the river Tiber. (Ludwig Pastor, *The History of the Popes From the Close of the Middle Ages* fifth edition, Volume I (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co 1923) 282ff. especially 294-95)

[177] Pastor (1923) 295

members had learned Greek, which had heightened their awareness of language. By contrast, the men engaged in the 1435 debate represent another intellectual circle, centered in the world of international diplomacy that was the Curia. These men used Latin in their working lives and had both a professional and scholarly interest in the language. The environment of the Curia fostered a dialogue on language which Bruni was invited to join. Bruni, himself a former Papal secretary, was still involved enough in the affairs of the Curia, possibly in his professional capacity as Chancellor of Florence, and still had continuing personal relationships with curial staff to warrant inclusion in the debate.

The Medici had assumed control of Florence from 1434 bringing a new political climate.[178] The arrival of the Curia heralded a new buzz of intellectual activity as well as the bustle of an economic boom. Entertainment and intellectual stimulation became easier to find in Florence. The quarters of the monastery of Santa Maria Novella must have seemed crowded for Curia staff after the splendours and space of the Vatican. The clothing of the participants marked them out in a hierarchy, for example the dress of the apostolic secretary and the robes of office Bruni may have worn as Chancellor. In addition, the visible ages of the older participants would have lent them a certain authority. The secretaries and notaries on duty gathered in the antechamber. They would have been on duty for longer periods and more frequently than at Rome, due to the flurry of diplomatic activity surrounding the Pope living in exile. This lead to a concentration of intellectuals and users of Latin present with other learned, interested men.

The people involved in the debate were all well known humanists. Most were currently employed in the papal Curia, but some had been established there longer than others. Flavio Antonio Biondo (1392-1463) was first employed in 1433 by Pope Eugenius, who reportedly had a great regard for him.[179] In 1435, he was a relatively new employee in the Curia. At the time of this debate, he had already begun the groundwork for reconstructing the topography of Ancient Rome for his later work *Roma instaurata*, which was eventually completed 1440-1446.[180]

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[178] Grafton (2002) 8

[179] Pastor (1923) 304 quoting Masius, *Flavio Biondo sein Leben und seine Werke* Leipzig: 1879 21.

[180] T.G. Bergin, J. Speake, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Renaissance* (USA: Market House Books 1987) 54; for a comprehensive discussion of Biondo's reconstruction of the Ancient Past see Angelo Mazzocco "Rome and the Humanists: The Case of Biondo Flavio" in *Rome in the Renaissance: The City and the Myth* (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies 1982) 186-195. Biondo's *Roma Instaurata* (c.1453) also contained a passage about the destruction of Latin,

Biondo's allies in the debate as he presents it were Poggio and Fiocchi. Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) was a humanist who identified himself with Florence. He had been papal secretary from 1403.[181] At the time of the debate Poggio was already famous for his literary productions, such as *Contra avaritia* (1428) and was compiling the *Facetiae*, which were not completed until 1451.[182] He was the most senior figure in the Curia and was regarded by many as the premier Latinist for his Ciceronian style.[183] Andrea Fiocchi (Andreas Florentinus) (1401-1452) was a humanist born at Florence.[184] Before 1421, he wrote the *De potestatibus Romanis*, a work on Roman magistrates. Later, Fiocchi appears to have been employed by Cardinal Condulmer and entered the service at the Curia in 1431 when Condulmer became Pope Eugenius IV.[185] He was appointed apostolic secretary on 16 January 1432, and Scrittor and Abbreviator in 1435. He also received several benefices.[186] At the time of the debate, Fiocchi was a relative newcomer to the Curia and, like Biondo, he was interested in reconstructing the ancient past.

Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) led the opposition. He held the position of Chancellor of Florence at the time of the debate and was a significant figure in the humanist movement; consequently, he was an important figure in Florence. He was joined by Antonio Loschi and Cencio de' Rustici. Antonio Loschi (Antonius Luscus) (1368-1441) entered into service at the Roman court in 1406 after being secretary to the Duke of Milan.[187] During the 1420s he achieved power and influence at the Curia and was sent on embassies to Milan and Budapest, where in 1429 he was made Count

his later work the *Decades* demonstrated Biondo's continuing concern with Latin, where he discussed its modernization (Angelo Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories in Dante and the Humanists* (Leiden, New York, Koln: E.J. Brill 1993) 41, 43, 46).

[181] Peter Partner, *The Pope's Men* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990) 80 He was employed there until 1453.

[182] David Rundle, (editor) *The Hutchinson Encyclopedia of the Renaissance* (Great Britain: Westview Press 1999) 332

[183] Phyllis Goodhart Gordan, (trans. and edit.) *Two Renaissance Book Hunters* (New York: Columbia University Press 1974) 258 note 2. Poggio's lapses into Italian in his letters are recorded here but described as rare occurences.

[184] Rundle (1999) 163

[185] Partner (1990) 232

[186] Giovanni Mercati, "Ultimi contributi alla storia degli umanisti" *Bibliotheca apostolica vaticana* Vatican: 1939 101

[187] Partner (1990) 239; Goodhart Gordan (1974) 276, 330-1

Palatine by the emperor Sigismund.[188] Cincio (Cencio) Paolo de' Rustici (Cincius Romanus) (c.1390-c.1445) was born in Rome to a wealthy family. Like Bruni, de' Rustici learned Greek from Chrysoloras (1410-15) and later taught it himself.[189] He was, therefore, acquainted with both Florence and Bruni when he returned there in 1435. He had worked, from 1411, in the papal Curia. In 1416, he had accompanied Poggio to St. Gall and been with him at his (re-)discovery of Quintilian.[190] He became a papal secretary 28 November 1417.[191] His interests, coinciding with those of Biondo, included the preservation of ancient monuments in Rome.[192]

Other sources provide evidence that the members of this group was acquainted with each other at the Curia. The group is depicted together at Poggio's birthday party in one of his letters suggesting their friendly ties.[193] Several members were grouped together in a letter from Andrea Fiocchi to Leonardo Bruni:

> *gravissimi ac lepidissimi viri Antonii Lusci relatio, qui in conventu quorumdam equalium et amicorum tuorum Pogii et Cincii ac nonnullorum elegantium virorum te ad Curam Romanam veluti ad proprios lares reversurum asseruit: quod quidem omnibus nunctium extitit sane iocundissimum, eisdem eruditionem tuam ac disciplinam eloquentie singularem efferentibus laudibus...[194]*

> It was a comment made by Antonio Loschi, an important and charming man, which reminded me of your learning. Antonio, talking with some of your peers and friends, Poggio and Cencio and several other cultured men, said that you were going to "come home" to the Roman Curia. This was good news for everyone and they all spoke warmly of your learning and your outstanding achievements in eloquence…

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[188] Goodhart Gordan (1974) 313
[189] Goodhart Gordan (1974) 207
[190] Rundle (1999) 353-4
[191] Partner (1990) 248
[192] Goodhart Gordan (1974) 319
[193] Goodhart Gordan (1974) 163, Letter LXXXII, where Antonio Loschi and Cencio de' Rustici are named among other humanists.
[194] Mercati (1939) 117

Their names occur as frequently in Poggio's *Letters*,[195] as in the *Facetiae*.[196] Fiocchi corresponded with Bruni in 1431, and was obviously keeping up with news in his hometown.[197] In fact, Fiocchi considered staying on there after the Curia had moved on.[198] As a group all the members working at the papal Curia had some connection to Florence, in terms of their birth or their education. When the Curia moved to Florence, for these members of the Pope's humanist staff it was a return to a city with which they were familiar, where they had established connections.

Reconstructing the Original Debate

Flavio Biondo's own treatise *De verbis Romanae locutionis* is unorganized and disordered in its presentation of the original conversation.[199] Precisely because of this style, it is all the more certain that the original discussion took place, as the treatise has the sense of a wide-ranging conversation with many contributors. Not one of the subsequent contributors to the written record of the debate ever disputed that the original discussion took place as Biondo described it. Accordingly, we can try and piece together the events of that original discussion from the haphazard description in Biondo's treatise.

Biondo describes the debate as it took place in the Pope's audience chamber, and the way in which Loschi, Poggio, de' Rustici and Fiocchi approached Bruni and asked his opinion on a subject they

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[195] Helen Harth, (editor) *Poggio Bracciolini Lettere* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki 1984). Loschi vol. II. 1.2, 3, 5, 12, 2.1, 5, 11, 3.6, 4.14, 9.7, vol. III. 4.19, 7.18; de' Rustici vol. II. 1.12,4.13, 6.8, 8.10, 11, vol. III. 2.1, 7.18, 7.31; Traversari vol. II. 2.20, vol. III 7.21; Fiocchi vol. III. 3.9; Biondo vol. III. 3.9, 11.

[196] From the edition of the *Facetiae* trans. by Bernhardt Hurwood (New York: Award Books 1968). The *Facetiae* contain reference to de Rustici (LXIX?, CV, CVI), Loschi (LXXXI, LXXXIX, CII, CIV, CXII), Luigi Marsili (CLXXXIV), Pope Eugenius (CCX, CCXLVII) and Niccolo Niccoli (CCLII). For a Latin edition of the text see Riccardo Fubini, *Poggius Bracciolini Opera Omnia* (Torino: Bottega d'Erasmo 1964) vol. 1 420 - 491

[197] Mercati (1939) 108, 117

[198] Mercati (1939) 102-103

[199] Flavio Biondo, *De verbis Romanae locutionis*, from Bartolomeo Nogara, *Scritti inediti e rari di Biondo Flavio* (Rome: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana 1927) (hereafter Nogara); also found in Mirko Tavoni, *Latino, grammatica, volgare: storia di una questione umanistica* (Padova: Editrice Antenore 1984) 197-215

were already discussing. In this way, Bruni is drawn into the debate.[200] Biondo names all the participants in the debate apart from himself. He then outlines the two sides of the debate: Antonio Loschi, Bruni and Cencio de' Rustici on one side, and Biondo, Poggio and Andrea Fiocchi on the other.

Antonio Loschi focused on the practice of oratory in Antiquity. He argued that the orators must have used the language that was most widely understood in order to be persuasive. His whole argument assumed that there was one literary language and another more common form of speech for domestic matters. Cencio de' Rustici points to a passage from Livy as evidence (Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 1.27.9). The passage describes how the people of a besieged town, Fidenae, overheard the words of the commander attacking them, Tullus Hostilius, and were filled with terror. Hence, the attacking Romans and the people of the town of Fidenae must have shared a form of spoken language at that time, and the commander would have had to use the literary form if he had not wanted to be understood by the people of Fidenae.

Bruni supported Loschi and de' Rustici but was called away in the middle of the discussion. However, he had enough time to contribute his own arguments. Firstly, he argued that recorded changes in the Latin language were a result of a difference in diction between the spoken and written language of Antiquity (V.), for example the word *duellum* became *bellum*.[201] Secondly, Bruni repeated de' Rustici's argument from Livy. Finally, he argued that orators received popular support and applause in response to their speeches so they must have been using a kind of *volgare*,

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[200] The passage reads:

> *(II.) memoria tenes, ut opinor, apud summi pontificis Eugenii auditorium, et pro ipsis ferme cubiculi foribus, cum viri doctissimi Antonius Luscus, Poggius, Cintius et Andreas Florentinus, apostolici secretarii, te collegi nostri decus adeuntes, tuam rei, de qua loqui coeptum est, rogassent sententiam, varias pro temporis brevitate singulos protulisse opiniones.*
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> You will, I think, remember the debate that occurred in Pope Eugenius' audience chamber and virtually in front of the doors to his private quarters, when a number of learned apostolic secretaries, Antonio Loschi, Poggio Bracciolini, Cencio de' Rustici and Andreas Fiocchi approached you as the luminary of our group and asked your opinion on the subject they were discussing. As you will remember the individuals involved put forward a range of opinions in the brief space of time available.

Nogara (1927) 117

[201] Nogara (1927) 118

since the Latin language could obviously not be understood by everyone. Bruni particularly tried to convince his old friend Poggio:

> *quas pro temporis brevitate rationibus confirmare et Poggium es adnixus vestris partibus adiungere contraria sentientem.*[202]

> Within the brief space of time available you did your best to support their positions with arguments and you endeavoured to win Poggio, who was of the opposite point of view, to your side.

Poggio responded that Bruni was shooting himself in the foot (*tamquam mucrone tuo ut te confoderet conante*[203]) with his argument that ancient Roman orators had received applause and must therefore have spoken in a form of *volgare*. He referred to Cicero's report that a particular line spoken in Latin by Gnaeus Carbo caused a great clamour and applause.[204] This was the result of his audience recognizing and being pleased by the metre of the line as the listeners spoke and understood the same language as the orator himself. The metre of the line depends upon it being in Latin. Therefore, contrary to Bruni's suggestion, the line was uttered and appreciated in Latin, not in a form of *volgare*. Bruni departs the debate when he is called away by the Pope. With Bruni's departure our reconstruction of the original conversation ends.

This debate is recorded as taking place in the context of the papal audience chambers. The apostolic secretaries named by Biondo were everyday users of Latin and prided themselves on their intimate knowledge of the language. It is unclear whether they spoke Latin in conversation with each other or spoke in a dialect of the *volgare*. As a group of Italians they would probably have found it easier to converse in their various dialects of the *volgare*. However, the Curia was an international setting, and if they were in the presence of speakers of other languages, Latin would have been the *lingua franca* employed. So this debate about the Latin language probably originally took place in the *volgare*, and here Biondo moved it into the Latin domain of the treatise.

Antonio Loschi's argument in favour of there being two forms of language in Antiquity reflects his own time. He did not believe the possibility that Latin could have been the only, perfectly

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[202] Nogara (1927) 117
[203] Nogara (1927) 118
[204] The line was a dichoreum: *dictum patris sapiens filii temeritas comprobavit*.

comprehensible language of Roman Antiquity. Accordingly he argues that the use of the vernacular for occasions where persuading the crowd was imperative testified to the existence of a common language spoken in daily life. In other words, he imagined the language of the *forum* to be the same as the language of the *piazza* in his own time. Latin speeches would have been ineffective methods of persuading contemporary masses, so Loschi concluded that the same was true for Antiquity. He was arguing obviously by drawing on what was demonstrably true to his audience and their personal experience in his own time.

De' Rustici had read Livy already convinced that there were two languages in Antiquity and he sought out evidence for this point of view, making critical assumptions. This approach is understood better if the basic linguistic situation of his own time is considered and applied back onto Antiquity. For example, if a fifteenth century general addressed his troops in Latin, only his officers would have any chance of understanding him, and even then, the odds would be against it. Therefore, a general in Antiquity must also have had to use the language spoken by his soldiers. For de' Rustici it is obvious that this must have been a form of *volgare*.

Biondo responds to the arguments put forth by the participants in the original debate in his treatise. Biondo thoroughly disputes de' Rustici's argument based on Livy by referring to the text itself, quoting directly (VI.).[205] Biondo's grasp of Livy's text allows him to refer directly to the two

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[205] The actual passage from Livy reads:

> *…inde eqes citato equo nuntiat regi abire Albanos… Equitem clara increpans voce, ut hostes exaudirent, redire in proelium iubet: nihil trepidatione opus esse; suo iussu circumduci Albanum exercitum, ut Fidenatium nuda terga invadant; …Terror ad hostes transit; et audiverant clara voce dictum, et magna pars Fidenatium, ut quibus coloni additi Romani essent, Latine sciebant.* (Livy *Ab urbe condita* I.27.7-10)
> …then a horseman galloped up to the king, and told him that the Albans were marching off… The horseman [Tullus] reprimanded in a loud voice, that the enemy might overhear him, and ordered him to go back and fight; there was no occasion for alarm; it was by his own command that the Alban army was marching round, that they might attack the unprotected rear of the Fidenates… The enemy in their turn now became alarmed; they had heard Tullus' loud assertion, and many of the Fidenates, having had Romans among them as colonists, knew Latin.

