Testing Tools for Ancient Greek on Digital Platforms

The advent of Unicode has made the production, transmission and reproduction of writings in polytonic Greek easier and more stable than at any other time in human history. It is now incumbent upon scholars and teachers to capitalize on this technology at all levels and to integrate the use of this technology into students' experience with Greek from the very start. This presentation spotlights the creation and use of assessment tools available within course management systems as they can be used in Greek classes, primarily at the Beginning levels, but potentially at other levels as well.

Because polytonic Greek is now stable across multiple platforms, it is straightforward and indeed critical for students to learn to type Greek characters and accompanying diacritical marks. Automatically graded online quizzes are an excellent means for students to get the practice they need for this skill. Setting up a short-answer quiz where the students have to transliterate letters and type out words, phrases or short sentences is simple in course management systems. Moreover, as long as one is careful about forms and glosses, the same format can generate vocabulary quizzes. I personally prefer to set up these quizzes as no-fault quizzes, that is, students can take them as many times as they want until they reach a score that satisfies them (ideally a perfect score). With paper quizzes this is unwieldy but online it is quite easy.

Another type of quiz that is easy to set up and an improvement over paper quizzes is parsing. Both major databases of Greek texts (Perseus and TLG) incorporate parsing tools, so this is now standard for readers of online texts. An online quiz can have a consistent format: asked to parse a given (or in a text, highlighted) word, the student checks off each of the appropriate pieces of parsing information. The available options should be all those for which the

student is at the time responsible (with an increasing number of options as they advance through the course). This simple exercise has the advantages that (1) students must actively select the correct information (2) the grading can be very precise and (3) students can do a large volume of such exercises or quizzes. The creation and grading of quizzes this way on paper would be challenging at the least and probably unrealistic in practice.

A third category that is easier than perhaps expected is the reading comprehension question. Translation and comprehension do reach a point where discursive answers need to graded by a human, but a helpful amount of practice can be graded mechanically. Students can be required to choose correct translations for individual sentences or phrases, for example (choices varying by subject, object, tense, etc). Comprehension questions about pronouns are also quite effective. Asking to whom or what a highlighted pronoun refers requires comprehension (and consulting or memorizing a translation is not a very helpful substitute). Once again, creating and grading a large volume of such questions in paper format is far more difficult.

The format of short comprehension and parsing questions also highlights another pedagogical advantage to online quizzes: the ease of providing surplus answers. Students are conditioned, if nothing else by standardized tests, to select from 4-5 answers and encouraged to take guesses if they can reduce the number of reasonable options. In practice, students often become too comfortable in guessing any of the 4-5 answers. For training in precision, this is disastrous, but avoidable. Providing ten or more answers to a comprehension question online, for example, is not so difficult, but it discourages guessing. A large number of answers signals to a student that their odds of guessing the right answer is very low and that it is more efficient to seek out the correct answer than screen out incorrect ones. This makes the process more active.

On paper, especially in large numbers, such questions become unwieldy, but online these options do not pose comparable difficulty.

These examples are just an introduction to the possibilities, to be sure, and there are other ranges to consider. Online testing can be integrated in different ways into a traditional classroom, a flipped classroom, a hybrid course or a fully online course. Most importantly, perhaps, it makes the assessment and practice work in a class in ancient Greek congruent with the experience of students who increasingly have done coursework exclusively on digital platforms, and hence many of the language's mechanics will not seem disorientingly foreign.