

Biblical Exegetical Software in the Classroom: Integration 101

Society of Biblical Literature

11/19/2004, 1–3:30 PM

Room #210A, San Antonio Convention Center

Rodney J. Decker, Th.D., Assoc. Prof./NT

Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA

You should know first that I am a NT prof and that I teach in a seminary. My examples will all be from Greek, and specifically from the context of training for ministry at the M.Div. level. My regular teaching load consists of the first three semesters of a required 5-semester Greek sequence, as well as various elective courses in exegesis, textual criticism, and Greek outside the NT. I should also note that I teach not only resident classes but also four semesters of Greek in an online format using WebCT course delivery software. “Your mileage may vary!” ☺

I was probably among the earlier adopters of technology in teaching Greek in the days when we worked with DOS-based computers with 5.25” floppy drives. At that time I used GRAMCORD and moved data back and forth between the various GRAMCORD modules and ChiWriter with batch files on 4 floppy disks. There were no computers in classrooms then—certainly not with ceiling-mounted video projectors. But my 2d year Greek students would meet for class in the computer lab and I taught them how to use this amazing software. I won’t bore you more details of such ancient history!

My next major step a number of years later (this was early-mid 90s) was writing a proposal and obtaining funding to create a new computer lab/teaching classroom. I designed and installed a Macintosh-based lab running Accordance and a classroom with a Macintosh installed in the teaching station, projecting the screen image onto the wall with a gray-scale LCD projection panel on an overhead projector. There was even a network in the building that enabled me to connect from the classroom to the Mac in my study. I used both Accordance and MS Word as my primary teaching tools in the classroom. In the lab we had both Accordance and several HyperCard-based programs for Greek, some that I wrote, some public domain products, and one quite large and elaborate stack written by Don Wilkins.

Several years later I moved to a larger school and had the rude shock of discovering this thing called “Windows”! There was not a single Macintosh on campus. And I was told quite firmly that there wouldn’t be. So I had to learn another system, this time with a *color* LCD panel on the overhead projector, but no Accordance. So I continued to prepare class materials on my personal Mac and then move the results onto Windows 95 in the classroom. For Bible software, Logos was the institutional standard, but I

found it quite useless for biblical-language purposes. I have finally come to terms with Windows with the release of XP, but I've never been able to leave Accordance, so I still create classroom materials on my personal Macintosh (now quite ancient, and still running OS 9) and move them to Windows using either Acrobat, Word, or PowerPoint and display them on an electronic whiteboard from a ceiling-mounted video projector. I do not have BibleWorks, nor all the newer language tools added to Libronix in the past year or two.

So how do I use the technology and the language tools to teach Greek? I have a rather strong opinion that students should be taught Greek and not just software. Teaching any piece of software is guaranteed to be teaching something that will be obsolete in a few years as it is replaced by the next major revision or the next new technology. But if I can teach students Greek, they will be able to read Greek the rest of their lives, whether from a printed Testament, a tattered scrap of papyrus, or from a computer monitor. Software may supplement that knowledge, but it can never replace it.

Some have adopted the philosophy of teaching just the basics of the language and concentrating on teaching the student how to use the software to parse words and do "word studies." If that's all that is accomplished, I am quite skeptical of the value of what is learned. I suspect that such students will do more harm than good with their "skills." They will not really learn the language and as a result will draw many faulty conclusions.

I am certainly not opposed to the use of technology and software for teaching the biblical languages. I've been trying to do just that for all of my 15 years in the classroom. And I am certainly not suggesting that anyone who uses the software more than I do or differently than I do is not teaching Greek. But we need to keep the fundamental goal in mind. That goal, in my opinion, is not teaching software. The goal is teaching Greek. We may well be able to use many different technological tools in the process. That question is much larger than how do we use biblical languages software and what is the best software for such a purpose. It encompasses such software, but also includes the use of appropriate hardware (projectors, electronic whiteboards, PDAs, etc.), graphics (including video), and the Internet. So our focus today is only one subset of a larger picture that must be integrated into a coordinated methodology for teaching the biblical languages.

Let me suggest some examples that illustrate the uses that I have found helpful.