Latin text and translation taken from Livy (London: William Heinemann (Loeb Classical Library) 1952) 96-99. This particular passage from Livy has occasioned little comment in critical editions apart from some discussion on the passage *ut qui/quibus coloni additi Romani essent* (1.27.9) see R.M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy Books 1-5* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1965) 119; R.S. Conway, *Titi Livi Ab Urbe Condita* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1969)

languages Livy *does* mention: an Etruscan language spoken by the original inhabitants of Fidenae, and Latin, spoken by Romans and their colonists, and also regularly used by the inhabitants of Fidenae. Thus, Biondo concludes, Tullus' loud proclamation is directed at his own soldiers and all of the enemies in Fidenae.[206] The evidence of Livy merely confirms that one language was spoken and understood in the area. This may have been the point that de' Rustici was actually trying to prove. His argument here may have been imported from a slightly different debate, perhaps on whether or not the people of Rome and Fidenae spoke mutually intelligible dialects in Antiquity. It is possible that de' Rustici considered the people of Rome and Fidenae to share a spoken form or language, but limited the literary form (Latin) as a possession of the Romans alone.

Bruni's argument, as reported by Biondo, was that orators and their speeches were popularly acclaimed with applause in Antiquity, therefore, as the unlettered populace would never have been able to appreciate Latin, the speeches must have been in some form of *volgare*. Bruni's own experience with learning Latin as a second language made it impossible for him to believe it could be a native tongue. He was taking his argument from the history of oratory, particularly the information contained in the recently recovered Quintilian and Cicero. Biondo and Poggio, however, were able to defeat his argument from the same authorities.

Loschi's argument is based on probability; de' Rustici's is based on an interpretation of a passage from Livy; and Bruni offers an historical argument. It is interesting to note the sources that the participants refer to in their debate. De' Rustici refers to Livy (Book 1), and Bruni to Cicero's *Orator* and Livy. There is a sense of one-upmanship between the debaters, as they seek to trump one another by referring to sources the others have not read or not understood. It is on this point that Biondo excels when he has the leisure to sit down with the texts themselves, particularly with the *Brutus*, and write a response.

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[206] In fact, the passage in Livy specifies that a good proportion of Fidenates knew Latin:
   magnam partem Fidenatum, ut qui coloni additi a Romanis essent, latine scivisse.
Quoted in Nogara (1927) 119. However, the line in Livy reads I.27.9 "*et magna pars Fidenatium, ut quibus coloni additi Romani essent, Latine sciebant.*" Livy, Loeb 98

Flavio Biondo's New Arguments

In his treatise, dedicated to Leonardo Bruni, *De verbis Romanae locutionis* (*On the Words of Roman Speech*)[207] written in Latin, Biondo summarises the debate and describes the arguments he would have made, had Bruni been able to continue the debate (IV.).[208] He points out that in all the writings that survive no mention is made of two languages. This is a telling fact, since plenty of authors wrote about the minute details of oratory.

By arguing that Latin was the language of both the educated and the masses in Ancient Rome, Biondo makes a distinction between the educated people's use of and ability with Latin, and that of the uneducated (VII.). This argument is drawn from a passage in Cicero's *Orator*, in which Cicero distinguishes between the disordered nature of speech and the contrasting, refined character of written productions, particularly poetry (VIII.).[209] Biondo uses the term *vulgare*, to denote the common, spoken form of Latin,.

In turn, the ancient *vulgare* is contrasted with the more modern *volgare*. With this contrast Biondo begins a series of arguments through the comparison of contemporary examples with those from the ancient world (XI.). The *vulgare* was the form of Latin spoken by the masses in Ancient Roman times (from *vulgus*). Biondo draws a parallel between three brothers from the same family: one glorious through military exploits, one through scholarly activity, and the third, a total nobody. Similarly, there were three types of Latin: the highly refined Latin of poetry, the language of oratory and the sloppy, ungrammatical Latin spoken on the street.[210] Another metaphor is

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[207] Written 15 March – 1 April 1435 Nogara (1927) 119. The form of the treatise is interesting to note, for example Biondo's reluctance to use the dialogue form, in spite of a seemingly appropriate topic. Perhaps he was influenced by previous objections by Loschi *et al* to Poggio's characterisations of them in his dialogues? Or perhaps there were too many distinguished examples from Poggio, Bruni and the other humanists that Biondo's work could have been compared to?

[208] Bracketed references are to Nogara's text (1927)

[209] In describing the character of the more common form of spoken Latin, Biondo says:
> *…etsi iisdem quibus superiora duo conficiebatur verbis, nulla tamen arte, nullis habebatur regulis, sed dissolutum ac pervagatum erat*
> Even if it comprises the same words as the two superior modes, it is not however constrained by any rules or art but is loose and absolutely unfettered.

Nogara (1927) 120

[210] The idea of a three part language is present in Dante's earlier thoughts in the *De vulgari eloquentia*. Europe has one language with three varieties: northern, southern and eastern. The

employed to emphasise the point: a woman with tawny, blonde hair may let it get dirty and dull or condition it and sit in the sun making it blonder and shinier, or even curl it into ringlets. It is the same hair, but in different states depending on the choices made by the woman.

Biondo anticipates that his opponents will criticize his opinion, arguing, as Loschi already has, that orators wanted their speeches to appeal to a mass audience and thus gave them in the ancient *vulgare*, only later writing them down in a more literary style (X.). However, Cicero's *Brutus* demonstrated that the orators used Latin words; while they may have used the *vulgare*, they did not use a *volgare*. That is, the ancients used a less structured form of Latin for speaking in domestic contexts, but not a totally separate language like the spoken dialects in Biondo's own time. Biondo cites several examples from the *Brutus* where Cicero praises the spoken Latin of various orators.[211]

Biondo uses the example of Curio the orator, whom Cicero believed to speak Latin well, in spite of being completely illiterate (XI.).[212] This example allows him to sustain the view whereby Latin was not just a literary language, since Curio must have learned Latin in his domestic environment to be able to speak it so well. A further comment by Cicero made it impossible to think that there were people in Curio's household who took pains to teach him Latin. By contrast, this did happen in the contemporary case of the barber's son, Bartolommeo, who, at just five years old, speaks Latin orations that have been painstakingly taught to him by Brother Ambrogio (Traversari) (XI.).

Once again in anticipating the objections of his detractors, Biondo cites Cicero as an authority on why fishmongers and fullers did not all become great orators, despite everyone speaking Latin (XII.). Biondo points to the domestic life of a child and its effects on their speech. Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, is lauded as having influenced her sons' eloquence with her own pure speech. Biondo refers to Cicero for the argument that the speech of the parents and others in the home influences the abilities of the individual with language (XIII.). Biondo also points to contemporary speakers of the *volgare* to provide a point of reference for his audience. Eloquence,

language spoken in southern Europe also has three varieties: *oc*, *oïl*, or *si*. See Steven Botterill, *Dante De vulgari eloquentia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996) xx
[211] For example see *Brutus* XXXV.132, XXXVI.137
[212] The term is *illiteratus*, a word which may be interpreted as meaning 'devoid of theory'. It is difficult to judge how Biondo, and his fellow debaters, used or understood this word. Bruni seems to have a slightly different reading of it than Biondo, see below.

or the ability to speak well, is linked to parents, education, usage and character. Biondo concludes that the ancients learned good Latin from a combination of their home life and their education (XIV.). Biondo reiterates that everybody in ancient Rome used the same words, that is, used the Latin language, but that three registers of language existed: a more sophisticated, educated register for literary purposes, a slightly less rigid, grammatically looser, "middle" (*modus medius*) manner of speaking for when orators wished to be understood, and an even less organized, colloquial form of speech for domestic domains (XV.-XVI.).

Biondo uses the environment of the contemporary Curia to illustrate his point about language. The variety of ethnicities, and therefore native languages, meant that even if they shared basic literacy in Latin, the spoken Latin of many members of the Curia was at times very rough and ungrammatical (XVIII.). In spite of their difficulty in speaking Latin themselves, these men can understand Latin speeches and sermons. Even Italian speakers who are not educated in Latin can understand the gist of Latin speeches, due to the proximity of the words used with vernacular vocabulary.

He further argues that Romans all spoke one language and did not translate plays and other works into a *volgare*. This act of translation would have ruined the metre and other features unique to the language. Biondo quotes passages from the *Orator* to demonstrate that audiences listened to and appreciated the metre in plays (XIX.). Biondo then discusses evidence from Cicero that audiences, who were not educated in Latin metre, could hear for themselves if a syllable in a play was the wrong length, and the idea of an accent – speaking the same language but with a certain sound that was unable to be discerned from the words on the page (XX.). Biondo recognises that in a native language, an individual naturally knows how to vary tenses, cases and moods (XXII.), so the complexity of Latin would not have been a problem for the uneducated and women.

The *De verbis* concludes with a discussion of when change between Latin and the contemporary dialects occurred, why it occurred and how. A passage from the *Brutus* is cited to illustrate that even in Antiquity, those at a distance from Rome or Roman life acquired a barbarity, a corruption

to their speech.[213] After the sacking of Rome by Goths and Vandals, the invaders tainted the populace with their speech habits (XXV.).

Biondo described how Poggio had argued that when Cicero reports the sensation caused by a *dichoreum*, it was because the ears of the crowd were delighted by the rhythm of the speech. This reinforced Biondo's argument that they were familiar with the Latin language and its forms - they could appreciate an orator's subtleties with language. Poggio is using Bruni's own argument against him.[214] This type of argument also points to the criteria that Poggio used to measure language competence and fluency. Poggio assumes that aural comprehension is a necessary prerequisite for the ability to recognize a metrical form. Therefore, he assumes that an audience that can recognize a *dichoreum* can understand what is being said. Linguistic competence is being determined by aural comprehension. For Latin, a predominantly written language, this evidence of aural comprehension is more compelling in determining linguistic capability. Poggio confuses appreciation for the rhythm of language with linguistic competence to the advantage of his argument.

Biondo mentions another popular humanist concerned with both education and languages in order to strengthen his own position (XI.). Brother Ambrogio Traversari (1386-1439), was General of the Camaldolese Order from 1430, a scholar and an authority on Greek language, who translated patristic works. He created an intellectual circle and a busy scriptorium at S. Maria degli Angeli.[215] He also established schools, for example one at Fonte Buona near Camaldoli. Although this school was principally for young people intending to embark on careers in the church, Traversari encouraged the élite to send their sons there as well as part of their moral formation.[216] Traversari was interested in other humanist schools; he remarked particularly on that of Vittorino da Feltre who accepted even low-born youths if they showed intellectual promise.[217]

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[213] Nogara (1927) 129; Tavoni (1984) 214; *Brutus* 258

[214] Just as, Poggio later reports, in his *Historiae Convivialis*, that Bruni's own letter on the subject of the Latin language in Antiquity proved the case against his own view. See discussion below.

[215] Rundle (1999) 389; Goodhart Gordan (1974) 140 for Poggio sending his texts to Traversari for his opinion.

[216] Charles L. Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers – Ambrogio Traversari and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance* (Albany: State University of New York Press 1977) 67

[217] Stinger (1977) 68

In Biondo's treatise Ambrogio Traversari is described as teaching a young boy, possibly a novice, to speak Latin orations by heart (XI.):

> *Ne vero suspicari liceat fuisse curiosos in Curionis domo, qui carentem litteris infantem latinitate a litteratura profecta tamquam picam imbuissent, quod de Bartholomeo tonsoris filio cive Florentino factum videmus, qui licet quantum aetatis annum vix emensus dicatur, subministratas ab eruditissimo fratre Ambrosio nostro luculentas orationes summon pontifici memoriter cum omnium admiratione pronunciat[218]*

> A little further on Cicero makes a further comment about Curio which makes it impossible for us to think that there were painstaking people in Curio's home who had imbued an illiterate child with the sort of Latin you find in literature as if he were a magpie – something which we see has happened in the case of the Florentine Bartolommeo, the son of a barber, who is said to be only just five but speaks, in front of the Pope, the luminous orations supplied to him by our most learned Brother Ambrogio from memory to the great admiration of all.

A Florentine man from Bruni's generation of humanists, Traversari is taking the message, which had earlier been promoted by Salutati, of expanding Latin language into domestic settings. By taking a young boy and teaching him Latin orations, Traversari is able to prove that it *can* be done. The fact that a young child is able to learn proficient Latin offers further evidence for Latin as a native language, spoken by people from all walks of life. However, we can gather from the performance element described that the child is being taught to recite orations by heart, rather than gaining a comprehensive knowledge of Latin language. It is clear that Biondo sees the situations of Traversari's student and Curio the illiterate orator as contrasting. It is interesting to note humanist scholars and interested people undertaking what amounts to linguistic experiments at Florence, where the question of language was hotly debated.[219] Traversari here may be contributing to a slightly different debate, one on education. His experiment may be more directed to discover whether or not such a low-born boy and such a young child could be educated in Latin at all.

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[218] Nogara (1927) 122

[219] Ambrogio Traversari was based at the Camaldolese order at Santa Maria degli Angeli at Florence and the papacy at this time, as discussed above, was also at Florence, allowing the Pope to enjoy Bartolommeo's orations.

Biondo digresses (IV.) to refer to Bruni's *Historiae urbis florentinae* and surmises that Bruni will have to translate famous speeches in the *volgare*. Indeed, Biondo refers to the translations of Dante and Boccaccio that have been made, but his description of the process of translation is telling:

> *quae cum grammaticis astricto regulis sermone scripta videmus, in latinitatem dicimus esse conversa.*[220]

> When we see the *Commedia* and the stories of Boccaccio having been written with grammatical rules in tightly bound language, we say that they have been translated into Latin.

So for Biondo, translations from the vernacular to Latin do not involve changing the language so much as changing the organisation of the material, by making it conform to grammatical restraints. A cursory examination of some translations from this time and region reveals why Biondo had this idea about language. The translations Traversari made from Greek to Latin of the lives of the Church Fathers were then translated at his monastery near Florence into the *volgare*. These translations into the *volgare* have a vocabulary that is so heavily based on Latin that it leaves a modern reader confused initially as to which language the document is in.[221] Particularly in areas where the Latin language had a strong claim, the vocabulary of the *volgare* was lacking, for example, in theological issues and scholastic theories. The *volgare* therefore had to borrow from Latin to make up the deficit in vocabulary.[222] This meant that words from Latin were transferred directly into the *volgare* and inserted into an already related language. Biondo, never having had to learn his own *volgare* in the same framework and terms as for Latin, assumes that Latin has rules and the *volgare* does not. Therefore, translation involves rewriting the text in a tightly controlled, regulated form of language.

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[220] Nogara (1927) 118

[221] Salvatore Frigerio, *Ambrogio Traversari: un monaco e un monastero nell'umanesimo fiorentino* (Siena: Edizioni Camaldoli/Alsaba 1988), see especially pages 47-49 for examples of Greek-Latin, Latin-*Volgare* translations.

