

Introduction 0.1.2: Method of this course
Forms and functions in language: Morphology, Syntax

Despite the diverse interests and focuses of the brave souls who are poised to start this voyage, they all have one common purpose: learning to read Greek texts and understand them as accurately as possible. I use the maritime metaphor, a favorite of the ancient Greeks, because I am aware that I will often unwittingly steer the ship the wrong way. If that happens, I ask you to warn me so that we can all find our bearings. I promise that we will not be stranded or wrecked, as was Odysseus.

I start with a disclaimer. What I call "my" approach to teaching this language with which I fell in love over half a century ago (yes!) owes so much to so many textbooks and to so many people (my own teachers, my colleagues, and especially, my students) that recognizing that vast debt every step of the way would be utterly impossible. I borrow cheerfully from many excellent textbooks and grammar books as well as from a smattering of historical grammars and linguistic studies and everything else that seems useful. I try, whenever possible, to include examples and readings from ancient authors and from the Greek Bible, at first adapted and simplified, and later gradually approaching the original texts.

What is, then, different in the method, the path I follow? ("Method" comes from the Greek *methodos*, and this word is a compound of *hodos*, a path, a journey.) To describe it I must refer to the contrast between **form** and **function** in language. A simple biological parallel may serve as an introduction. If doctors studied only the anatomy of the human body (assuming that it could be studied exclusively) they would not be able to heal us. To cure us they need to understand the physiology of our bodies, the interrelated functions of systems, organs, cells and genes...

As we proceed along the lessons of this elementary course we will include the study of both forms and functions. The study of forms or parts of speech used to be called Morphology. It is the Anatomy of a language. The study of functions focuses on the way that parts of speech "stand in line" or are "ordered together" in the language. It is the Physiology of a language, its Syntax, a derivative of the Greek verb *syntassw* ("to order together.") Modern classroom textbooks for the study of the classical languages present forms and functions simultaneously, and so will I. What is different in this course is the greater emphasis I place on the syntax. You may be surprised, or even annoyed :-> at my insistence on the syntactical analysis of texts. Soon, I hope, you will agree that these strategies are useful.

The drills, the translation and composition exercises, and the quizzes linked to each lesson will help you master the forms. In the presentation of forms I exclude exceptions and omit the barrage of detail that students sometimes believe they have to memorize. If you acquire the skills necessary to interpret texts, you will be able to look up puzzling exceptions or particulars you have not learned in the elementary course. If, instead, you trained yourselves to recite by rote lists of endings or lists of meanings, you still would not know how to read even a simple Greek text.

To acquire real skills in reading Greek independently you will need to continue beyond this elementary two-semester course. Hopefully, a sequel will be available online in the fall of 2002, equivalent to the second year of the language. At the end of the first fourteen lessons corresponding to the first semester,

- you will be able to recognize the forms and functions you have studied when they are presented in unseen texts of comparable difficulty;
- you will have acquired a basic vocabulary (marked in the vocabulary lists);
- you will be familiar enough with conjugation and declension as to make simple transformations and compose easy sentences in Greek;

- and, as a consequence, you will know how to read and understand short passages of classical or *koinê* Greek, probably adapted to the level of the skills expected.

Well, now I have to make true what I claim is my *methodos*. You will succeed if you have the *pothos* (= desire) to learn.