

Methods of Teaching Ancient Greek in Lithuania
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First of all I would like to make it clear, that when I speak about studies of Ancient Greek in my country, I mean only one and only institution, i.e. Vilnius University and its' Department of Classics, the only school in Lithuania to offer Classics and a unique provider of the research in the relevant fields. Some Ancient Greek in secular education is also obligatory for the students of Slavonic Philology at Vilnius University (two term course) and for the students of Philosophy (two term course) at Vilnius and Kaunas universities. Ancient Greek is almost totally absent from the secondary and high schools.

Thus I am going to speak about the teaching practice at Vilnius University, from the point of view of a person who has been teaching Ancient Greek for more than 10 years, and am going to concentrate on the problems of teaching basic and intermediate Greek, because this stage in teaching Ancient Greek is the most important.

Due to our situation with Classics, mentioned above, Ancient Greek studies not only are available, but also are targeted for complete beginners in general. Apart from the difficulties of psychological adaptation to the change of curriculum and to the constant strenuous work in the same small given group (the number of students as a rule does not exceed 10), and the necessity to “bear” the same teacher 8 hours per week over the period of two terms, they are compelled to cope with a strange script and very difficult language they knew nothing about before; in fact, and their knowledge of Ancient Greece is usually very scanty. Thus, from the very beginning, from the alphabet and accentuation, studying Ancient Greek is predestined to be looked upon as a huge hurdle, by some of them – an impossible task. Therefore it is necessary to build an atmosphere of trust and rapport within the class from the very beginning to facilitate the most efficient learning of the language. Sometimes the efficiency is gained not as fast as we would wish, but it is *malum optimum* to compare with the situation when the motivation to study can be completely lost; the additional factor of great concern that must be always kept in mind is that there is practically no possibility in Lithuania to find a job corresponding the speciality. We do our best to keep students engaged and motivated to ensure the would-be learning success; if we

succeed, it is also the merit of our students, who appreciate the value of a proper humanitarian education. Of course, the separation between “ideality” and “reality” always exists, but it is always better to turn process into cooperation rather than into pushing away. Several factors here are of great importance: teacher’s enthusiasm and sense of humor; his (or hers) efforts made to avoid routine and always try to “make something new” being able to present the subject matter as an intellectual challenge. Even teacher’s readiness to answer silly questions without showing they are silly is important here. To tell you the truth, my students ask a lot of questions on the subject every lesson, sometimes maybe too much and maybe not new, but I do not think it to be a waste of time. The aim is to help every student pass successfully from the beginners level to the intermediate stage, *id est*, to understand language as a system, explain morphological forms and syntactical structures, learn principal forms of the verbs, infer meanings of unfamiliar words from the cognates, derivatives and context, orate poetry to metrical principles and reach fluent and generally accurate understanding of Attic and Biblical texts at the end of the second term (some of them – without the help of vocabulary). These are the requirements of the 2nd term exam the students have to meet, and usually they manage to pass it without failure. The *metamorphosis* like that requires not only day’s and night’s hours of studies, but the change of mindset, when they get able to read the texts.

So here we come across the problem of methodology and must acknowledge the fact that practice of teaching Greek is generally based, nearly everywhere, exclusively on traditional methods. Of course we do not stick to the old “deductive” method of first learning paradigms and then proceeding to authentic texts. The inductive and deductive methods should be balanced, and the students are supposed to be able to read and understand the text with the help of vocabulary before the grammatical explanations are given. Nevertheless we are faithful to the very traditional approach of reading the text aloud. The so-called 5th element of nowadays world, the e-learning, or the Computer assisted language learning (CALL), is totally absent from learning basic and intermediate Greek in Lithuania; we have no access to, e.g., Thimissis educational software series (Herodotus, Herodotus+, Homeric Epics etc.).

I would like to mention some of the approaches, which in my opinion are the most important in teaching Ancient Greek:

1. First of all, the so-called “cultural reflection” approach, studying language as an instrument for an ever-widening critical cultural competence, integrating language and culture in the teaching process. The most important thing here is the selected text. The proper selection of reading-texts provides many opportunities for teaching culture through language and language through culture, especially while reading more or less authentic text. Of course, the text should be interesting on its own (but sometimes it is a matter of taste). It is the best way to motivate students and to keep their interest in studying the language, because the principle point of attraction choosing Classical Studies, besides their exotic flavor, is the cultural background. At first it is difficult to get students into the habit of looking at the Ancient Greek not as the undecipherable morphological and syntactical structure but as the carrier of the cultural values of the nation that spoke it, as an expression of its’ modes of feelings and thought, that have not lost their value, or *vice versa*, to get them into the habit of looking at culture as linguistically mediated system, in which language plays a crucial role. Studying Greek sometimes could and should be compared to a kind of multidisciplinary course, embracing various aspects of Greek civilization; the only drawback of this approach is that the commentaries and explanations sometimes take a lot of time, even if they are given in an introductory form. But it works. At first the discourse is intercultural, later on the culture of Greece and Rome can be compared. Very helpful are also the illustrations, in general emphasis on the monuments of art, short commentaries on their cultural typology and their cultural significance; this aspect is almost totally neglected in our school-education programs and usually is in great demand. When language and culture in the teaching process become integrated, Greek studies become not only a universal instrument for the cognition of European cultural roots, but also, because of the spiritual and value-based aspect of Greek culture, a factor for building up a mature personality. It has recently been confirmed by the educators in Lithuania that the activation of teaching and learning of classical languages is closely related to the possibilities of cultural reflection provided by these languages. Therefore language acquisition should also be the acquisition of the culture.