[222] See Sarah Stever Gravelle "The Latin-Vernacular Question and Humanist Theory of Language and Culture" *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol 49 No 3 (Jul. – Sep 1988) 367-386 for discussions of later humanist perceptions of the positions of the *volgare* and Latin, and especially the relative *copia* of the Latin language.

Biondo also shows an astute awareness of the role of the mother and the home in language acquisition (XII) when he cites the example of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi. It is this vision of Latin being spoken in the home that contributes to the picture of Latin as a native language:

> *sed magni interest quos quisque audiat quotidie domi, quibuscum loquatur a puero, quemadmodum patres, paedagogi, matres etiam loquantur.*[223]

> But it is of very considerable importance who the child hears in his daily life at home, who he speaks with from childhood onwards, how his father, his teachers and his mother speaks.

His conclusion, in section XIV., that ancient eloquence was a result of the combination of home life and education reveals an awareness of the lack of Latin-speaking domestic environments. The contemporary prospective-Latin-user has no chance to develop Latin in home life, only in educational domains. Traversari's experiment with the young boy speaking Latin orations he has learned at home in the monastery therefore holds a special interest for Biondo and his fellow Latin users (see section XI.).

Biondo gives evidence for the view that the contemporary dialects came from the Latin language. In section XXII., Biondo discusses the conservative nature of change in the speech of women, and the fact that their speech sounds closer to Latin. From this the reader can infer that the contemporary dialects came from Latin at some stage. Later on Biondo makes this idea of language change more explicit, by explaining (XXV.) that everybody spoke Latin until the Roman Empire was sacked by the Vandals and the Goths. He felt these languages corrupted Latin and created the *volgare*. This explanation of the evolution of the local dialects ensures that they cannot benefit from any supposed authority garnered from their antiquity. It also answers the question: if the ancients did not speak a form of *volgare*, then where did it come from? However, describing the *volgare* as a form of Latin corrupted by barbarian speech is a value judgment that implies the *volgare* is un-Italian, un-Roman and un-patriotic. To prove that the *volgare* was descended from barbarian speech is to devalue it and tarnish the reputation it had been gaining as a result of vernacular authors like Dante.

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[223] Nogara (1927) 117
[223] Nogara (1927) 122-23

It is interesting to note how frequently Biondo uses examples from his contemporary world to make his point about the ancient world relevant and comprehensible for his contemporary readers. This makes his arguments more convincing. Biondo was concerned with reconstructing the world of Ancient Rome in every aspect, from the physical buildings of Rome, to the language spoken on the street. Biondo applied situations from his own experience back onto the ancient world to help explain what was occurring to his audience. His opponents projected the situation of their own time back onto the ancient world as an interpretive framework that allowed them to use evidence in support of a view of the ancient world as similar to their own time. Those who endorse the monolingual view of Ancient Rome seem already concerned with reviving the ancient world in other ways, for example, physically, in terms of buildings and inscriptions in Biondo's work on the topography of Rome. The other side, who believe that there were two languages in the ancient world, is less concerned with historical realities and more concerned with using the tools of the ancient world in their immediate environment.

Biondo's use of appropriate works from the ancient world gives him an advantage in the debate over those who had not yet embraced them. This is particularly true of the newly discovered texts of Cicero's *Brutus* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. Biondo frequently makes reference to ideas in Cicero's *Brutus*, which became available during Biondo's lifetime in 1421. Most of the evidence Biondo pulls from the *Brutus* comes from a large section in the middle of the text (LVIII-LXXV). Many of his arguments are lifted directly from the *Brutus*: Curio the orator without any formal education, who learned his excellent Latin in the home (LVIII 210, LXIX-LX 213-216); Cornelia the mother who gave eloquence to the Gracchi (LVIII 211); the tainting of Latin by an accent from those who spent time outside of Rome (LXXIV 258-259); and Caesar and his attempts to refine the Latin spoken in domestic, informal domains (LXXII-LXXV 253, 258, 261).[224] Biondo has also been reading Quintilian (rediscovered 1418). These works inform his accounts of the ancient world and give his arguments an authority his opponents struggle to find in their common sense approach.

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[224] There is an article waiting to be written on Julius Caesar and Reversing Language Shift in the *Brutus*. *Cicero Brutus and Orator* (London: William Heinemann/Harvard University Press 1971) 216-221, 224-227; *hunc facilem et cotidianum novisse sermonem num pro relicto est habendum?* "yet are we therefore to look upon mastery of the easy and familiar speech of daily life as a thing that now may be neglected?" (253)

A generation gap is evident among the participants in the 1435 debate. Loschi and Bruni are the old order, the established men with established reputations. They both take the view that Latin was never a vernacular language and are supported by Cencio de Rustici. The opposing team, as it were, includes two relative newcomers to the Curia, Flavio Biondo and Andrea Fiocchi, who are supported in their view by old-hand in the Curia, Poggio. The average age of the group arguing against Latin as a vernacular is 59, whereas the average age of Poggio's group is 44. The younger age of the participants arguing for Latin as a spoken language probably reflects a greater awareness of the ancient world due to greater access to a wider variety of texts. The discovery, for example, of the *Brutus* in 1421 occurred while Bruni and Loschi were in their early fifties and already working in humanist fields. By contrast, Flavio Biondo and Andrea Fiocchi were 29 and 20 respectively. Their younger age at the point of contact with this new information meant that they would have been able to adapt better and engage with the information it presented.[225] Poggio was a fluent and prolific Latin author in this period, and had been one of the most enthusiastic people recovering ancient texts and inscriptions. Poggio's access to the recovered works and his eagerness to study them may help explain why he found himself siding with the two younger humanists.

As two newcomers to the Curia, Biondo and Fiocchi might have been using this debate to make a name for themselves and establish a reputation of their own. Biondo in particular becomes a more visible figure after making public his views and his role in the debate in his first written treatise. Their challenge to the authority of their direct superior, Loschi, and their humanist role model, Bruni, perhaps would not have been so bold had they not also had the backing from Poggio. As a senior member of the curial staff, Poggio's views had more authority and more weight than those of two lately employed younger men. They could use Poggio's name to lend credibility to their arguments and could draw attention to their names and views. Biondo reports a real discussion and continues it, but it is no coincidence that Poggio was known for being outspoken and that he is

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[225] Cencio de Rustici was 31 when the *Brutus* was rediscovered, and a member of the generation who were able to assess the culture of Antiquity with the information. He had, however, been a member of the Curia a little longer than the two younger men and this may have affected his ideologies and perceptions of Latin as a language.

presented as being on the side of the younger two championing a radical view of Latin. Biondo acknowledges that he is striking out against the "opinions of his elders and betters."[226]

The real issue arising from Biondo's account of the debate is the literary nature of the Latin language. This is particularly pertinent to Bruni's arguments that it was impossible to believe that Latin had ever been a vernacular language. It is difficult, according to the experience of the audience and the participants in this debate, to speak Latin. It then seems logical that it must have been difficult in Antiquity too. Therefore, Latin is too difficult a language to be a spoken language, particularly among those who cannot afford an education. The idea of a native language and an understanding of the way in which a mother-tongue is acquired, without reference to the level of difficulty, is absent from the early part of the reported debate.

Biondo's treatise demonstrates an increasing awareness of language acquisition, especially the role played by the mother and the home life of a child. This concept of a native language helps explain why a difficult language like Latin was able to be spoken by all people in Ancient Rome, including those who had no access to education. Despite this understanding, Biondo still considers the major difference between Latin and the *volgare* to be that Latin has rules and grammar, and the *volgare* does not. Biondo works hard in his treatise to be persuasive because the opposing side of the debate is both more logical to an observer of the contemporary linguistic situation and is propounded by men with considerable mana in humanist spheres. His treatise makes a number of good points but the convoluted and difficult Latin style used makes the text inaccessible. The debate had to be restated in more readable Latin in order to reach a wider audience.

Leonardo Bruni

Leonardo Bruni's letter to Flavio Biondo on the Latin language, dated to 7 May 1435 and written in Latin,[227] opens directly into the question at hand. Bruni describes the debate as following:

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[226] Letter to Bruni I "nec me maiorum sententiae acquiescendo durum pervicacemque videri velim." Nogara (1927) 117

[227] Tavoni (1984) 216-221; Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, David Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts* Vol. 46. New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987, the letter appears 229-234.

Quaestio nostra in eo consistit, quod tu apud veteres unum eumdemque fuisse sermonem omnium putas, nec alium vulgarem, alium litteratum. Ego autem, ut nunc est, sic etiam tunc distinctam fuisse vulgarem linguam a litterata existimo.[228]

Our dispute is about the following: you believe that among the ancients everyone shared one and the same speech, and that there was no distinction between the vulgar and the literary language. I, however, hold that the situation was then as it is now: the vulgar tongue was distinct from the literary.[229]

Bruni then refines the time period under discussion to the lifetimes of Cicero and Terence. Bruni recaps Biondo's principal arguments that Latin was spoken by orators in the Senate, law courts, and assemblies and by actors in comedies and other plays. Bruni refutes this based on the evidence of ecclesiastical liturgy. He claims that contemporary audiences understand the mass even though they are illiterate and cannot speak Latin themselves. Bruni acknowledges that it is far easier to understand a foreign language than to speak it.

Bruni agrees that Latin was used in formal settings like the Senate and law courts. However, he points out that the orators in these cases were addressing educated men, who would have been familiar with Latin. In a more general assembly, orations were delivered to an audience which included both illiterate and literate men.[230] In this kind of mixed company, Bruni explains, the literate, Latinate men would have understood the orator's speech, whereas the rest, including the bakers and woolworkers, would have understood it as much as they might understand a mass.

Orators in the ancient world were reported to have delivered their speeches in a different form from that disseminated in written form. Bruni understands a great deal of refinement to take place between the delivery of a speech and the finished copy. He does not suggest a translation from volgare to Latin, but that the delivery might include the following process:

non quod diversum scriberent, sed quod ornatius et comptius id ipsum quod dixerant litteris mandabant, ut quaedam in concione dicta verbis forsan vulgatis et apertis et ad intelligentiam accomodatis...[231]

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[228] Tavoni (1984) 216
[229] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 229-230
[230] By literate we can assume that Bruni meant those literate in Latin as literacy in a volgare language would have been impossible.
[231] Tavoni (1984) 217

It is not that they wrote something different, but that the same thing they had spoken they put in literary form in a more elegant and embellished way, so that some things spoken in the assembly in vulgar terms, perhaps, or plain words accommodated to the understanding, might afterwards be read from a sparer and more polished text.[232]

The ability of ancient audiences to understand the words spoken in the plays they watched is also questioned. Bruni believes they came to watch the spectacle rather than to enjoy the dialogue. In support of this he cites the words associated with the theatre: audience members are called spectators rather than listeners, they are described as 'watching' rather than 'understanding'. Bruni also cites evidence that actors had to 'learn' their lines. Bruni understands this to mean that they had to learn lines off by heart but did not understand the language the lines were written in.

Bruni then expresses his utter disbelief that "wetnurses, shop girls and similar persons of mean degree… could acquire without the aid of masters what we can scarcely retain with so many teachers and so much practice."[233] Bruni reflects on the differences between the *volgare* and Latin, particularly the inflected endings and irregular forms. He emphasizes the complexity and subtleties that are so difficult to come to grips with as a student of the language. More ancient evidence is then cited which Bruni considers as support for his view, for example that Varro speculated on the etymology of certain Latin words based on how the country folk spoke. Bruni considers this as evidence that the country dwellers spoke a *volgare* rather than accented Latin.

Bruni then returns to answering Biondo's arguments. He considers the case of Curio, the orator who Cicero describes as speaking wonderful Latin but who was illiterate. Bruni is dismissive and suggests Cicero only mentioned it because it was so remarkable. For Bruni, Curio is the exception that proves the rule. He further adds that, if the assembly applauded an orator when he spoke a line in a pleasing metre, it was due to the presence of literate men in the audience. Furthermore, listeners may also be pleased by metre without understanding content. Returning to the subject of Curio, Bruni explains his proficiency with Latin as the result of his domestic situation, since his

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[232] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 231

[233] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 232; for Latin see Tavoni (1984) 218-219 (and also see the conclusion to this chapter for further discussion on this point).

slaves and parents were educated. Bruni then digresses onto the subject of Roman women and their manner of speech, and discusses how mothers and nurses assist children in their speech.

Bruni's letter is less a response to Biondo than a repetition and re-assertion of his original statements as recorded by Biondo. Bruni is, in his letter, so utterly convinced that Latin was not a vernacular language that he interprets evidence illogically to support his arguments. Bruni regards the ancient world as having been bilingual: with one language for the educated and a separate language for the uneducated.[234] Bruni suggests that Latin was acquired through theoretical training in Antiquity, as in his own time.[235] Mazzocco has suggested that Bruni was influenced in this by the linguistic conceptions of Dante, especially those outlined in Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.[236] I do not think that similarities between Bruni and Dante's idea of Ancient Rome necessarily reflect that Bruni has absorbed Dante's teachings - indeed there is much doubt that Bruni even had access to that work. Rather, Bruni and Dante lived in a more or less identical linguistic reality, which they then projected back onto Antiquity.

Bruni's argument that actors in ancient plays "learned" the plays but would not have understood the writings themselves is also faulty. Bruni confuses the idea of memorization with language comprehension.[237] It is difficult to believe that Bruni failed to realize that the actors would have had to "learn" the lines of a play in order to perform it. However, it is equally difficult to establish what Bruni's own experience of the theatre would have been. Perhaps his general lack of concern for the precise re-creation of the ancient world meant he failed to understand fully the nature of theatrical performing in Antiquity.

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[234] This point has been subject to scholarly query in recent decades, Tavoni argued that Bruni envisaged Ancient Rome with diglossia rather than two separate languages. I think Mazzocco (1993 199-208) is correct in his arguments against this point of view. Particularly compelling are the arguments drawn from the documents of the debate: if Bruni had been misunderstood by Biondo, why would he fail to correct this error in his letter? And why would Biondo risk misunderstanding Bruni if his views were unclear? (200-202)

[235] Mazzocco (1993) 22

[236] Mazzocco (1993) 23, 30, and 30 note 1. I also disagree with Mazzocco's suggestion (22 note 39) that Bruni was trying to mask his belief in bilingualism in Antiquity. This opinion must have been fairly explicit during the debate to allow Biondo to respond to it. For other criticism of Mazzocco see Deborah Parker's review in *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 48, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995) 619-621 and Gary P. Cestaro's review in *Speculum* Vol. 70, No. 4 (Oct., 1995) 941-943

[237] Noted by Mazzocco (1993) 20

Bruni also exaggerates the difference between the form of a speech given to the public and the form published to be read by the educated:

> *Praestantes igitur homines oratorem latine litterateque concionantem praeclare intelligebant, pistores vero et lanistae et huiusmodi turba sic intelligebant oratoris verba ut nunc intelligunt Missarum solemnia. Nam illud nos latere non debet, oratores ipsos aliter scripsisse orationes suas quam dixerant... non quod diversum scriberent, sed quod ornatius et comptius id ipsum quod dixerant scriberent, ut quaedam in concione dicta verbis forsan vulgatis et apertis et ad intelligentiam accomodatis, limatius postea contractiusque scripta legantur.[238]*

> The leading men would thus have understood very clearly the orator's harangues in literary Latin, but the bakers and woolworkers and persons of that sort would have so understood the orator's words as they now understand the Mass. It should not escape us that the orators themselves wrote their orations otherwise than as they spoke them… the same thing they had spoken they put in literary form in a more elegant and embellished way, so that some things spoken in the assembly in vulgar terms, perhaps, or plain words accommodated to the understanding, might afterwards be read from a sparer and more polished written text.[239]

This difference is represented as a complete translation for a different medium rather than the few refinements and touches of an editing process. Whereas Biondo's explanation used registers of language, Bruni asserts that there were two different languages.

