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# **Propelling Plutarch from the First to the Twenty-First Century**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how our grants MUTDG "A computer-aided reading course for Greek historians based on the biographical writings of Plutarch" and MURGS "Plutarch and Thucydides on the Rise of the Athenian Empire" have been utilised.

## **KEYWORDS**

Plutarch, e-learning, ancient languages.

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the authors of this paper was in Yangon, Myanmar (alias Rangoon, Burma) a few weeks ago. The heat was stifling and darkness was falling and he was lost. In desperation the assistance of a diminutive beggar child was sought. The child understood almost no English. I said " City Star Hotel, Maha Bandoola Gardens Street", but there was a Maha Bandoola Road, which ran in a different direction from Maha Bandoola Gardens Street. The child's experience of life did not bring him/her into contact with hotels, so it was a slow process getting from a street which only had signposts in Burmese script to my air-conditioned destination.

The absence of a road-map and ignorance of the language led to confusion. So it is with the historian, ancient or modern, seeking to teach, write or research his/her subject without the assistance of the relevant language and its grammar. Grammar has been neglected in many institutions of learning, from primary to tertiary, for some years now, but for the serious student of history, let alone the linguist or the anthropologist, it is the indispensable road-map.

With the decline in the intensive study of the major Classical languages (Greek, Latin and Hebrew) in Australian high schools, students have been greatly disadvantaged. They no longer have the means of reading the great literature and history of the past, as they were originally given. They are dependent upon translations into English and other languages. But these translations may be nuanced in various ways and may be biased, paraphrastic and interpretive.

In many ways the ancients said things better than we do and have much to teach us still. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how our grants MUTDG "A computer-aided reading course for Greek historians based on the biographical writings of Plutarch" and MURGS "Plutarch and Thucydides on the Rise of the Athenian Empire" have been utilised.

## THE PROBLEM

Classical Greek is one of the most heavily inflected of all Indo-European languages. For example, in a verb there are many different morphemes (meaningful segments). There is usually a prefix, then the verb root and finally an ending (suffix). An English word such as *pre-condition-ed* in a sentence like " He preconditioned me to accept his proposal" would give some idea of this process. *pre-* is the temporal prefix, *condition* is the root, conveying the primary meaning, and *-ed* the tense marker.

A Greek verb may have almost 60 different markers of this type, denoting such things as tense, mood, voice, person, number, case. The situation is compounded with irregular verbs, of which there are several hundred. Most commonly used verbs are irregular.

The process of *ablaut* does not help matters. "Ablaut" is the "substitution of one vowel for another in the body of a word to indicate a corresponding modification of a use or meaning, for example: *sink, sank, sunk* " (Webster New Encyclopedic Dictionary, Tabor House, 1971).

A Greek example of this is seen in the verb *stello* I send. Its simple past is *esteila* I sent. Its past complete (perfect) is *estalka*. Another candidate is *hiemi* I send forth. Its simple past is *heka* and its perfect passive participle *heimenos*.

A twelve-year old learner of Classical Greek may retain the "principal parts" of a Greek verb for many years, as they have been learnt orally, with drills and by uttering them in unison. Eye-gate is strengthened by ear-gate and mouth-gate, as means of ingesting and expressing useful factual knowledge. But at the present time only students at a handful of state and private high schools have the knowledge which is essential for correct analysis of historical texts.

To be able to translate the works of such great literary figures as Herodotus, Thucydides and Plutarch, writers whom the ancients did not find easy to understand, may be an almost impossible task for the student who has not studied the language at school. A student who has to read original unsimplified texts after only two semesters of learning the language would have to have:

- a) an edition of the text which would have grammatical and semantic comments at the level of the student.
- b) an Intermediate Greek Lexicon, as the huge, but still inadequate, Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie *Greek-English Lexicon* would overpower the tyro.
- c) an index of Greek irregular verb forms
- d) a standard Greek grammar.

- a) does not exist, as far as historical authors are concerned.
- b) does exist, but presupposes a fair bit of knowledge. It is sometimes lacking the specific word needed. For example the word for "curly hair" *oule* Plutarch *Cimon* 5.3 is not there. Plutarch has not been well-served by the lexica.
- c) does exist and can be found by the diligent student.
- d) exists but can be overwhelming for the beginner.

But the student who follows the Greek-through-reading might have to spend an inordinate amount of time looking up b), c) and d) and would not gain the desired fluency in reading.

## **THE SOLUTION**

Some preliminary work has been done by Macquarie researchers, pioneering the use of the computer to assist Greek reading. There has been work done on a parser, which enables a student to identify the roots as well as other salient features of the verb, noun or other inflected part of speech.