2. The second important approach that should not be avoided even in the first language teaching stage is diachronic aspect, of course, at the elementary level. More diachronic teaching is put into the 3rd year (historical grammar is a required 3rd year core). Some insight into the History of Greek in addition to the aspect mentioned

above shows language as a system, integrates language with a study of history and literature. This approach correspondingly could be named “linguistic reflection” and must not be looked upon as an additional burden, but as a possible way of avoiding the troubles, caused by the situation of compulsory “bilingualism”. Our students start learning both Latin and Greek from the very beginning and at the same time (8 contact hours per week for Latin in addition to 8 contact hours per week for Greek, plus numerous other subjects); the combination of Greek and Latin is compulsory. The first impression one gets while starts studying Greek (that is difficult to avoid), – is that Greek cannot be compared to any other language, not even Latin, not to speak of Lithuanian, while Latin is identified as an akin to modern European languages and having some common features with Lithuanian. Therefore the minimum of the Comparative Linguistics and Historical Grammar is very helpful to activate learning Greek. And this is the attitude which is followed in Greek manual of national edition: in it a short commentary on the phonetic changes and the linguistic history of the discussed morphoparadigms is usually given, besides the similarities between Greek, Latin and Lithuanian languages are stressed. So it is much easier for a student to remember, e. g., the declension of the a-stem nouns, when it has been explained that Greek gen. sg. flexion –as is in straight correspondence with Lithuanian a- stem flexion –os, dat. Sg. -’<*-ai corresponds Latin –ae and Lithuanian –ai, Greek –an corresponds Lithuanian -ą<-an and Latin –am, and so on. The same with the vocabulary: it is easier to remember, e.g., Greek word *thymos*, if one knows, that it is etymologically the same as Lithuanian *dūmas* and Latin *fumus*, or Greek *hespera*, which corresponds Lithuanian *vakaras* and Latin *vesper*, or Greek *thygatēr* – cf. Lithuanian *duktė*, or Greek *ear* – cf. Lithuanian *vasara*, Latin *ver*, and so on. Lithuanian also helps to explain accentuation, because intonation, both rising accent and falling accent, still exists in it. Irregular verbs also could be better understood from a diachronic perspective.

In our national textbook of Ancient Greek the cultural approach is basic: the method of analytical reading and translation of the Greek text in it predominates over other methods; the exercises of grammatical order are rather neglected. The initial texts are, of course, traditional textbook *koinē*, consisting of separate simple sentences, illustrating the use of forms and the syntactical code, but after about one month of studies the students are able to read long related texts, which usually are

“stories”, be it a novel, a myth, or a piece of historical narrative, selections from Herodotus, Plutarch, Xenophon, Apollodorus and others, normalized and simplified at first (in the 1st term), complicated in the 2nd term. They are not only very interesting and informative in themselves, but also give a comprehension of Greek culture generally and of the concrete author particularly. But there is still much left for a teacher to explain, because the context is almost totally unfamiliar for the students, be it a story about Oedipus’ tragedy, or Polycrates’ fate, or Croesus’ tragic mistake, or numerous love-affairs of Zeus. Besides, one should mention the lack of good dictionaries and the absence of commentaries. Therefore reading and translating of those texts is rather a tough task. That is why I took the challenge to prepare an exercise book for our students and for the sake of change to present an easier, sometimes even funny material just to change the “tune” of a lesson from “tragic” to more relaxed and less formal. It is not a secret that in the curriculum of an integrated approach, consisting of language – culture – communication, the element of communication is the weakest one. Therefore the main principle here is communicative and the activity of students is brought into play: they ask and answer questions, explain international words of Greek origin, make different parts of speech from the same root, make one sentence out of two, fill the words into the gaps, explain and translate forms, transform sentences from one grammatical structure to another, and so on. I have included also fragments of texts and authors not represented in the textbook, which in my opinion are necessary to include, e.g., Plato, or Homer, or the New Testament, or the so-called *anekdota*, which students usually like to read. But what they like best of all, it is the translation and discussion of the *Epea pteroenta*, from the list of 500 idioms and quotations, selected by my colleague and presented at the end of the book, in an original form, with an *Index auctoris* and *loci*. They are the key to Greek culture and the *symbolon* of the shared intellectual and moral values; students are very eager to learn a given number of the *paroimiai* by heart.