What I find particularly interesting is that Bruni shows himself to be aware of some of the facts that sustain Reversing Language Shift theory, as sustained by Fishman's model:

> *Evangelia Missarumque solemnia latine ac litterate in audientium turba pronunciari. Intelligunt enim homines, licet inlitterati sint, nec tamen ipsi ita loquuntur nec illo modo loqui scirent, licet intelligant, propterea quod longe facilius est intelligere alienum sermonem quam proferre.[240]*

> …the Gospel and the Mass are recited to the mob of listeners in literary Latin. They understand it, although they are illiterate, yet they themselves do not speak so, nor in that way do they know how to speak it, although they understand it, since it is far easier to understand a foreign language than to speak it."[241]

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[238] Tavoni (1984) 217
[239] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 230-31
[240] Tavoni (1984) 216
[241] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 230

In this passage, language acquisition is conceived as an understanding-speaking-reading-writing progression, precisely as discussed by Fishman. Bruni places particular emphasis on the first two steps. He acknowledges that people may understand what they would struggle to say themselves. Note that Bruni uses the verb *profero*, rather than *loquor*, to imply proficiency with a foreign language, rather than rudimentary speaking ability. It seems that Bruni understood *loqui* to indicate speaking eloquently, whereas *proferre* was to speak in an ordinary way. Bruni also appears to recognize the vital role played by women and the domestic domain in language acquisition for children:

> *At domus ei contulit verborum copiam. Fateor: parentes enim litterati, et servi, matres etiam si elegantes sunt, adiuvare eloquentiam filiorum possunt.*[242]

> Admittedly, [Curio's] domestic life contributed to the size of his vocabulary. I admit it; educated parents and slaves, even mothers if they are well-bred, can aid the eloquence of their sons.[243]

Bruni recognizes that, for Curio, language acquisition of Latin was possible if the people in his home were educated in Latin. This is a tentative acknowledgment that Latin could be acquired without having to be taught in a school or similar teaching environment. However, Bruni seems to be so utterly oblivious to the concept of a native language that he fails to understand that the people of Ancient Rome never had to learn Latin in the way he and his contemporaries did. All of the humanists involved appear to consider Latin an extremely difficult language, and Bruni in particular cannot bring himself to imagine Latin as a native mother-tongue for someone, since actively mastering irregular forms, cases and other idiosyncrasies was a task that only few could undertake.

> *Tu ne quaeso...animum inducere potestas ut credatis nutrices et mulierculas et huismodi turbam ita tunc nasci, ut quae nos tot magistris, tanto usu vix tenemus, illi nullis magistris assequerentur*[244]

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[242] Tavoni (1984) 220
[243] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 234
[244] Tavoni (1984) 218-219

> Can you … really bring yourself to believe that wet nurses, shop girls and similar persons of mean degree, were in that age so formed by Nature that they could acquire without the aid of masters what we can scarcely retain with so many teachers and so much practice?[245]

Bruni reinforces this specific point by repeatedly stressing the image of women and their potential confusion over declining a noun, especially an irregular one. Bruni cannot comprehend how people who cannot afford an education, for example a women in unskilled employment, could ever become users of Latin, even in Antiquity.

> *Haec ne quaeso mulierculae et nutrices illiteratum dicent, quae nos literati vix dicere valemus?[246]*

> Tell me, are your shop girls and wet nurses and the illiterate vulgar going to say what we, the lettered, can scarcely manage to say?[247]

In this passage, the verb the Bruni uses is *dicere*, placing the emphasis on speaking Latin as the most difficult activity, rather than on reading or writing the language. Bruni makes it very clear that in his opinion, Latin could only ever have been the language of a highly educated elite.

Another element that stands out in the letter is Bruni's lack of direct responses to Biondo's arguments. This may derive from the weakness of his own arguments. His unwillingness, however, to engage with Biondo may also be his response to the complexity of the Latin that Biondo used in his treatise addressed to Bruni. It is possible that Bruni struggled to read Biondo's text and therefore to understand all the arguments in it. Rather than admit any inadequacy in his reading ability of Latin, Bruni responded by pronouncing his opinion as an inarguable fact. He may not have had much interest in the question under debate, but felt compelled to respond to a high profile piece by Biondo.[248]

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[245] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 232
[246] Tavoni (1984) 219
[247] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 233
[248] Mazzocco (1993) 31

As critics have noted, Bruni's response to Biondo's treatise is woeful in its inadequacy.[249] Far from delivering the powerful arguments that Biondo had anticipated, Bruni flounders, repeating his assertions about the difficulties of the Latin language, especially dwelling on the difficulties it would have presented to the uneducated and women. The only new argument that Bruni raises against the assertion that Latin was both the spoken and the written language of Roman Antiquity is the evidence of the theatre, and that, as we have seen, is flawed.

Poggio Bracciolini – the Historiae Convivialis

The *Tertiae Convivialis Historiae Disceptatio* is the third dialogue in a series written by Poggio. The speaker, Benedict of Arezzo, raises the question of whether or not the ancients spoke Latin or whether they had two languages, one spoken and one written.

> *Id est ut apertius loquar: utrum docti pariter et indocti, ab ipsaque infantia latino veluti materno domesticoque sermone loquerentur. An esset alius quispiam doctorum hominum prout nobis contingit, ac usu vulgari diversus.[250]*

> That is, to put it more clearly, the question of whether educated men and uneducated men alike spoke Latin from infancy[251] as their mother-tongue and language of use – or was there some other language used by learned men, a language different from that in common use, as happens with us today.

Benedict refers to the letter that Bruni wrote in reply to Biondo and to Antonio Loschi's support of Bruni.[252] He does not, however, refer to the letter that Biondo wrote aside from Bruni's response to it. In his writings, Poggio's own position is clear: that the ancients had only one language.

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[249] The inadequacy of this letter is widely recognised. Some particularly apt descriptions are found in Mazzocco (1993) "inconclusive and amateurish" (20); "brief, incoherent, ambiguous," "half-hearted reaffirmation of his position" (202).

[250] Riccardo Fubini, *Poggius Bracciolini Opera Omnia* Torino: Bottega d'Erasmo 1964 vol. I 52; this work has been edited and now appears in Tavoni (1984) 239-259

[251] Note that in Latin the word *infantia* also refers to a lack of eloquence, being tongue-tied. A lack of ability speaking Latin is therefore directly related to childhood in a metaphorical sense.

[252] Tavoni (1984) 239

Benedict reports that Poggio has explained that the concept of a mother-tongue, acquired in childhood, negates the difficulty of Latin, which is only perceived when learning as an adult.[253] Daily use allows men to pick up languages, including Latin, as seen in contemporary times in the Curia, where illiterate men are able to pick up Latin simply from exposure to it.

Poggio explains that, although addressed to Flavio Biondo, Bruni's letter was in fact aimed at himself, and that this was meant to provoke a response:

> *Leonardum quippe memini dixisse, mihi etiam se conscripsisse epistolam, quo me alliceret respondendum. Et certe is mihi animus semper fuit, ut aliquid contra suam sententiam scriberem, sed variae occupationes fuere hactenus impedimento.[254]*

> In fact I remember that Bruni said he had written the letter for me, with a view to provoking a response from me. And I always intended to write something opposing his view but up to now various occupations have prevented me from doing so.

Poggio explains that Latin is called Latin because it was the only language spoken by the Latins, just as German is called German because it is spoken by the Germans, French spoken by the French and so on:

> *Sed solam linguam Latinam legimus illorum vernaculum sermonem extitisse.[255]*

> But we read that only the Latin language existed as the spoken language of those men [the Latins].

The speech of the contemporary Romans, particularly contemporary Roman women, is referred to as preserving some (unusual) Latin words that have been lost elsewhere.[256] Furthermore, Poggio suggests that Latin has influenced a number of other languages such as the language spoken by Spaniards and the language at Cologne. This is evidence that the Roman colonists who settled in Spain and Germany spoke Latin.

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[253] Tavoni (1984) 239
[254] Fubini (1964) vol. I 52-53; Tavoni (1984) 240
[255] Fubini (1964) vol. I 53; Tavoni (1984) 241
[256] Fubini (1964) vol. I 53; Tavoni (1984) 241

At this point, Poggio launches into lengthy arguments based on the authority of ancient authors.[257] Poggio describes how in Quintilian, from a young age children must be surrounded by people who speak good Latin so that they might learn to speak good Latin themselves.[258] From Quintilian, Poggio also offers Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, as evidence for the benefits of good domestic Latin usage. If Latin had only been taught in schools, Poggio asks, why would Quintilian have emphasised the role of the home? Poggio acknowledges Quintilian's distinction between the educated people's use of Latin, in a more grammatically correct style, and the uneducated people's Latin.

Augustine, whose Latin sermons were taken down *verbatim* and circulated, is offered as further evidence that Latin was the spoken language understood by the whole congregation, including women.[259] Poggio then refers to Marcus Cato in the Senate, the works of Cicero,[260] Asconius Pedianus, Varro, Sallust, Livy,[261] Aulus Gellius, Juvenal, Aelius Lampridius, Aelius Spartianus, Flavius Vopiscus as authorities whose writings support his arguments. He also points out that to approve a speech given in Latin the populace must have been able to understand it, and for illiterate men to become great orators they must have spoken Latin at home rather than in schools.

The difference between polished language and less educated language can be noted in the modern *volgare*, Poggio explains, enlightening his reader on the concept of registers of language. Poggio is making the point that registers of language may be different, but they are not separate languages. Poggio spends considerable time discussing the different languages originally spoken at Rome and some of the differences in vocabulary.

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[257] Fubini (1964) vol. I 54ff; Tavoni (1984) 242ff

[258] Mazzocco (1993) 63-65: Poggio misinterprets Quintilian's statements in *Institutio* I, vii, 27 to mean that although all Romans spoke Latin, the speech of the learned, who spoke grammatical Latin, was determined by theory (*ratio*), whereas the uneducated speech was determined by usage (*consuetudo*). Quintilian's passage mentions confusion over usage, but makes no distinction between educated and uneducated. Poggio's reading is coloured by his adherence to Cicero, who, in the *Brutus* 258, argues that excellence in eloquence depended on sustaining perfect, grammatical Latin according to the theory.

[259] Fubini (1964) vol. I 55; Tavoni (1984) 244

[260] Poggio mentions various works by Cicero: *De lege agraria,* defence speech for Cornelius Balbus, *Pro Milone*, *De oratore, Brutus, De finibus*

[261] Poggio uses the same passage from Livy as de' Rustici but to prove the opposite point of view: *Ab urbe condita* I.27.7-10, and several other passages all related to military language use. Fubini (1964) vol. I 60; Tavoni (1984) 253-254

Poggio leaves his refutation of Bruni's arguments until the end of his work.[262] He challenges Bruni's argument that uneducated people in Antiquity understood Latin as in their own time uneducated people might understand a Mass by noting that, although not everyone understands the Mass, the same formula is repeated often, and in language similar to the *volgare*. Poggio questions Bruni's assertion that in ancient times the Senate and courts were populated by educated men. Poggio agrees that written versions of speeches were more polished than the originals but argues that they were nevertheless given in Latin. Finally Poggio uses Donatus' description of ancient theatre to quash Bruni's argument that actors did not know the language their lines were written in.

The first thing to strike any reader of Poggio's treatise is the overwhelming number of quotations from ancient authors. The sheer volume of quotation is enough to convince any reader, contemporary or modern. Poggio depicts himself as being learned and well-read, and his own opinion as being in accord with the evidence of the most well-known ancient authors. However, Poggio's continuous name-dropping and lengthy quotations give the impression that he is showing-off, and perhaps trying to out do Biondo's thorough use of Cicero's *Brutus*.

Poggio's presentation of the arguments gives us reason to suspect that he was consciously reworking Biondo's treatise. Poggio's opening paragraph for the *Tertiae Convivialis Historiae Disceptatio* introduces the topic to be discussed in language highly reminiscent of Biondo's work, but restates the question in more readable Latin. It is notable that Poggio never mentions Biondo's work by name:

> *Diutina me dubitatio tenuit: utrum priscis Romanis latina lingua (quam grammaticam vocamus) fuit omnium communis, an alia quaedam esset doctorum virorum, alia plebis et vulgi oratio; id est ut apertius loquar: utrum docti pariter et indocti ab ipsaque infantia latino veluti materno domesticoque sermone loquerentur, an esset alius quispiam doctorum hominum, prout nobis contigit, ac usu vulgari diversus.[263]*

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[262] Tavoni (1984) 259

[263] Fubini (1964) vol. I 52; Tavoni (1984) 239 (I have followed Tavoni's punctuation here).

> I have long wondered whether the Latin language (which we call the "lingua grammatica") was the common language of the ancient Romans – or whether there was one form of speech for learned men and another for the common people and the lower classes.
>
> That is, to put it more clearly, the question of whether educated men and uneducated men alike spoke Latin from infancy as their mother-tongue and language daily use – or was there some other language used by learned men, a language different from that in common use, as happens with us today.

Poggio's comment that he will restate the problem "more clearly" (*apertius*) is perhaps a tacit reference to the difficult Latin of Biondo's work. Poggio's statements are made in terms that clearly reflect Biondo's phrasing of the problem: *docti*/*indocti*. Biondo's statement of the same question reads:

> *...materno ne et passim apud rudem indoctamque multitudinem aetate nostra vulgate idiomate, an grammaticae artis usu, quod Latinam appellamus, instituto loquendi more Romani orare fuerint soliti.* [264]

> …as to whether the Romans were accustomed to use in their public addresses as the established method of speaking the mother tongue which is spoken generally among the illiterate and uneducated masses in our own times or the grammatical form which we call "Latin".

Poggio has neatly inverted the description of the language: Biondo talks about a grammatical language which we call Latin; whereas Poggio refers to the Latin language, which we call grammatical language. There is a change of emphasis from Latin as a grammatical construct, to Latin as a language like any other. Poggio's work, however, depends on Biondo's for more than word-play.

Poggio uses the majority of Biondo's arguments, even providing the same authorities from ancient authors in some cases, without any mention of Biondo. Like Biondo, Poggio argues that Latin was acquired with relative ease as a mother-tongue and that Latin words survive in the speech of contemporary Romans, and in particular among Roman women. Like Biondo, he illustrates the differences in registers of language by reference to contemporary speakers in the *volgare.* In addition, Poggio uses some of the same examples, such as Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, and the example from Livy of the commander's shouted comments in Latin at Fidenae.[265] One

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[264] Nogara (1927) 116
[265] This began with de' Rustici in the original debate discussed by Biondo.

original argument he introduced to the 1435 discussion was that contemporary Romanian dialects were derived from Latin as well as Italian, French and Spanish dialects.[266]

Another argument reminiscent of Biondo is Poggio's reference, in the mouth of Benedict, to illiterate people picking up Latin to a passable degree at the Curia. Obviously, Poggio could have been drawing on his personal experience in providing this evidence:

> *Cur enim quod nunc doctrina percipitur, non tunc quotidiano usu percipi potuit? cum noverimus in curia romana permultos qui, licet rudes literarum, tamen assidua consuetudine tum loquendi, tum caeteros audiendi, et intelligerent alios, et ipsi haud absurde latine loquerentur.[267]*

> For what reason is there why what is nowadays learned in schools, could not then have been absorbed by daily use? Particularly since we know that there are very many men in the Roman Curia who, although virtually illiterate, have come to understand what people say to them and to speak Latin passably well themselves – and have done this simply by constantly speaking and listening to others.

