

Elements of Fluency in Reading Greek

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I have used versions of this handout with students for a number of years. It is in outline form, but the discussion should be sufficiently full to convey the thought clearly. Please report any errors to me at rodwhitacre@tesm.edu.

I. Three basic ingredients

A. Parsing

- Quick recognition of the form a word takes in order to know:
 - * Its part of speech, i.e., verb, noun, pronoun, adverb, etc.
 - * How it may be functioning in the sentence.

B. Vocabulary

- Move from 'translating' to 'reading'.
 - * When you read ἵππος don't think the word 'horse', rather, see a horse. See the quote from C. S. Lewis at the end of this handout.

C. Word Order

- Training yourselves to think in Greek order instead of English order.
 - * Read through a text as it comes, without jumping around for the verb or subject, etc.
 - * See clusters within sentences, e.g., prep. phrases

II. Parsing

A. Sneeze Sheet

- Greek's large number of paradigms are finite.
- The goal is not the ability to write paradigms, but to recognize the basic data of a word to know how it is functioning in a sentence.
- Many of the paradigms fall into patterns which makes them easier to learn and cut downs the amount of rote memory.
 - * See my handout "A Review of Basic Hellenistic Greek Morphology" for a core set of paradigms that cover a large number of the forms you meet on a page of Greek.

B. Use of Paradigms

- Once you have memorized the basic paradigms there will still be words that you have to look up.

- * Basic forms that you have forgotten or irregular forms.
- Return to Patterns
 - * When you have to look up a form ask yourself if you recognize its pattern.
 - * If not, consider taking a few seconds to look it up in your basic set of forms to see it in the context of its paradigm.
 - * This brief attention to the larger pattern of the word takes enormous discipline, since we want to get the parsing and get on with reading the text. But for most people such a return to the paradigm is a quick review of the pattern which will help it stick more securely in your memory and eventually lead to recognition when you meet it.
- For help in parsing you need a good parsing guide.
 - * BibleWorks, or other similar software, is the easiest and fastest option.
 - * Zerwick, Max and Mary Grosvenor. *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981.
 - * Mounce, William D. *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.
 - * Taylor, Bernard A. *The Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint: A Complete Parsing Guide*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
 - * <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>
 - * Bodoh, John J. *Index of Greek Verb Forms*. With the assistance of Sara E. Bavousett. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1970.
- For returning to patterns you need a good set of paradigms.
 - * BibleWorks, version 07 and later.
 - * Bowne, Dale Russell. *Paradigms and Principal Parts for the Greek New Testament*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1987.
 - * Mounce, William D. *The Morphology of Biblical Greek*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
 - * Smyth, Herbert Weir. *Greek Grammar*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920.
 - * <http://www.e2ni.com/~latingreek/grammar/znouns.htm>

III. Vocabulary

A. Building a Basic Vocabulary

If you are reading regularly in texts then your vocabulary will increase. You can facilitate this increase in two basic ways.

The first way is to gather words from your reading of texts. As you are reading through a passage note words that you have to look up which seem, from the lexicon, to be used a number of times and therefore worth learning. After your time of reading add these words and their definitions to a list or set of cards.

The second way is to set a specific goal for memorization from a set list of vocabulary words. This method obviously can be used at the same time as the first method. I find memorizing words I've met in a text is easier than memorizing from a list, but I continue to use both methods.

- A good goal for the NT is the 1066 words used 10 times or more in the NT.
 - * Metzger, Bruce Manning. *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999.
 - The first of such books, published for years by the author, one of the great NT scholars of our time, from his home, beginning in 1946.
 - * Trenchard, Warren C. *Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.
 - Very thorough—all the words in the NT (all 5425 of them) organized both by word family and frequency.
 - * Robinson, Thomas A. *Mastering Greek Vocabulary*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995.
 - Includes helpful material on word formation and families.
 - * Scott, Bernard Brandon, et al. *Reading New Testament Greek: Complete Word Lists and Reader's Guide*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993.
 - Includes a list of the words used 10 times or more and then a list of the other words arranged by book and chapter (in the Synoptics by section of the synopsis) for rapid reading.
 - * Flashworks at <http://www.teknia.com/software/index.html>
 - * Pennington, Jonathan T. *New Testament Greek Vocabulary: Learn on the Go*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
 - A two CD set and booklet that includes pronunciation of the words used 10 times or more in the NT.

