Teaching Ancient Greek with a Digital Textbook: Some Preliminary Observations

Beginning Greek textbooks have not just a function – the presentation of a standard body of material – but a context, namely the classroom environment (Aziz 2014). Each annual cohort of beginning students brings with it a unique collective of pedagogical needs and academic interests. The result is that while one class may respond well to the approach of a particular textbook, another may struggle. Finding a textbook that can accommodate a wide range of academic calendars can also be challenging. Some institutions teach language courses over two sixteen-week semesters, while others may have only two twelve-week semesters (as is my case). Many of today's popular Beginning Greek textbooks – written with the admirable aim of introducing nearly all possible forms and grammatical constructions – are formidable physical objects, numbering in the hundreds of pages. Such textbooks present material at a pace that is demanding even for the most expansive of calendars.

A flexible, online pedagogy offers an effective and powerful solution to these issues. Furthermore, a lively, state-of-the-art approach can make the study of Ancient Greek more appealing to students. This is important. According to a recent – and alarming – report from the Modern Language Association, undergraduate enrolment in Ancient Greek fell 35% from 2009 to 2013 (Goldberg et al. 2015). What would a course based upon computer and tablet resources look like? There are many forms. In this paper, I present one such program.

In 2012, Wilfred Major and his colleagues introduced a Digital Greek program at LSU, and began posting their lessons in pdf and PowerPoint formats for other instructors to use (dramata.com). This program offers a streamlined and efficient approach to Beginning Greek; for example, it overhauls and simplifies a student's introduction to vocabulary, morphology, and syntax (Major 2007 93-94).

The following year, I introduced a Digital Greek program at my campus. I began by editing and augmenting the LSU material to create digital lessons that accommodated my pedagogical approach and academic calendar. Each lesson included a video tutorial introducing the most important aspects of the lesson, making connections with previous material, and addressing anticipated questions. This not only allowed the lessons to become fluid and flexible, but provided the students greater autonomy in how they wished to engage and learn the material: text, video, or both.

In many ways, the students themselves became co-editors of the digital material. Student input – such as requests for further development of some content – was incorporated into lessons and assignments throughout the year. In the second year of the program, lessons, assignments, and videos were further edited and expanded to accommodate the new student cohort, whose academic ability and interests at times differed dramatically from that of the previous year.

In class, I discussed the material in class using an iPad and AppleTV, which allowed the iPad to be used wirelessly. Using a wireless tablet allowed for a flexible and lively presentation, as well as quick access to supplemental material available online – e.g. Perseus or the digital Loeb Classical Library – and third-party apps, such as *Barrington Atlas* or Smyth's *Greek Grammar.*

The program has been successful, and well received by students. Future developments of the program are now underway. Based upon these preliminary results, however, the fluid nature of an online pedagogy already seems to offer much promise for providing an adaptable, lively approach that can improve student engagement and increase enrolment.

Aziz, D. 2014. "A Coursebook is What it is because of what it has to do: An editor's

perspective," in Tomlinson, B. (ed.), *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*, Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 58-71.

Goldberg, D., D. Looney, and N. Lusin. 2015. *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education, Fall 2013*. Retrieved August 17, 2015 from http://www.mla.org/pdf/2013_enrollment_survey.pdf.

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