This is evidence that at the Curia Latin must have been a spoken language-in-use. In spite of the shrinking domains for spoken Latin, it was obviously still in sufficient use at the Curia to instil a *haud absurde* working-knowledge in the uneducated members of the papal staff. Some Latin speaking ability must therefore have been required of all staff. Even the specifically uneducated members of staff have been able to learn Latin; this is surely a response to Bruni's disbelief that wet-nurses and shopgirls could ever master Latin.

Poggio is responding to the letter of Bruni, as he states in the opening address. He is participating in the written record of the debate and consciously responding to the most recent work completed on this topic. Apart from mentioning that Bruni composed his letter to Flavio Biondo and the possible sly reference to Biondo's Latin style, Poggio does not mention the original written treatise. Did Poggio consider Bruni's letter more authoritative? Or was Bruni's more famous name attached to this work in order to gain a larger reading audience for it? Or alternatively, did Poggio, as I have suggested with regard to Bruni, find Biondo's text simply too difficult to engage with effectively? It is certain that, in spite of the bulk of quotations from ancient authors, Poggio makes

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[266] Mazzocco (1993) 61

[267] Fubini (1964) vol. I 52; Tavoni (1984) 239 I have followed Tavoni's punctuation.

better use of the evidence and the arguments on behalf of Latin as a vernacular language than Biondo before him. Poggio's career was built on the quality of his Latin prose, and this treatise is more readable and therefore more accessible for the Latinate.[268]

Leon Battista Alberti - Preface to Book 3: On Good Management

Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) was born to a Florentine banking family, in exile in Genoa, but he lived mainly at Rome and Florence. He worked within the Roman Curia from 1432 and traveled with Pope Eugenius IV to Florence.[269] Alberti made contributions to mathematics and geometry, writing on perspective in visual representations, architecture, geography, cryptography and cartography. In 1435, Alberti's association with Brunelleschi was bearing fruit in his book on painter's perspective. Later in life he went on to write the first Italian grammar book.[270]

Alberti began to write the *Della famiglia* (On the Family) in the *volgare* at Rome, 1432, and completed it in 1435-44.[271] Alberti writes in his autobiography that he completed the first three books before 1434.[272] This surely excludes the preface to his third book, as it deals with a debate well attested as occurring in 1435 and the following years.[273] In spite of coming chronologically

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[268] Poggio's own belief in Latin as a spoken language for more than just educated and formal domains is illustrated by his later work the *Facetiae*. See Appendix I.

[269] Guido Guarino, *The Albertis of Florence: Leon Battista Alberti's Della Famiglia* New Jersey: Bucknell University Press 1971 11; he was an abbreviator, Grafton (2002) 7

[270] Giuseppe Patota, ed., *Grammatichetta e altri scritti sul volgare* (Rome: Salerno Editrice 1996).

[271] Guido Guarino (1971) especially 159-162; Leon Battista Alberti, *I libri della famiglia: a cura di Ruggiero Romano e Alberto Tenenti* (Torino: G. Einaudi 1969), hereafter 'Romano, Tenenti', especially 185-189; It does not seem to have been a particularly popular work judging by the limited number of manuscripts surviving and late date of printing (1843), however the third book seems to have circulated widely, Grafton (2002) 152, 175

[272] Grafton (2002) 154-155; R. Neu Watkins, "L.B. Alberti in the Mirror: An Interpretation of the *Vita* with a New Translation" *Italian Quarterly* 30 (1989) 8 Alberti's unfamiliarity with Tuscan due to his absence from Florence meant that the work required revisions before it was finished. Alberti may not have even visited Florence before 1434 (Mazzocco (1993) 90 note 48).

[273] Alberti's role in the debate is summarised briefly in Grafton (2002) 168-170; Grafton reads Alberti's beliefs with regard to the origin of Tuscan differently from myself (Grafton 170), where Grafton describes how Alberti believed the Tuscan language was corrupted by barbarian languages. In fact, I believe, Alberti, like Biondo before him, refers to the creation of the Tuscan language out of the corruption of Latin. The point may be ambiguous, as Alberti refers simply to "*la nostra… lingua*" (Romano, Tenenti (1969) 186).

before Poggio's work, Alberti's preface to the third book of the *Della Famiglia* has been included in my discussion at this stage because it marks a turning point in the argument.[274]

The preface to the third book of *Della famiglia* opens with a reported lament for the loss of the Latin language by an older relative of Alberti.[275] The loss of Latin, it is said, is a greater misfortune for the Italians than the loss of the Roman Empire. Alberti notes that, in spite of being used by everyone, the knowledge of Latin was lost with the Empire. This was because the invading peoples corrupted the local language with their own.

In this context, Alberti makes it clear that Latin was the spoken language of the ancients. He refutes carefully the arguments made by some of his fellow humanists that a separate form of spoken language had existed for the ancients. He mentions in particular the argument that women could not have learned the difficult cases of Latin and therefore Latin could not have been the language of everyday life (see Bruni's letter above). Alberti refutes this by asking whether texts in any other language, even those relating to domestic matters, had been discovered from Antiquity. Further, he offers the example of foreigners trying to speak Italian dialects in his own time. They too struggle with the cases and tenses of Italian vernaculars as it is not their own language, whereas native speakers have no trouble. Similarly, Romans would have been native speakers of Latin. Women, Alberti points out, rather than struggling with irregular nouns, were very much praised in Antiquity for the purity of their Latin speech. Finally, he raises the examples of those orators who had no education, but who were able to make public speeches.

At this point in his argument, Alberti shifts the topic slightly. He asserts that ancient authors wrote in order to be understood by their fellow citizens. Accordingly, they wrote in the predominant language of the street. He adds that he is concerned that learned men of his own time, that is, those who use Latin in their writing, may criticise him for writing in the *volgare*. But Alberti maintains that, like the ancients, he is merely writing in a language that may be understood by more people:

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[274] Mazzocco makes a similar choice in Mazzocco (1993) 82-105

[275] "Poemio del libro terzo a Francesco d'Altobianco Alberti: Economicus"; Romano, Tenenti (1969) especially 185-189; also available in Tavoni (1984) 222-225

scrivendo in modo che ciascuno m'intenda, prima cerco giovare a molti che piacere a pochi [276]

…by writing so that everyone may understand me, rather than to please just a few.[277]

What this suggests is that Alberti praises the Latin language, but praises the *volgare* as well for being a potentially equal medium. He then makes comments about the state of the Latin language and is disparaging about the abilities of his critics to use Latin. Alberti mentions that he has tried to replicate the style of Xenophon in order to enhance the enjoyment of his readers.

What is obvious in this context is that Alberti used some examples of arguments taken from earlier works on the debate. These included a description of the contemporary *volgare* originating out of a debasement of Latin by invading barbarian languages; the argument that Latin as a native language would not appear difficult to its speakers - even those lacking in education; the uncorrupted speech of women in both Roman and contemporary times; and finally that the existence of illiterate orators proved Latin was more than just a literary language. He has obviously read the debate among his fellow humanists and it is their arguments that he refutes or endorses. Yet, he chose to discuss this question in the *volgare*. He is moving a debate that has hitherto taken place in the Latin domains into the vernacular.

Of particular importance here is the fact that Alberti embraces the notion that Latin was once a living, breathing language but offers no evidence of wishing to revive it as such. He thinks it incredible that it could have disappeared so quickly in Late Antiquity, especially considering it survived as a written medium; even so, he recognises that people are no longer native speakers of Latin. Alberti is also able to note the difficulty of speaking any language that is not a native language for the individual. He uses the example of foreigners speaking Italian dialects to make a stronger argument.

As opposed to the other participants in the debate, Alberti is the first to show an awareness of the complexity of contemporary Italian dialects, including the fact that cases, tenses and varying forms have survived. With this, he foils the arguments that seem strongest in the earlier debates

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[276] Romano, Tenenti (1969) 187
[277] Guido Guarino (1971) 161

amongst those in favour of Latin as an educated language in Antiquity and not a spoken language, namely that Latin was difficult, especially for women and the labouring classes. Alberti's seemingly obvious assertion that contemporary Italian dialects could also be difficult is the rejoinder missing from earlier treatises. His example of the foreigner struggling to use forms and tenses is one his readers could draw on from their own experience. It also helps to dispel Biondo's notion that Latin has rules and grammar and the *volgare* does not. [278]

In his discussion of the different areas of written language in the ancient world, Alberti points to the domestic domain, the letters to wives, children and servants. These are indentified as the most telling indicators that Latin was not just an elite, written language of Roman Antiquity, but also the spoken language of everyone. Although the domestic domain is viewed in modern theory as a final haven, used to determine how threatened a language is, Alberti used it to prove the strength of Latin in Antiquity. Like Biondo, Alberti recognises the dialects' development out of Latin in the wake of a string of invasions by people speaking other languages. But Alberti is the first to recognise the prolonged nature of this process, arising out of a need for Barbarian peoples and Latin-speaking natives to communicate.[279]

Alberti makes some interesting comments which are illustrative of the position of Latin and the state of RLS efforts to revive Latin as a spoken language. He defends his use of the *volgare* against critics by saying:

> *A me par assai di presso dire quel ch'io voglio, e in modo ch'io sono pur inteso, ove questi biasimatori in quella antica sanno se non tacere, e in questa moderna sanno se non biasimare chi non tace. ...Né posso io patire che a molti dispiaccia quello che pur usano, e pur lodino quello che né intendono, né in sé curano d'intendere.[280]*

> I like to express myself in precise terms and be understood. But these complainers can do nothing but remain silent in the ancient language, while in our own they can only damn those who do not remain silent. ...I

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[278] In this sense, Alberti lays the foundation for his move towards the production of the first grammar book for the Tuscan dialect by borrowing the form from Latin, and by borrowing vocabulary from Latin as well: *Regole della lingua fiorentina* (c. 1450): Stever Gravelle (1988) 381

[279] Mazzocco (1993) 83-83

[280] Romano, Tenenti (1969) 188; Tavoni (1984) 224-225

cannot bear the fact that many criticize Italian, the language they nevertheless use, and praise Latin but make no attempt to use it and do not understand it when used by others.[281]

In this passage, Alberti gets to the heart of the matter. Reversing Language Shift attempts must fail for Latin in the fifteenth century because people are so reluctant to use the language in spoken domains. Alberti's reference to silence may be interpreted as referring to written domains. I think it must encompass the spoken form of the language as well, especially where Alberti refers to proponents of Latin failing to understand the language when it is used by others. The inherent hypocrisy of praising Latin and condemning the *volgare* while continuing to use the volgare in preference to Latin, presumably exclusively in the case of spoken domains, is a problem indeed for those seeking to re-establish Latin.

Guido Guarino sees the preface to the third book as a defence of Alberti's writing in Italian over Latin.[282] Alberti's argument is that the Latin language gained nobility from the fact that many wonderful texts were written in it. Although a new language, Italian has the potential to be just as noble, providing that serious and important works are composed in Italian.[283] Alberti states that the ancients used Latin because they wanted to be understood by as many people as possible. This is his justification for writing in Italian; he too wishes to be understood by as many people as possible. Alberti was competent in Latin and wrote several works in that language.[284] His preference for Italian can be gathered from his activity translating his own work, *De pictura* into Italian. This was a great deal more useful to the painters for whom it was intended, as they were largely ignorant of Latin.[285] Certain politics of language choice among his contemporaries obviously were at play. Intellectual activity took place largely among the elite, in Latin. Alberti may have been on the outside of the cultural elite circles. He does not seem to have been included in the debate at the Curia. His rank as abbreviator, a lower position in the hierarchy, or his illegitimate birth may have barred his inclusion or advancement in social circles.[286] This position just outside the high profile humanist circles at this time allows him to comment on their activity

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[281] Guido Guarino (1971) 161
[282] Guido Guarino (1971) 15
[283] Guido Guarino (1971) 15
[284] Guido Guarino (1971) 16
[285] Guido Guarino (1971) 16
[286] Grafton (2002) for an introduction to Alberti's life, see 3-9, 14, 18-29

with a new perspective. Although he anticipates censure, his status as an outsider gives him the freedom to choose the language in which to write.[287]

Alberti's concern for what is useful to the greater number of people is evident throughout this work. As such, it is no surprise that, for him, the benefits of reaching as many people as possible outweighed the benefits of writing in the literary language. By choosing the *volgare*, Alberti intends to open up the debate to more people, including those not literate in Latin.[288] Rather than taking away from the *volgare*, by establishing that Latin was the spoken language of Antiquity, he offered the contemporary *volgare* huge potential. It too could grow and establish itself as Latin had done before it.

> *E sia quanto dicono quella antica apresso di tutte le genti piena d'autorità, solo perché in essa molti dotti scrissero, simile certo sarà la nostra s'e' dotti la vorranno molto con suo studio e vigilie essere elimata e polita.*[289]

> Let us grant that because of the many learned authors who used it this ancient language has as much authority among all peoples as they say. Ours will gain it too if learned men choose to make it elegant and polished through their efforts and studies.[290]

Conclusions

The debate in 1435 was both a continuation of and a new direction from the issues encapsulated in Bruni's earlier *Dialogus*. Bruni is the only participant who embodies this continuity. Bruni becomes the Salutati figure for the 1435 debate. He was the established authority - the *sapiens* - that the younger humanists both looked up to and wished to challenge. Salutati's concern with promoting spoken Latin interaction was translated into a debate about whether Latin was ever a spoken language. For those labouring in the Latin language and trying to revive its use, this debate

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[287] When in 1440-41, Alberti tried to organise a vernacular poetry competition at Florence, Bruni used his power and influence to cause the public competition to fail. All the entrants were declared far from as eloquent as the ancient Latin works that had inspired them, sparking a quarrel between Bruni and Alberti. Of the ten judges elected to judge the competition some familiar names arise: Biondo, Poggio, Fiocchi, and de' Rustici. (Grafton (2002) 171-174; Mazzocco (1993) 91-94)

[288] He takes a less patriotic, more pan-Italian approach to the question of language: Mazzocco (1993) 90, 98

[289] Romano, Tenenti (1969) 188; Tavoni (1984) 225

[290] Guido Guarino (1971) 161

from 1435 and the following years was crucial. But the outcome was just as important to the 'other side,' represented by figures like Alberti who were promoting the use of the *volgare*. The collision of the papal Curia and its employees, who use Latin in their daily activities, and Bruni's Florence, were the circumstances that brought about the debate.

Flavio Biondo opened the debate to a wider audience than the Curia when he addressed his treatise to Leonardo Bruni. In many ways, this was the definitive document of the debate, recording the arguments from each side and putting forward a convincing, and ultimately victorious, position. Bruni's response was weak and was recognized as such by Alberti and Poggio, who wrote follow-up documents. Bruni failed to be convincing, and although the debate seems to continue, the views published after his are unanimous in their support for Biondo's view of Latin as the sole language of Roman Antiquity. Biondo views Latin as distinct from the *volgare* in his own time because of its stringent grammatical rules and structures, which he perceives the *volgare* to lack. This view is corrected by Alberti's observation of foreigners learning dialects of the *volgare* and their struggle to grasp the 'grammar' of the language. Once the contemporary dialects are understood as native languages, the way is clear to understand Latin as a native language.