In my setting I find the software tools most suited for use in preparing to teach and in preparing teaching materials. I have used the tools for finding appropriate examples. That may be to illustrate specific lesson content or to locate simple vocabulary for 1st

year students. It can be very helpful to illustrate assigned vocabulary in conjunction with specific grammatical or syntactical forms being learned. Or you might search for parallel constructions which may vary in only one key feature. This can serve to illustrate the meaning or use of specific grammatical or syntactical constructions. For example:

Rom. 3:26, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἐκ *πίστεως Ἰησοῦ*
Phil. 3:9, μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ *πίστεως Χριστοῦ*
Rev. 14:12, οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν *πίστιν Ἰησοῦ*

Gal. 3:26, Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ *τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*
Eph. 1:15, ἀκούσας τὴν καθ' ὑμᾶς *πίστιν ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ*
Col. 1:4, ἀκούσαντες τὴν *πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*¹

I use the various tools to illustrate the usage of various forms and constructions. For example, when I teach the aorist passive form in first year Greek it is late enough in the year that students are beginning to get a bit weary of seeing another new form. So I illustrate how easy it is to spot an aorist passive by scrolling through an Accordance search of aorist passives in the Gospel of Mark. The hits are all displayed in bold red text, and I use a parallel English column to enable them to quickly pick their way through the verse. The students quickly notice how distinct these verbs are—and which specific forms are the most common. Since I can't use Accordance in the classroom, I use an Acrobat pdf file to display the search results.

¹ In these examples, notice how the preposition makes the statement more specific and less ambiguous than the parallel statement without the preposition. Although context usually clarifies, *πίστεως Ἰησοῦ* could be read as either “faith of Jesus” (i.e., the faith which Jesus exercises) or as “faith in Jesus” (i.e., faith which has Jesus as its object). For other similar examples which have only a genitive case substantive modifying *πίστις* see Rom. 3:22; Gal. 2:16; and 3:22.

Mark 1:9 Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις ἦλθεν Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ Ναζαρετ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ **ἐβαπτίσθη** εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου.

Mark 1:9 ¶ And it came about in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

Mark 1:27 καὶ **ἐθαμβήθησαν** ἅπαντες ὥστε συζητεῖν πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς λέγοντας· τί ἐστὶν τοῦτο; διδαχὴ καινὴ κατ' ἐξουσίαν· καὶ τοῖς πνεύμασι τοῖς ἀκαθάρτοις ἐπιτάσσει, καὶ ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ.

Mark 1:27 And they were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."

Mark 1:42 καὶ εὐθὺς ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἡ λέπρα, καὶ **ἐκαθαρίσθη**.

Mark 1:42 And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

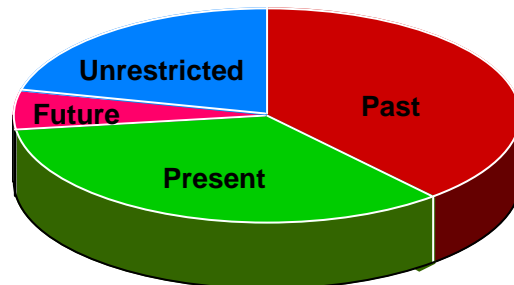
Mark 2:1 Καὶ εἰσελθὼν πάλιν εἰς Καφαρναοὺμ δι' ἡμερῶν **ἠκούσθη** ὅτι ἐν οἴκῳ ἐστίν.

Mark 2:1 ¶ And when He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home.

Mark 2:2 καὶ **συνήχθησαν** πολλοὶ ὥστε μηκέτι χωρεῖν μηδὲ τὰ πρὸς τὴν θύραν, καὶ ἐλάλει αὐτοῖς τὸν λόγον.

Mark 2:2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them.

I've also created graphs in Excel to give students a visual conception of various usages. For example I have a pie graph of the present indicative forms in Mark's gospel, graphed as to their time reference. (You probably remember that Mark has more historical presents than other NT writers.) This graph originated as an Accordance search which was then evaluated contextually. Remember that there are many things that software can't do. It still takes a human mind to evaluate context factors and make appropriate classifications.



You might do such searches either in advance of the class as you prepare your teaching materials, or (if it is feasible in your situation) do it live to show the student how to construct and carry out such a search. (If you do it live, always do it in advance first so you know what to expect!) If you are teaching in a lab setting or if you have one of those idealistic situations in which you can assume that all your students have the same software, then you will want to do more of this live. If you happen to have a class in which most students have a laptop parked in front of them during class *and* have the

argument of the passage and the grammatical markers of subordination, etc., using the paragraph indents of the word processor to create the indented phrasing structure.

