Teaching Accelerated Greek and Latin in the Digital Age

in High School or College

Students today are more enthusiastic than ever about all elements of the ancient world, thanks to movies, video games, and other elements of popular culture that feature classical Greek and Latin themes. Yet worldwide we are still teaching the languages the same way we did two centuries and more ago. The traditional focus is on memorization and exclusivity through the elimination of the faint-hearted. In short, we are running headlong off a cliff and into irrelevancy. And we do this in a modern intellectual world that is burgeoning with rapid developments in pedagogy and digital tools, cognitive science, language acquisition studies, computer learning, and the like, all of which require a familiarity with language structure and meaning. We cannot keep requiring two years of college level study before students are able to read anything meaningful. Fewer and fewer of our students are aiming to become classicists and more are steering their lives elsewhere. In short, we are rarely training the next generation of Greek and Latin professors. We are instead opening up access to the marvels of the ancient world to the next generation of diverse people who will follow many vocational paths.

Thus, we have developed a methodology that accelerates the foundational learning in order to be inclusive of a much wider audience, including classicists, but also Christians, historians, political scientists, anthropologists, readers of literature, data systems engineers and programmers, and psychologists studying cognitive science. The key is to eliminate much of the tedious memorization by using a data-guided process in order to prioritize learning. Readily available frequency data tell us what vocabulary and what syntactic structures occur most often and therefore should be emphasized. The free Alpheios browser extension (https://alpheios.net/)

—the linguistic version of a pocket calculator—and similar tools instantly identify lemma and morphology, and link into a large lexicon for detailed semantic and valency information. Dependency syntax trees (see illustration, below; https://www.perseids.org/) illustrate the specific relationships between the words and structures, offering visual learners a whole new way to quite literally *see* languages. Thus, by using these digital tools, we can free up the limited study time available to each student in order to emphasize syntactic understanding and the vocabulary of the metalanguage that is used worldwide to describe language. Students can then interpret morphological and semantic information that is given them by the various pieces of software, instead of spending all their effort generating that information from memory. Students learn how to think their way through a language—*any* language. They learn how to articulate their questions and how to use standard reference works to find their answers. We should note that this approach is very similar to the method used by linguists worldwide to teach in one semester Sanskrit, Old Irish, Tocharian, and the like.
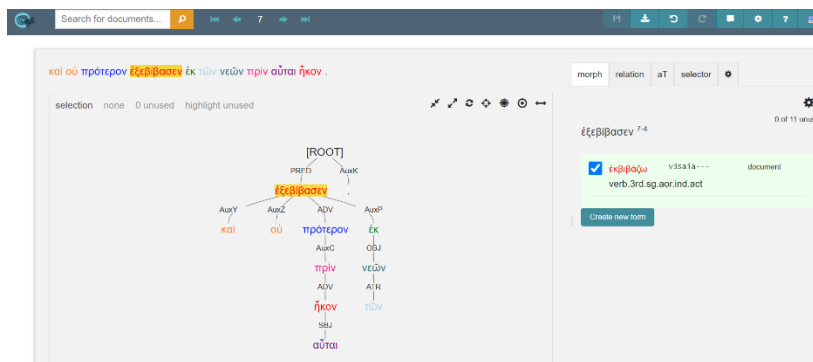
The goal of this 90-minute workshop is to use sample passages of Latin and Greek in order to offer high school and university teachers an immersion into this new pedagogy. We will have three presenters. Presenter A will make an initial 20–25-minute exploration of a 3 credit

hour, accelerated beginning Greek course that has already been taught. Presenter B, an undergraduate student, will speak for 10 minutes, comparing their learning experience in the traditional Latin sequences and the accelerated Greek class. Then the remaining hour will be spent working with the attendees as they use their own laptops to familiarize themselves with the software and its capabilities. Presenter C will be the software programmer who is also a language student, who will act as a facilitator and answer technical questions. By the time this workshop is finished the attendees will be able to envision a much quicker, alternative approach to ancient language pedagogy, and will be linked into the resources that allow them to employ this method in their own high school and college classrooms.