One idea to emerge from a comparative study of these documents is that in fifteenth century Florence, language was gendered. Women, as a general rule, were not educated in Latin. As a result they did not speak in Latin, but in the vernacular.[291] Women were excluded from the main domains where Latin was employed: the church, intellectual literature and politics. Men operated in these Latin domains, women operated in vernacular domains, such as the market and the home. Humanists confronted with ancient references to women, not only capable of speaking Latin but well regarded for their Latin, found it easier to locate Latin-speaking in the home because of their own experience of language domains. In other words, if women were recorded as speaking Latin in Ancient Rome, then truly everyone must have spoken Latin in all domains. The role that the

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[291] This same situation had clearly existed even in Dante's time; he explains his focus on the vernacular by saying:

> *ad modum loquendi, remissus est modus et humilis, quia locutio vulgaris in qua et muliercule communicant*
> the style is unstudied and humble, since it is in vernacular speech in which even women talk

Simon Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence* London: Cambridge University Press 2005 4, 4 note 12 *Ep.* XIII, X, 31.

mother and the domestic domain play in language acquisition is gradually recognised by the debate.[292]

One result of this realisation was an implicit threat to the privileged status of contemporary Latin users. Bruni addressed this underlying threat:

> *Tu ne quaeso, Flavi, cum sis vir doctus ac litteris expolitus, vel alii, qui tecum sentient, animum inducere potestis ut credatis nutrices et mulierculas et huiusmodi turbam ita tunc nasci, ut quae nos tot magistris, tanto usu vix tenemus, illi nullis magistris assequerentur, ut eo modo loquerentur, quemadmodum hi qui latine litterateque loquuntur…?[293]*

> Can you, Flavio, a learned and cultivated man, can those others who take your side, really bring yourselves to believe that wetnurses, shopgirls and similar persons of mean degree, were in that age so formed by Nature that they could acquire without the aid of masters what we can scarcely retain with so many teachers and so much practice? Do you really believe they spoke just like the men who spoke literary Latin…?[294]

Bruni's disbelief in female ability with language is palpable. Note his emphasis on the difficult action of speaking Latin (*loquerentur*; *loquuntur*).

It was not just the idea of women speaking Latin that Bruni found threatening. His response to the debate reveals equally the threat posed by people of lower social standing becoming users of Latin, which would have diminished the status of Bruni and other intellectuals. Knowledge of Latin was a tool of social distinction. Biondo's example of the remote contemporary peasant vernaculars preserving classical Latin vocabulary embodied the challenge posed by the suggestion that uneducated Romans spoke Latin.[295] Bruni used Latin to define himself against the uneducated and reinforce his own uniqueness and privileged position. Furthermore, ability with Latin and attractive style in written Latin were used to define each individual against the other members of

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[292] For Biondo (Nogara (1927) section XII.), Bruni (Tavoni (1984) 220-221), Poggio (Fubini (1964) vol. I, 53-54), Alberti (Romano, Tenenti (1969) 186-187). Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, is an example drawn from Cicero by nearly all of the participants examined here: Biondo (Nogara (1927) section XII. 122-123), Bruni (Tavoni (1984) 220), Poggio (Fubini (1964) vol. I 54)

[293] Tavoni (1984) 218-219

[294] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 232

[295] Nogara (1927) 127-128 In fact, Biondo explicitly says "speaking peasants and women" (*loquentes rusticos mulieresque*)

the restricted intellectual circle that the humanists operated in. Latin became a determiner in the hierarchy and relative fame in the competitive world of humanist scholarship. It is the self-reflective nature of this debate that has been largely overlooked. Proving that Ancient Rome was monolingual had repercussions for the fifteenth century reality. It may have devalued the exclusivity of Latin language skills from which humanists derived not only their reputations, but also their income.

The hierarchy within the intellectual circles taking part in this debate was determined not just by their ability with Latin, but by their access to ancient sources. Evidence and quotations were weapons against the ignorance of peers. Ancient sources might be used not necessarily as evidence in the immediate debate, but as evidence of the breadth of knowledge of the ancient authors of the interlocutor. This might explain some of the appropriations of ancient evidence where the context in the ancient text varies greatly from the Renaissance use of the same argument.[296] Biondo, as discussed above, plunders Cicero's *Brutus* for his treatise, a work that had been made available relatively recently. In response, Poggio quotes every available ancient author that he can lay his hands on. This competition between rival papal employees and humanist scholars is the subtext to any esoteric discourse they participate in.

Which side of the debate would have seemed more obviously correct to a student or humanist elsewhere in Europe reading Biondo and Bruni's accounts of the debate about Latin language? Everywhere in Europe the spoken language varied from region to region, while Latin remained a universal, seemingly-eternal written language.[297] Even had the reader looked as far as the Byzantine Empire in the East, the same split between spoken and written languages would have been in evidence as spoken Greek was already divorced from the Ancient Greek used in written records. Additionally, because the treatise was written in Latin, any person reading it would have completed a Latin education of their own and struggled first hand with the difficulty of the language. Any reader would therefore know the difficulty of speaking Latin, rather than reading it. Therefore, to the majority it might appear obvious that Latin could never have been a spoken

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[296] For a recent study of the ancient works in their ancient contexts see John Dugan, *Making A New Man: Ciceronian Self-Fashioning in the Rhetorical Works* (New York: Oxford University Press 2005) especially for the *Brutus* 172-250, *Orator* 251-332

[297] For a brief summary of the European-wide challenge of Latin by vernaculars see Mazzocco (1993) 9

language and that a *volgare* must have existed for ancient Romans, just as it did in the contemporary linguistic reality. Biondo had to work much harder to prove his point as it was not immediately obvious to his audience. The support of the figure of Poggio in this debate might suggest that the view being propounded was a popular one, but Poggio was well known for taking up provocative views, for example his stance that the clergy were greedy in *De avaritia*. Biondo is on the back foot, defending an unpopular and provocative position as a relatively unknown humanist, whereas the authority of his opponents is derived from their personal status within the Curia, their employment as practitioners of Latin and in the cases of Loschi and Bruni, their age and experience.

Humanists were attempting to recreate spoken Latin from the page of literary works and had witnessed Dante create a literary language from the mouths of his contemporaries. This would explain why they found it so difficult to speak in Latin. Recreating literary Latin as conversational Latin would have been an impossibly high standard to set for learners of Latin as a second-language.[298] Standards for spoken Latin were perhaps set too high. Reflecting back on the preceding period to the debate, Salutati believed that speaking in Latin was entirely possible (see my chapter on Bruni's *Dialogi*), but perhaps his standards of spoken Latin were not as high as those of the later humanists. Coming from a medieval educational context, where Latin would have been a normal means of communication in the classroom and beyond, Salutati saw room for improvement in achieving a more classical Latin, but for those further along the path to Ciceronianism, this small improvement on Medieval Latin was not enough. It was better to stay silent than to reveal a substandard ability with spoken Latin once the standard for Latin had been raised so high. To attribute the decline of Latin entirely, or even mostly, to the rise of Ciceronianism, is still, in my view, incorrect.[299] The Latin language was already in decline when Salutati recognized the threatened status of Latin, possibly a status only applicable at that moment to Florence. Ciceronianism belonged to a later period. The fate of Latin as a language-in-use had already been sealed.

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[298] See Poggio's attempts in the *Facetiae* to use Latin as a language of jokes and casual banter.
[299] Peter Burke, "*Heu Domine, Adsunt Turcae*": a Sketch for a Social History of Post-Medieval Latin" in *The Art of Conversation* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press 1993) 34-65

The basic issue in RLS terms was that if no one spoke Latin in the ancient world, what was the point in trying to revive it as a spoken language? Speaking Latin would be unnatural if the Romans themselves had not spoken Latin. Those who believed in a bilingual Ancient Rome believed as a consequence that that Cicero and other ancient orators had translated their works out of the ancient *vulgare* into Latin. Thus, contemporary translators of Dante and other vernacular authors into Latin might be regarded as repeating a believed activity of Romans. That is, just like Cicero himself, they were taking *volgare* compositions and putting them into Latin as a permanent record, and as a means of sharing information across time and space. The outcome for the Latin language, if it were proved to have been a literary, educated language in all times, would have been an even further loss of domains and potential domains in the RLS effort.

In terms of the fight for RLS for the Latin language, the debate about Latin's status in Antiquity has a number of implications. There was no point in trying to revive spoken Latin domains if the Romans themselves had not spoken Latin informally. Therefore, when it was established that Latin was the language of the forum, those seeking to use Latin in the fifteenth century were able to cite an ancient precedent for their behaviour and for the possibility of Latin interaction. Establishing Latin as the spoken language of Romans living in Antiquity also allowed for the contemporary *volgare* to grow and aspire to a status akin to Latin, as recognized especially by Alberti. Ultimately it was the latter outcome of the debate begun in 1435 that was the most influential. The problem became how to create a more effective linguistic medium out of competing vernaculars as attempts to save the Latin language from extinction eventually failed.

Chapter IV: Bruni's *Vita di Dante* and the Question of Bruni's Attitude to Language Choice

Leonardo Bruni has been our case study in determining a prominent, if not dominant, attitude to the competition between the vernacular and Latin. In this chapter, his contacts with the figure of Dante in both the vernacular and Latin domains will be used to illustrate further the ongoing dialogue about language and Reversing Language Shift for Latin in fifteenth century Florence.

Bruni and the Figure of Dante

Bruni's attitude to Dante was complex. In his Latin work the *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum*, Bruni allowed Dante's abilities and worth to be debated by the characters. In Part I of the *Dialogus*, he depicted Niccolo Niccoli as hostile towards the 'cult' of Dante and particularly critical of both Dante's use of the vernacular and his Latin style. However, while Dante is the object of a diatribe by Niccolo Niccoli in the first half, he is the object of a redemptive retraction from the same speaker in the second. In the context of the *Dialogus* the content of Niccoli's speeches is less important than the form and the language in which they are spoken.

Bruni himself seems to have been pragmatic in his attitude to Dante.[300] He was critical of Dante when judging him by humanist standards; however, he praised Dante, especially where he was promoting Florence. Bruni's pragmatic approach is revealed in his literary productions. He discusses Dante as a historical figure, but is silent on his literary achievements.[301] In this chapter, I argue that Bruni's attitude to Dante mirrors his practical approach to the competition between Latin and the vernacular. When it was a matter of Bruni's humanist reputation, he employed Latin for written productions. In his later *Vita di Dante*, however, he felt confident employing the *volgare*. It should be noted that this biography was written in 1436 in the vernacular, while Bruni

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[300] I am not so pessimistic as to agree with Irving Elgar Miller, "The History of the Vernacular in Education. I" *The Elementary School Teacher* Vol. 4 No. 6 (Feb., 1904) 431, who states, erroneously I believe, that as a Humanist scholar, Bruni only lectured and wrote on Dante for money!

[301] Noted by Simon Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence* (London: Cambridge University Press 2005) 112, 113

was Chancellor of Florence, and have been viewed by Bruni as part of his civic role.[302] This date is important as it places the work in the wider context of the debate of 1435, discussed in the previous chapter. The choice of language is also important. In this chapter, I will use the *Vita* to explore closely Bruni's attitude to the competition between the two languages.

Bruni's Vita di Dante

Considering Bruni's participation in Latin-only domains and his self-promotion as a Latinist, his choice of the *volgare* for this major work is notable. Bruni seems to have found using Latin challenging and demanding. His persona in the *Dialogus* is unwilling to engage in Latin conversation and, three decades later in the 1435 debate, he argued it was impossible for Latin to have ever been a spoken language. In the opening to the *Vita*, Bruni contrasts his work with Latin with the light and easy *volgare*, which he reads for relaxation. In the *Vita* he states:

> *Avendo in questi giorni posto fine a un' opera assai lunga, mi venne appetito di volere, per ristoro dello affaticato ingegno, leggere alcuna cosa volgare.*[303]

> After my having finished recently a rather long work, there came to me the desire to read something in the vernacular tongue, in order to refresh my tired mind.[304]

This is significant as it illustrates Bruni's attitude to the Latin language. Bruni may make Latin look easy, but it was a struggle for him. Whether intentionally constructed or not, if Latin was understood to be difficult, Bruni gained status from his well-known use of Latin in other domains. His success in using Latin could be admired more if the idea of its difficulty was reinforced. Bruni's intention may have been closer to a justification of his use of the *volgare*. If it were accepted that reading and writing in the vernacular was a recreational exercise, Bruni's status as an intellectual was both safe-guarded and reinforced. To put it another way, Bruni was a well-known

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[302] Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, David Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*. Vol. 46. (New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 1987) translation 85-95, commentary on the text 59-62; Hans Baron, *Leonardo Bruni Aretino Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften* (Berlin: Verlag und Druck von B.G.Teubner 1969) 50-63 for the Tuscan text; Thompson and Nagel *The Three Crowns of Florence* (New York: Harper&Row 1972) translation 57-73

[303] Baron (1969) 50

[304] Thompson and Nagel (1972) 57, see also Bruni's letter to Flavio Biondo in Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 229-234; Tavoni (1984) 197

user of Latin, his choice of the *volgare* for recreation indirectly reinforces his argument about the difficulty of Latin. Latin belongs to the serious domains from which he drew status. His status would have been increased if he made explicit that using the *volgare* was an activity the educated man undertook only when his mind was too tired for the more intellectual Latin. Accordingly, I do not agree with Miller, who suggests that this passage is an apology for the use of the vernacular, and that this implies an attitude of condescension or contempt for the *volgare*.[305] Bruni reminds the reader that he normally is a user of Latin, and therefore belongs to the intellectual elite, and that it takes relatively little effort to write in the *volgare*.

Bruni's choice of the *volgare* for this work has implications for the intended audience. Composition in the Tuscan dialect automatically limited his audience to those who spoke and read Tuscan; a domestic audience in Florence and the surrounding area, and a scattering of people in other regions of Italy.[306] Bruni was a humanist with a reputation that extended beyond Florence, but this work was unlikely to impact on that reputation as it could not be read internationally, as his Latin works could. It seems unlikely that, as Gilson suggests, it was a work designed to promote Florence externally.[307] The choice of subject matter and language work against this argument. Mazzocco suggests that Bruni was concerned to promote the Florentine vernacular as an example for other Italians.[308] Dante's works would have done this far more effectively than Bruni's biography of Dante. I believe that it is more likely that Bruni was trying to curry favour locally in his position as Chancellor. The biography is stated as being a supplement to that of Boccaccio. As such, it was a text intended for domestic consumption attached to Florentines' own copies of Dante's works. Its subject matter also seems particularly designed for Florentine tastes. The effect of Bruni's composition in the *volgare* is to open up his literary productions to those who are ignorant of Latin language and thereby extend his reputation to those of his fellow citizens who cannot read Latin.

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[305] Miller (1904) 431

[306] Although, largely thanks to Dante *et al*, Tuscan was becoming more widely read on the Italian peninsula.

[307] Gilson (2005) 123-124. Likewise I agree with Gilson that the suggestion that Bruni's choice of language is a form of defiance to the Medici regime seems highly unlikely given Bruni's dependence on their favour in continuing his position at Florence.