- * Gromacki, Robert. *Biblical Greek Vocabulary Cards*. Springfield: Visual Education Association, n.d.
- For vocabulary beyond the NT there are basic sets of words available or you might consider working through one of the textbooks for Classical Greek.
 - * *Greek Vocabulary Cards*. Springfield: Visual Education Association, n.d.
 - * *Reading Greek* by The Joint Association of Classical Teachers (JACT) is a multi-volume work which has its own separate comprehensive vocabulary book, *Greek Vocabulary*. Cambridge: University Press, 1980.
 - * Balme, Maurice and Gilbert Lawall. *Athenaze: An Introduction to Ancient Greek*. Rev. ed. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 1991, and *Athenaze: An Introduction to Ancient Greek, Teacher's Handbook*. Rev. ed. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 1991.
 - * Saffire, Paula and Catherine Freis. *Ancient Greek Alive*. 3rd ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

B. Word Formation

- You should learn at least a few of the basic principles of word formation in order to be able to deduce the meaning of new words that are related to words you already know—i.e., pick up free vocabulary. For example, note the basic significance of the following common suffixes.
 - * -ιζω, to do, be — βαπτίζω, I dip, baptize.
 - * -μα, object, result of action — βάπτισμα, baptism
 - * -μος, process, state — βαπτισμός, dipping, baptism
 - * -της, ό, agent one who does — βαπτιστής, baptizer
- Most of the vocabulary books I have mentioned above include a section on word formation, e.g., Robinson and Trenchard. I have taken the descriptions of the suffixes just listed from Trenchard.

IV. Word Order

A. Words As They Come

- Because Greek order does not often follow English order we need to learn to pick up the meaning as it comes in the Greek order.

- To work toward fluency, set as your goal the 'understanding' the text, rather than the 'translating' of it into English.
 - * Though you may translate individual words into English in your mind, don't try to translate the sentence, since then you would have to skip around to get the words needed for the English order.
 - * Rather, try to understand what the sentence is saying as it comes, receive the meaning in its Greek order.
 - * In this way you will learn to know what the action is before you know who is doing it—you'll picture the act and then supply the subject instead of the other way around, as in English.

- An inspiring, and humorous, plea for such fluency is given by William Gardner Hale in his *The Art of Reading Latin: How to Teach It* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1887) available at: http://www.bu.edu/mahoa/hale_art.html While this document is focused on Latin the relevance for Greek is obvious. You don't need to know Latin to benefit from this document.

B. Paragraph Rereading

- One of the simplest and most effective exercises for gaining familiarity with Greek word patterns is through rereading.
 - * Work through a paragraph of text so that you understand it.
 - * Then reread the paragraph several times, trying to pick up the meaning word by word.

- Reading out loud is also important for gaining fluency
 - * If you have trouble pronouncing then, while you are still at the stage of working on pronunciation, you should also read the paragraph several times without pronunciation. This will enable you to focus on the meaning of the passage as it unfolds without getting distracted by the effort to pronounce.
 - * Once your pronunciation is smooth it is not as important to continue to read out loud.

C. Basic Patterns of Word Order

- While a feel for the rhythm and emphases in Greek comes from lots of reading you can also consult studies of Greek word order.

Before listing some common views regarding Greek word order, I should note that a recent major contribution has called into question much of the modern approach to the question. See Caragounis, Chrys C. *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission*. Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2006. As the title suggests, the book is wide-ranging. I have not yet read the whole thing, but the sections I've read on word order suggest I will need to rethink my understanding of this topic. Since the verdict on Caragounis' contribution is not yet established, I will present some of the more common thought on word order.

- For a brief overview of word order in New Testament Greek see Young, Richard A. *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994.
- For further discussion see:
 - * Turner, N. Pages 344-50 in *Grammar of the Greek New Testament, Vol. 3: Syntax*. Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1963.
 - * Moule, C. F. D. Pages 166-70 in *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*. Cambridge: University Press, 1971.
 - * Blass, F. and A. Debrunner. Pages 248-53 in *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* Translated and revised by R. W. Funk. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
 - * Robertson, A. T. Pages 417-25 in *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*. Nashville: Broadman, 1934.
- The following are some of the more significant features of Greek word order. This material is taken mostly from Richard Young's *Intermediate New Testament Greek*. Many of these details are relevant for careful analysis of a passage and go beyond what is necessary for reading a passage with good understanding.