This was implemented successfully at the Macquarie Ancient Languages School 2001. This language school has been a distinctive feature of the University's pedagogical outreach to students and the community at large for more than 20 years. At the present time Ancient Greek is taught in five different modes: Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced Classical, Elementary and Advanced Koine (Post-classical/New Testament.) Other languages offered are Coptic, Hieroglyphics, Classical Arabic and Sanskrit.

In 2001 students were enabled to read a major section (unsimplified) from Thucydides on the Rise of the Athenian Empire. The present project aims to duplicate that success and produce an electronic version of the Greek text of Plutarch's *Life of Cimon, Aristides and Pericles*, together with relevant 5th century B.C. inscriptions. Considerable progress has been made on producing an analytical concordance of the *Life of Cimon*.

The material covered is Chapters 4.1 to 17.3 at the time of writing. Every word has been analysed, except certain usages of the definite article *the* and of the words *and* and *but*. The accentuation of a Greek word will vary according to its position in the sentence. The concordance takes into account this difference between the form in the text and the unmodified form as it occurs in the dictionary. Sometimes the phonetic shape of a Greek word, especially a verb, will give no clue to its meaning. Such a word is *ekekteto*. It is not a common word, and is given a separate place in the dictionary, with the instruction: see *ktaomai*. Having looked up this last word, the student will find that the problematic verb is "a pluperfect indicative middle 3rd person singular of *ktaomai* "found in Chapter 4.2 The meaning "he had acquired" is not given, but can easily be worked out from the other data.

Once all the data is analysed, it is planned to produce a fresh translation of the Plutarch text.

A highly innovative part of this project is that the material will be accessed through the Glossary function, which is part of every version of Microsoft Word (both Mac and PC). The student will be given the programme on a floppy disk and all he/she will need to do is to learn how to load it onto their system.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

In 2001 Fox was enlisted to teach Ancient Greek B (AHST 206)/Advanced Greek Documents (AHPG 808), a 2nd Half Year course, which may only be studied after successfully passing Greek A.

There are three components to this course:

35% Tutorial work, which involved weekly exercises from the textbooks (*Reading Greek - Text*, and *Reading Greek - Grammar, Vocabulary and Exercises*) 30% and vocabulary tests (5%)

30% Documentary Project- the translation and analysis of a historically significant Greek text.

35% An examination based on the material covered in the course.

Instead of the normal passages culled from *Reading Greek*, I set Plutarch's *Life of Cimon*, Chapters 4-5 and asked the students to translate any 60 consecutive lines, making grammatical and analytical comments as requested. A Greek text, analytical vocabulary and questionnaire were given to each student.

The results of this exercise were pleasing. All students successfully completed the exercise, with results ranging from 22.5 to 28/30 (75 to 93.3%). 9 out of a possible 11 students answered the questionnaires. The comments made by TE, KA, ZB and PH were particularly helpful, as they focussed on weaknesses, real and otherwise, in the analytical vocabulary. These corrections, where necessary, were included in the steadily expanding database. Comments mainly had to do with linguistic analysis- alphabetisation, inclusion of information about grammatical gender and the means of tracking down obscure forms. The vocabulary was much appreciated by the students, all of whom, from 2nd Year to Doctoral level, are beginners in the Classical language.

In January 2002, Fox was a tutor in Greek at the Macquarie Ancient Languages School. Considerable interest was expressed by the students in a class in which the Greek text of Plutarch's *Cimon* would be studied. This in fact took place from February to June. It was an evening class and took place at 4-6 p.m. to cater for members of the community. It was not examinable, except for postgraduates, one of whom distinguished himself. He is a Greek. Sometimes (modern) Greeks are the worst students of Ancient Greek, because they imagine that they know it all, as fluent speakers of the contemporary language. But this student was humble enough to submit himself to the regime of strict grammatical analysis. His improvement over the period of the course was dramatic and gratifying. The progress of the other students was steady and enthusiastic. We now have a body of advanced students of the language, who can utilise their skill in personal and formal postgraduate projects. Tuesday at 4 p.m has become a time for the reading of Ancient texts in both the Greek and Latin languages. Authors considered thus far are: Plutarch (*Life of Cimon*), Tertullian (a 2nd century A.D. Christian apologist (February to June 2002), Cicero's speech against Catiline and the Acts of the Apostles (July to November 2002).

Meanwhile the intention is to continue the compilation of the Analytical Vocabulary with a view to publication, as a document crucial to the understanding of the rise of the Athenian Empire in the 5th Century B.C.