[308] Angelo Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories in Dante and the Humanists* (Leiden, New York, Koln: E.J. Brill 1993) 31

There were a number of factors supporting Bruni's choice of the vernacular. One element that relates to language choice is linguistic propriety. Bruni was engaging with an author and a work already in the vernacular domain. As such, it was appropriate that his life be discussed in the same language. Dante had placed himself squarely in the domain of vernacular writing, where the majority of his fans were also located. Furthermore, Bruni was writing in direct response to the biography of Boccaccio.[309] Boccaccio's biography had been written in the *volgare* and consequently Bruni's response is also composed in that language. So he writes:

> *Ricordando le cose leggieri e tascendo le gravi. Io adunque mi posi in cuore per mio spasso scrivere di nuovo la vita di Dante con maggior notizia delle cose estimabili.[310]*

> The frivolous little things are remembered and concerning serious ones there is only silence. I then proposed for my recreation to write the life of Dante anew, with greater notice given to more valuable things.[311]

On the other hand, the fact that a sense of linguistic propriety did determine language choice can also be seen in Salutati's practice of translating Dante's verses into Latin when he wished to quote them in the context of his Latin writings.[312] Within the context of the *volgare* Bruni's biography can be seen to be a conscious correction of Boccaccio, whose biography Bruni felt to be frivolous and focused too heavily on Dante's personal life.[313] Accordingly, his correction is directed at the

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[309] Bruni himself states this intention: "*Nè questo faccio per derogare al Boccaccio, ma perchè lo scriver mio sia quasi in supplimento allo scrivere di lui.*" "I do not do this to detract from Boccaccio, but in order as it were that may writings should supplement his." Baron (1969) 51; Thompson and Nagel (1972) 58. Gilson notes that criticism of Boccaccio's version informs much of Bruni's biography (Gilson (2005) 115). "Life of Dante" Giuseppe Mazzotta in Rachel Jacoff, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Dante* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993 3 notes that Bruni's biography was very influential and contributed to doubts about the "literal trustworthiness" of Boccaccio's version. Note the article Lorenzo Bartoli *Bruni e Boccaccio biografi di Dante: appunti filologici* http://www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/bartoli111403.html (15.09.05) which argues that Bruni read Boccaccio's second version (of three) of his biography of Dante.

[310] Baron (1969) 51

[311] Thompson and Nagel (1972) 58

[312] See Introduction.

[313] Bruni places Dante in the context of Florentine intellectual and political life, "Life of Dante" Giuseppe Mazzotta in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante* edt Rachel Jacoff Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993 4; "Dante and Florence" John M. Najemy in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante* edt Rachel Jacoff Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993 80-99 looks at Dante in the context of contemporary political Florence and the political happenings of his lifetime.

original readers of Boccaccio's work; the original was in the *volgare*, and so is the correction. We should also remember that Bruni had experience of classical biographies, since he had translated some of Plutarch's work.[314] As such, he also aimed to elevate Dante to the status of a classical figure by writing his biography within the framework of a classical biography. A consequence of this strategy was also the elevation of the vernacular to the domain normally reserved for Latin authors and Latin language.

In the biography, Bruni mentions the stereotype of a Latin-user in order to discredit it on several occasions. Dante's education in *studi liberali* is particularly emphasised, but Bruni reports that study did not prevent his participation in youthful activities (*ogni esercizio giovanile*).[315] After fighting for his city, Dante is described as returning to his studies, while remaining an active citizen by participating in civil conversation with his fellow citizens (*converse civilmente con li uomini*).[316] In Bruni's eyes, Latin is the language of study, but studying and reading Latin to the exclusion of other activities was anti-social and anti-civic behaviour. There was no such thing as a vernacular scholar, therefore all scholars read and wrote in Latin only.[317] The stereotype of a scholar in fifteenth century Florence was that of a withdrawn bachelor, reclusive, in solitude with his books and reading Latin.[318] In relation to this stereotype, the vernacular was the language of the active, city life, the politics and the streets, and therefore, the language of the good citizen.

In his *Vita di Dante*, Bruni holds up Dante as an example of the ideal scholar-citizen against the contemporary stereotype of the scholar-recluse. Even after going to war, Dante continued his studies and also his participation in civic life:

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[314] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 9; Ian Thomson, "Manuel Chrysoloras and the Early Italian Renaissance" *Greek Roman & Byzantine Studies* 7 (1966) 64-65

[315] Baron (1969) 52

[316] Baron (1969) 53

[317] Ong wrote that "to establish and maintain contact with academic and scientific thought pupils had to be able to read [Latin], write it, and think in it."(Walter J. Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology – Studies in the interaction of expression and culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1971) 114). See also 120ff, 134 where Latin represents the accumulated knowledge of mankind and is the language in which learning is encoded.

[318] See Salutati's comments in his speech in the *Dialogus* (Stefano Ugo Baldassarri, *Leonardo Bruni Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore 1994) 237-241). Leon Battista Alberti had a reputation as anti-social because he worked too hard, see his work *De commodis litterarum atque incommodis* in Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (USA: Harvard University Press 2002) 19-20, 31-32 n.1 345; See also Ong (1971) 120-21 for celibate academics at universities.

Dopo questa battaglia tornò Dante a casa e alli studi più che prima si diede; e niente di manco niente tralasciò delle conversazioni urbane e civili. E era cosa miracolosa, che, studiando continovamente, a niuna persona sarebbe paruto, che egli studiasse, per l'usanza lieta e conversazione giovanile. Nella qual cosa mi giova riprendere l'errore di molti ignoranti, i quali credono, niuno essere studiante, se non quelli, che si nascondono in solitudine ed in ozio; ed io non vidi mai niuno di questi camuffati e rimossi dalla conversazione delli uomini che sapesse tre lettere.[319]

After this battle, Dante returned home and gave himself over to studies even more than before. Nonetheless, he left aside nothing of cultural and civil affairs. It is a marvelous thing that although he was studying continuously, yet it would never have seemed to anyone that he studied, because of his pleasant habits and youthful conversation. On this point I am happy to correct the error of many ignorant people who believe that there is no student who does not hide himself away in solitude and leisure. I have never seen any one of those who are hidden away and removed from conversation with men who knew three languages.[320]

Dante is described as participating in a battle, demonstrating his courage; studying intensively, demonstrating his work ethic and commitment to bettering himself through knowledge; and also participating in the day-to-day civic affairs of his city, which included conversing with his fellow citizens. The reader must assume that Dante is just as comfortable conversing with his citizens, in the vernacular, as he is conversing with his books, in Latin. Bruni emphasises the point that students of language do not remove themselves from the company of others.[321] Time and again the image is repeated where Dante is the exception to the stereotype of the lone scholar. He does not close himself up but fulfills the ideal of the active citizen:

Non solamente a letteratura, ma a gli altri studi liberali si diede, niente lasciando addietro che appartenga a far l'uomo eccellente.[322]

He gave himself not only to literature but also to the other liberal studies, leaving nothing that pertains to the growth of an excellent man.[323]

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[319] Baron (1969) 53

[320] Thompson and Nagel (1972) 61

[321] Just which three languages (or *lettere*) Bruni refers to here is uncertain, is he being deliberately general, or he may simply mean Latin, Greek and the vernacular, and any of his readers could have understood that.

[322] Baron (1969) 52

[323] Thompson and Nagel (1972) 59

This is the same stereotype that Bruni had hoped to break through the character of Salutati in his earlier work, the *Dialogus*.[324] Salutati had wanted Latin to be moved from the classroom and the study into the dining room and the street.

Bruni constructs Dante in the *Vita di Dante* to appear like Bruni himself: a citizen-scholar. Bruni had made his reputation in Latin as a humanist scholar, with translations from the Greek, official letters and works like the *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum* and the *Laudatio florentinae urbis*. Dante, by contrast, was a virtuoso user of the vernacular, but was widely regarded as deficient with Latin in written domains. As Chancellor of Florence, Bruni wished to quash the stereotype of the scholar who locks himself away from public life. He himself needed to construct his own image as a scholar who was also capable of acting as Chancellor for Florence. Bruni wanted his reader to identify him with that famous and well-loved son of Florence. Dante was a learned user of the vernacular and Latin, and a good citizen as well. Dante had contributed literary works in both the vernacular and Latin; here Bruni adds his first major vernacular work to his established record in Latin. Bruni hopes to gain authority and popularity from identification with Dante. In addition, Bruni can praise Dante and add to his *auctoritas* while simultaneously adding to his own. For example, Bruni compares Dante's situation to that of Seneca, Aristotle, Cicero and Cato.[325] The discussion of poets draws on examples from the ancient world, such as Orpheus and Hesiod, and the more recent Christian tradition, for example Saint Francis.[326] This comparison with ancient authors is flattering for Dante, and through him, for Bruni. Finally, Bruni engages with the tradition of Dante on a personal level; he describes meeting his son and talking about Dante with him.[327] This brings the *Vita* to a close, and provides a final reinforcement of the connection between Bruni and Dante.

As a public figure and renowned scholar, Bruni puts all his weight in support of Dante. He reminds the reader of his own qualifications to assess Dante when he describes what it is to be a poet. Bruni claims that unless a person knows Greek (and it is implicit that he does), they cannot

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[324] Baldassarri (1994) 237-241
[325] Baron (1969) 54
[326] Baron (1969) 59 "*Beato Francesco*"
[327] Baron (1969) 62-63

know what a poet truly is.[328] This knowledge of Greek was a rare skill that Bruni did possess and he appears to have felt that it entitled him to be a literary critic. Knowledge of multiple languages granted Bruni the authority to pass judgment on appropriate uses of the various languages and language choices. Bruni gave his qualifications for judging Dante, and this gave credence to his approval of Dante for the reader. Bruni's references to Greek seem to be directed at highlighting his own intelligence and learning. Bruni's ability to translate Greek set him apart from other scholars.[329]

Dante was criticised by the character of Niccoli in Bruni's earlier work the *Dialogus* and presumably among some literate circles of Bruni's time for his lack of Latinity. Bruni acknowledged the existence of this criticism in the *Vita di Dante*, but chose to defend Dante. Nevertheless, in effect, Bruni was defending himself, by identifying himself with Dante. He was considerably kinder in the *Vita* as author than the character of Niccoli in the *Dialogus*. Bruni's language and tone are apologetic. In this regard, the *Vita di Dante* is almost constructed as a defence of Dante:

> *Ciascuna lingua ha sua perfezione e suo suono e suo parlare limato e scientifico; pur, chi mi domandasse, per che cagione Dante piuttosto elesse scrivere in vulgare che in latino e litterato stile, risponderei quello, che è la verità, cioè: che Dante conosceva sè medesimo molto più atto a questo stile volgare ed in rima che a quello latino e litterato. E certo molte cose sono dette da lui leggiadramente in questa rima volgare, che nè avrebbe potuto, nè avrebbe saputo dire in lingua latina ed in versi eroici. La prova sono L'*Egloghe *da lui fatte in versi esametri; le quali posto sieno belle, niente di manco molte ne abbiamo vedute vantaggiatamente scritte. E a dire il vero, la virtù di questo nostro poeta fu nella rima volgare, nella quale è eccellentissimo sopra ogni altro; ma in versi latini o in prosa non aggiugne appena a quelli che mezzanamente hanno scritto. La cagione di questo è, che il secolo suo era dato a dire in rima; e di gentilezza di dire in prosa o in versi*

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[328] Baron (1969) 60

[329] Thomson (1966) 64 note 3 gives a list of the students who acquired Greek under Chrysoloras at Florence and elsewhere: Guarino, Giacopo di Scarperia, Roberto Rossi, Niccolo Niccoli, Leonardo Bruni, Carlo Marsuppini, A. Traversari (?), Pier Paulo Vergerio, Uberto Decembrio. Poggio is described as having acquired some Greek but he was not a pupil *per se*. This list suggests another reason for Bruni's emphasis on his Greek learning. At the time of writing the *Vita* Bruni had recently become embroiled in the 1435 debate on the nature of the Latin language. No one of his opponents, save Poggio, had experience with Greek. Bruni may be adding to his overall credentials in the face of serious opposition in this separate debate.

latini niente intesero gli uomini di quel secolo, ma furono rozzi e grossi e senza perizia di lettere, dotti niente di meno in queste discipline al modo fratesco scolastico.[330]

Each language has its own perfection and its own sound, and its polished and learned diction. Yet if someone should ask me why Dante chose to write in the vernacular rather than in Latin and the literate style, I would reply that the truth is right there, that is to say, that Dante knew himself much better adapted to this vernacular style in rhyme than to that Latin and literate style. Certainly he says many things graciously in this vulgar rhyme, which he could not have said and would not have known how to say in Latin and in heroic verses. The proof of this is his *Eclogues*, done in hexameters; agreed they are beautiful, but nonetheless we have seen many that are better written. To speak the truth, the virtue of our poet was in vernacular rhyme, in which he is more excellent than any other; but in Latin verse, or in prose, he barely comes up to the average. The reason for this is that his century was given to rhymed speaking; the men of that time understood nothing of speaking in prose, or in Latin verse, for they were coarse and heavy and unskilled in letters, even if nonetheless learned in these disciplines according to the monkish scholastic manner.[331]

Bruni is allowing space for both the vernacular and the Latin language from the opening line of this passage. He defends Dante's deficiency in Latinity by excusing him on multiple grounds, as follows: Dante himself knew that he had greater ability with the vernacular than with Latin, so preferred to use the vernacular[332]; Dante did not know how to say some things in Latin; Dante's Latin composition was average in contrast to other Latin authors; Dante's epoch valued composition in rhyme, something Latin is unsuited for; furthermore Dante's contemporaries had no competence in prose writing or Latin verse; and in Dante's lifetime, education (and therefore Latin) was led by the practices of the monks (not using Classical Latin), and had different standards from Bruni's time.

This catalogue of excuses on Dante's behalf does not apply to Bruni, who had seen great advances in literate education and practices in his own lifetime. Bruni's argument here might be construed as suggesting that Dante, writing in the fourteenth century could not have written in Latin *at that time*, that is, in Dante's life time. The reason for Dante's choice of the *volgare* was the situation *at that time* and in Bruni's own time the same choice would no longer be acceptable. Bruni here

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[330] Baron (1969) 61

[331] Thompson and Nagel (1972) 70-71 (emphasis added).

[332] Bruni explains that the proof of Dante's lack of ability with Latin was evident in Dante's Latin works, such as the *Eclogues*, which do not measure up to others of their genre.

constructs a slight difference between himself and Dante; Bruni could write Latin, whereas Dante had been criticised for being unable to do so.

The reluctance of the character of Bruni in the *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum* to speak in Latin may have influenced his need to defend Dante. Dante could use Latin, but his Latin was limited.[333] Bruni could speak Latin, but represents himself in the *Dialogus* as not doing it as well as he would have liked. His depiction of himself much earlier in the *Dialogus* included only one utterance, to explain that Niccoli was speaking for him:

> *Tum ego: <<Et te, inquam, Salutate, permagni facio, et Nicolaum item; quare me aequum iudicem habebis, quamvis non sum nescius, non magis Nicolai causam quam meam hoc sermone agi.>>[334]*

> Then I said: "Salutati, I have an equally high regard for you and Niccolò; so consider me a fair judge, although I am aware that my cause no less than Niccolò's is being pleaded in this discussion."[335]

At the same time, the act of writing the *Dialogus* proved his capability with the written language. At this point in the debate, Bruni refers to Niccoli's assertion that a thorough and competent Latin education is impossible in their times. He admits that Niccoli pleads his case as well as his own both because they are of the same generation and enjoyed the same educational advantages. The limited appearance of Bruni in his own dialogue could be for a number of reasons. I would speculate that he did not wish to represent himself as a more capable speaker of Latin than he really was. In addition, he may have wanted to distance himself from some of the views expressed in the *Dialogus* for the readers who did not understand that the classical dialogue was not necessarily a description of the true views of the characters or author. Whatever the motivation, Bruni was reluctant to depict himself speaking Latin authoritatively. On the other hand, Bruni did not believe in Latin as a spoken, vernacular language for the Romans, as he thought it too difficult for everybody to speak.[336] Bruni defended himself and his reluctant spoken Latin when he defended Dante from similar criticism.