1. Active Sentences

- a. The basic order is: Verb – Subject – Object.
 - This seems to be the case simply because the predicate usually is the most important thing in the sentence (Robertson, 417).
- b. If the subject is a pronoun it is usually before the verb.
- c. An embedded clause, like a relative clause, normally moves to the end of the sentence.
- d. A negative in front of the verb negates the whole clause, but a negative in front of a nonverbal element only negates that element, often causing that element to come before the verb.
 - This move would be a form of fronting, and thus often includes emphasis (see section three, below).
- e. Noun modifiers, like genitives, adjectives, adjectival participles, normally follow the word they modify.
- f. Subordinate clauses may either precede or follow the main clause they modify. Young (216) cites N. Turner, *Syntax* (344-45) for the following information.
 - 1) The following types of subordinate clause usually precede the main clause: condition, concession, temporal.
 - 2) The following types of subordinate clause usually follow the main clause: purpose, result, cause, complement [i.e., content clauses], temporal, local, comparative.

2. Non-active Sentences

These are sentences with equative/linking verbs like εἰμί and γίνομαι.

- a. The basic order is: Verb – Subject – Complement
- b. If the subject is a pronoun it will normally be before the verb.
- c. "All six possible variations of the three elements occur. The variations are difficult to explain" (Young, 217).

3. Variations from the normal order.

- a. Emphasis occurs when a word is moved from its usual position to an unusual one, whether forward or backward in the sentence (Robertson, 417).
- b. The most common variation is to move an element further forward to emphasize it in some way (Young, 217).
- c. Young notes seven forms of emphasis (217-18):

- 1) Contrast—"When an element in one clause is contrasted with an element in another clause, both of the contrasted elements are placed before their respective verbs" (217).
- 2) Contra-expectation—"A word which constitutes a contra-expectation is placed before its verb, i.e., 'Although they went to the restaurant, Mary did not eat.' In Greek, 'Mary' would be placed before the verb" (217).
- 3) Comparison—"both parts of a comparison are placed before their verbs in their respective clauses" (217).
- 4) Topicalization—"Introduction of a new topic is often marked by fronting it before the verb" (217).
- 5) Motif—highlighting "the first mention of a motif in a particular segment of discourse" (217)
- 6) Rhetorical emphasis—expressing, "the emotion or expectation of the speaker" (217).
- 7) Focus—"narrowing the reader's attention to specific, important information" (218).

C. S. Lewis has provided an inspiring account of reading Greek with his tutor, Kirk (also called, Knock, and The Great Knock):

"I arrived at Gastons (so the Knock's house was called) on a Saturday, and he announced that we would begin Homer on Monday. I explained that I had never read a word in any dialect but the Attic, assuming that when he knew this he would approach Homer through some preliminary lessons on the Epic language. He replied merely with a sound very frequent in his conversation which I can only spell 'Huh.' I found this rather disquieting; and I woke on Monday saying to myself, 'Now for Homer. Golly!' The name struck awe into my soul. At nine o'clock we sat down to work in the little upstairs study which soon became so familiar to me. It contained a sofa (on which we sat side by side when he was working with me), a table and chair (which I used when I was alone), a bookcase, a gas stove, and a framed photograph of Mr. Gladstone. We opened our books at *Iliad*, Book I. Without a word of introduction Knock read aloud the first twenty lines or so in the 'new' pronunciation, which I had never heard before. Like Smewgy [Lewis' Greek and Latin teacher], he was a chanter; less mellow in voice, yet full gutturals and rolling r's and more varied vowels seemed to suit the Bronze Age epic as well as Smewgy's honey tongue had suited Horace. For Kirk, even after years of residence in England, spoke the purest Ulster. He then translated, with a few, a very few explanations, about a hundred lines. I had never see a classical author taken in

such large gulps before. When he had finished he handed me over Crusius' *Lexicon* and, having told me to go through again as much as I could of what he had done, left the room. It seems an odd method of teaching, but it worked. At first I could travel only a very short way along the trail he had blazed, but every day I could travel further. Presently I could travel the whole way. Then I could go a line or two beyond his furthest North. Then it became a kind of game to see how far beyond. He appeared at this stage to value speed more than absolute accuracy. The great gain was that I very soon became able to understand a great deal without (even mentally) translating it; I was beginning to think in Greek. That is the great Rubicon to cross in learning any language. Those in whom the Greek word lives only while they are hunting for it in the lexicon, and who then substitute the English word for it, are not reading the Greek at all; they are only solving a puzzle. The very formula, '*Naus* means a ship,' is wrong. *Naus* and *ship* both mean a thing, they do not mean one another. Behind *Naus*, as behind *navis* or *naca*, we want to have a picture of a dark, slender mass with sail or oars, climbing the ridges, with no officious English word intruding."

C. S. Lewis. Pages 140-41 in *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955.