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[333] Gilson notes that Bruni "okays" Dante's use of the vernacular as perfection is possible in both languages and Dante's choice is based on his ability with language: Gilson (2005) 121

[334] Eugenio Garin, *Prosatori latini del quattrocentro: a cura di Eugenio Garin*. Milano: R. Ricciardi, 1952 62

[335] Griffiths, Hankins, Thompson (1987) 70

[336] See Chapter II.

Bruni's defence of Dante's choice of the *volgare* for his works also raises the issue of vocabulary. Bruni suggests that Dante simply did not know how to say certain things in Latin that he could say in the *volgare*, and that this affected his choice of language for the *Commedia*. This is the opposite of what is generally accepted for this stage of development for the *volgare* - that Latin had a vast and abundant vocabulary and the *volgare* was more limited.[337] Contemporaries and later humanists seemed to accept that the *copia* of words available in Latin vastly exceeded those in the *volgare*.[338] So, why does Bruni say that Dante was unable to discuss his subject matter in Latin? What is Bruni trying to say about Dante and his language choice? This may be another argument about Dante's lack of Latinity and lack of requisite learning, or a fault of the times when Dante lived, that he did not have access to Latin education that reflected the *copia* of the language. It may be a contrast where he juxtaposes the *volgare* that is easier to use, with the more difficult Latin in order to appear more learned. After all, if Dante, who was regarded as a literary icon, could not use Latin, then the people who could use Latin, even in limited contexts, like Bruni, must truly have been learned.[339]

Dante is also described as amalgamating the knowledge available in ancient Latin texts, into his vernacular writing:

> *Perocchè per istudio di filosofia, teologia, astrologia, aritmetica, per lezione di storie, per revoluzione di molti e vari libri, vigilando e sudando nelli studi acquistò la scienza, la quale doveva ornare ed esplicare con li suoi versi.*[340]

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[337] Sarah Stever Gravelle "The Latin-Vernacular Question and Humanist Theory of Language and Culture" *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol 49 No 3 (Jul. – Sep 1988) 369-70

[338] Lorenzo Valla, Lorenzo de' Medici, Angelo Decembrio to name a few, see Stever Gravelle (1988) 382-383

[339] The further question of Dante's intended domain and audience is too big to be discussed in this work. As is the question of specifically what it was that Bruni considered Dante unable to describe in Latin? This must surely be a question of the subject matter of Dante's works. Christian topics should not have been a problem for the Latin vocabulary; Latin was a dominant presence in Church and religious domains. However, the characters in Dante's *Commedia* are contemporary celebrities and would normally have been discussed in the vernacular. Perhaps it is this content that Bruni assumed Dante could not discuss in Latin.

[340] Baron (1969) 60

> For he acquired the knowledge with which he was to adorn and exemplify in his verses through the attentive and laborious study of philosophy, theology, astrology, arithmetic, through the reading of history and through the turning over of many different books.[341]

These subjects would almost certainly have been written about and read by Dante in Latin. Yet Dante takes the knowledge from this reading and incorporates it into his vernacular writings, making it available to vernacular readers. This praise for Dante and his abilities with rhymed verse contains covert praise for the choice of language in relation to the genre he wrote in:

> *Queste belle cose, con gentilezza di rima esplicate, prendono la mente di ciascuno che legge, e molto più di quelli che più intendono.*[342]

> These fine things, set out with nobility of rhyme, take over the mind of the reader, and all the more so the more the readers understand.[343]

Language and genre become the means whereby the reader who speaks daily in the *volgare* acquires the lofty subject matter. He or she is no longer forced to expend their mental energy on deciphering the language itself.[344]

Bruni's definition of a poet is closely linked to the matter of linguistic choice and genre. He comments that a poet is someone who makes verse, irrespective of which language they write in and each language has its own perfection.[345] Buried in the description is an interesting remark about language itself:

> *Or questa è la verità certa e assoluta del nome e dell'effetto de'poeti. Lo scrivere in istile litterato o vulgare non ha a fare al fatto, nè altra differenza è, se non come scrivere in Greco od in latino.*[346]

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[341] Thompson and Nagel (1972) 69

[342] Baron (1969) 62

[343] Thompson and Nagel (1972) 72

[344] "It is rather a question of endorsing the legitimacy of the vernacular poetic tradition within certain contexts, while recognizing that Latin was required for higher subjects of a historical and philosophical nature." Gilson (2005) 122

[345] Baron (1969) 60

[346] Baron (1969) 61

…so we call poet only the man who composes works in verse and is supreme and most excellent in composing such works. Writing in literary or vernacular style has nothing to do with the case [of what constitutes poetry], any more than the difference between writing in Greek or in Latin.[347]

In light of Bruni's earlier praise of Dante for including information normally found in Latin texts in his *volgare* writing these remarks are hard to interpret. He distinguishes between the literary and the vernacular styles. But, he also recognises that poetry exists for both languages. Then in a sweeping statement, Bruni places the *volgare* on the same level as the two ancient languages. In so doing, he sets up Dante as a model poet, but seems to devalue himself and his own learning at the same time. This may simply represent Bruni's own view of languages as separated in their functions and domains. For Bruni, poetry was a genre the languages could all share, whereas other genres, such as dialogues, might more squarely belong in the Latin language.

Conclusions

Bruni's choice of language for his *Vita di Dante* and the attitude towards Latin and the vernacular which he displays have been the primary questions examined in this chapter. In the *Vita*, Bruni states that he reads and writes in the vernacular as a form of relaxation after using Latin for extended periods.[348] Bruni's contrast of Latin as hard-work and the *volgare* as relaxation gives him a certain prestige as a user of Latin; but it is unlikely that prestige alone guided his language choice. Bruni seems to have been influenced by linguistic propriety. This demanded that vernacular authors and their works be discussed in the vernacular; and Bruni confirms this fact when he asserts to be writing in response to the Tuscan biography of Boccaccio. Yet this notion of linguistic propriety is not entirely straight forward. This may be what led Salutati to translate lines of Dante into Latin for insertion into Latin texts, but Bruni had already discussed Dante in his Latin work the *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum*. However, in that case there was the issue of the non-Florentine audience and the argument of Salutati for the revival of spoken-Latin to influence language choice. Furthermore, other contributors had no hesitation in both translating Dante into Latin and writing commentaries on his works in Latin. On the other hand, the decision to write this work in Tuscan can also be read as an attempt to gain popularity with non-Latinate Florentines. By expanding his literary production into the vernacular written domain, Bruni would have increased

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[347] Thompson and Nagel (1972) 70
[348] Baron (1969) 49

his local audience. Before this audience, he exalted his civic qualities as well by discussing and aligning himself with the figure of Dante.

In Bruni's biography, Dante is treated as a serious author, despite his choice of the *volgare* for his compositions. In the opening of the *Vita di Dante*, Bruni stated his intention to correct the overly romantic biography of Boccaccio, which, by its content, had marginalized Dante as a writer of serious literature and diminished him as a citizen and political figure. Bruni's biography treats Dante as if he were a Latin author, like Cicero, Seneca or Cato. This treatment of Dante as an author of serious literature assumes that the *volgare* can be a serious literary language.

In the *Vita*, Bruni associated the *volgare* with social relationships and leisure time, or *otium*. These are also two factors that construct a good citizen. Accordingly, he constructed his image as that of a multilingual, educated man, capable of engaging with the social and political life that characterise him as a good Florentine citizen. He established himself as an authority in intellectual, civil, and political domains by using both Latin and the vernacular. Bruni also defines the domains where each language is appropriate. He accepted that rhyming epic poetry, like the *Commedia*, was a vernacular domain. RLS for Latin is not advocated in this domain. Rhetorical constructions, on the other hand, belong as a Latin language domain. Models are appropriated from Greek rhetoric and for Bruni the volgare cannot encroach on this space.[349]

In the context of Bruni's other productions, the decision to compose this biography in the *volgare* could be seen as confirmation of a progression in his attitude towards favouring the *volgare*.[350] The *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum*, written at least thirty years previously, featured the characters of Niccoli and Salutati articulating alternative views on the value of work written in the *volgare*. Bruni's own attitude to the choice between Latin and the vernacular seemed to fall on the side of Salutati; Salutati is the dominant figure in the dialogue, his use of spoken Latin is unparalleled, and his message in support of RLS for Latin is ultimately prevailing. In his Letter to Flavio Biondo as part of the 1435 debate, Bruni emphasized the difficulty of learning Latin, particularly

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[349] Rhetoric was a literary domain for the humanists. Political speeches were less necessary in the reality of fifteenth century than that of their classical models. Most public speaking, such as it was, would have been in the *volgare*, for example, the public lectures on Dante mentioned in the Introduction. However, Lenten sermons and funerary speeches.
[350] Mazzocco (1993) 88

for people without access to education, and therefore the impossibility of choosing Latin as an everyday language.[351] The *Vita di Dante,* come out in 1436, that is, a year after the debate had arisen over the nature of the Latin language; as such, it must be viewed in the context of Bruni's views in that debate, according to which Latin could never have been a spoken language of the common people.[352] Bruni's belief in a bilingual ancient Rome would have then demonstrated his own frustration with Latin as a spoken language and bestowed on the vernacular a certain authority through its supposed antiquity. Between these two documents, Bruni has been regarded as undergoing a progression from favouring Latin, although being limited in his personal use of it, to supporting the *volgare*.[353]

The situation is not as absolute as the above interpretation suggests. Bruni, as is mentioned briefly in the Introduction, translated the first tale of the fourth day of Boccaccio's *Decameron* into Latin.[354] This was an example of Bruni taking a vernacular work and placing it in the domain of Latin literature. The translation is listed by Baron as having been completed in 1438.[355] If Baron's dating is accurate, this work fits into the overall pattern of Bruni's interest in vernacular literature at this time, but would mark a departure from any progression towards preference for the *volgare* that might be assumed after he composed the *Vita di Dante* (1436) in the vernacular.[356]

Rather than seeing the *Vita* as Bruni embracing the progression towards the vernacular in literary domains, I think we must assess the *Vita* as Bruni's contribution to the general displacement of Latin at this time. It does not appear that Bruni held a clear preference for one language or another. Mazzocco says:

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[351] see Mirko Tavoni, *Latino, grammatica, volgare: storia di una questione umanistica* (Padova: Editrice Antenore 1984) 218-219

[352] Noted in passing by Mazzocco (1993) 32 note 11

[353] Mazzocco (1993) 32-33, 32 note 11, 206

[354] W. Leonard Grant, "European Vernacular Works in Latin Translation" *Studies in the Renaissance* Vol. 1 (1954) 122-123 *Leonrado Aretinus ex Boccacio vulari Tancredi filiae Sigismundae amorem in Guiscardum transtulit in Latinum*, which unfortunately does not appear to have been well researched. This tale is about Tancredi, the Prince of Salerno, who slays his daughter's lover and sends the young man's heart to her in a golden chalice.

[355] Baron (1969) 176 Baron titles the work *De duobus amantibus Girardo et Sigismunda.*

[356] Mazzocco (1993) 33, 88

> To be sure, unlike Dante, Bruni makes no explicit claim for the linguistic superiority of Latin. However, to have done so at the height of humanism would have been redundant.[357]

In fact, Bruni not only makes no claim for superiority of either language, but he also explicitly says that each have their own beauty.[358] In Bruni's linguistic reality there were two languages with separate functions. While Bruni may not have believed the *volgare* to be capable of fulfilling the roles and domains that Latin occupied, he did not deny the vernacular the opportunity of being a literary language, especially not when in the hands of a virtuoso like Dante. Bruni commits to Tuscan as a literary language when he himself publishes in it, but two years later he was found moving another vernacular work back into the Latin language domain. Thus, Bruni's dynamic attitude to the choice between Latin and the *volgare* as we have reconstructed it was perhaps typical for the time and did not represent a progression in any specific direction. This was a choice that Bruni, like his contemporaries, made everyday, when he opened his mouth or picked up his pen. Language choice was an ongoing issue, depending on diverse factors connected to intended domain, audience and the influence of linguistic propriety.

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[357] Mazzocco (1993) 37

[358] In the *Vita di Dante* (Baron (1969) 61): *Ciascuna lingua ha sua perfezione e suo suono e suo parlare limato e scientifico*. Mazzocco (1993) describes Bruni as torn between his allegiance to classicism and his love of the vernacular (36), and attributes his hesitancy in defence of and use of the vernacular to indicate his belief in Latin as superior (37). I think Bruni never had to make a choice between his love of Latin and classicism, and his involvement with the *volgare*, both languages were widely in use in his lifetime.

Some Final Conclusions

The reevaluation of the *Dialogus* placed the speaker Coluccio Salutati at the centre of the dialogue. This interpretation gives the most weight to his opening speech, in which he promotes the active use of spoken Latin to the younger humanists before him. His endorsement of Latin-speaking can be viewed, in Fishman's RLS terms, as a pro-RLS action for Latin. Salutati saw the dangers posed by the rising status of the Tuscan vernacular to the status and domination of Latin in its limited domains. His response to this identification of Latin as a threatened language was to promote its revival by endorsing Latin-speaking to a younger generation. This revival was targeted at a limited, elite, male minority, and did not stress the importance of mother-tongue transmission for a language that might be described as a father-tongue. The *Dialogus* also attempted to define the limits of the vernacular language to domains such as rhyming poetry, where authors like Dante had already excelled.

Another consequence of this challenge to Latin by the vernacular was the debate it generated about the Latin language itself. Approximately three decades after Salutati voiced his concerns in the *Dialogus*, the linguistic situation in Florence did not appear to have altered dramatically. The arrival of the papal Curia heralded the start of a debate on the linguistic situation of Ancient Rome. Participants argued whether Ancient Rome had been monolingual, or bilingual, with one language for speaking and one language for writing. The diglossia of early fifteenth century Florence led some humanists, including Leonardo Bruni, to the conclusion that Ancient Rome too must have been bilingual. The majority of authors who describe the debate, however, seem to agree that Latin was the spoken and written language for the Romans.

One consequence of the 1435 debate was picked up by Leon Battista Alberti, who, after establishing that Latin was the only language of Ancient Rome, described the potential this offered the contemporary vernacular. Rather than aiding the RLS effort for Latin, by providing pro-RLSers with an ancient model for their Latin-speaking, the debate proved that a spoken language had the potential to expand into written domains and develop a literature as Latin had once done. Critically, Alberti makes these assertions in his work the *Della Famiglia*, written in the vernacular. Therefore, non-Latinate audiences were not excluded from his discussion of the 1435 debate, nor from his vision for the *volgare*.

Bruni's own flexible attitude to language choice was examined in relation to his *Vita di Dante.* His views on any subject are typically elusive. He hides behind the characters of his literary productions: Niccolo Niccoli in the *Dialogus ad Petrum Histrum*; Dante in the *Vita di Dante*. Bruni only speaks for himself in his letter to Flavio Biondo, and it appears that he does not particularly wish to engage with his correspondent. He attempted to define the domains appropriate for each language and also to carve out a space for himself in the Florentine environment. Bruni's flexible approach is not surprising. His dynamic use of language means that there is no need to establish either a definite position or a progression of positions.

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