Enterprise Education at the University of St Andrews

Case Study Template

Module Title: GK4124: The History of Ancient Greek from Homer to the New Testament

Discipline: Classics (Ancient Greek); module designed, coordinated and single-taught by Dr. Nicolas Wiater (Senior Lecturer at the School of Classics)

Module Descriptor:

This module offers in-depth insight into the key stages of the development of the Ancient Greek Language. Beginning with its earliest stages, the epic language of Homer and the famous Nestor Cup, we will acquaint ourselves, at a basic level, with Mycenean (Linear B) Greek and Greek's relationship with Indo-European. Through an exploration of the main Greek dialects and alphabets preserved in both literary and inscriptional evidence, we will trace the process leading to the establishment of Attic as standard Greek, paying attention to linguistic-historical as well as social-cultural factors. We will then study the development of Hellenistic koine Greek and the influence of other cultures and languages on Greek, a fundamental part of this process, focussing, again, on inscriptions along with literature, which culminates in Greek classicism in Augustan Rome. The module concludes with an introduction to biblical Greek, at the threshold of pagan and Christian antiquity.

Context and Description:

1. What was the initiative? What was its purpose?

This is a genuinely student-led module. While we have an excellent coverage of ancient Greek literature in our Honours module, we have so far not had a module that approaches ancient Greek from a linguistic-historical angle. Students, quite rightly, felt that there was a lacuna here to be filled and approached me about the possibility of a module that deals with the history and development of ancient Greek, and its main principal forms (i.e., its various dialects), from the beginning to the Christian era. I have a strong interest in the history of the ancient Greek language and had always felt that such a module was missing in our course catalogue so I gladly accepted the students' suggestion and designed such a module for the following academic year. I also felt that such a module would make a significant contribution to our profile within the UK because only very few Universities in the UK actually offer similar, language-focussed modules.

2. How did you develop and deliver it? Were there any partners/additional support?

The basis of the module is a textbook used in similar modules at the London universities, designed by a specialist in the history of Greek and Greek linguistics for that purpose. Significant additions were necessary, though, because that textbook presupposes a general knowledge of Indo-European and ancient Greek linguistic that our students do not have the opportunity to develop. I therefore devised introductory sessions on general and Indo-European languages (based on quite a large quantity of challenging material for the students to prepare at home and then discuss in class), followed by a series of classes which were centred on the different forms of ancient Greek at different times or in

different places (spread out over the entire Mediterranean world, ancient Greek for a long time existed in the form of numerous, different dialects, some of which differ quite radically from each other, rather than as one 'unified' language). We thus covered almost 1000 years of language development in the linguistic landscape of the entire Mediterranean.

I designed the module entirely by myself.

How do students develop their capabilities on this module?

1. Creativity and innovation

Because the material itself and the approach was entirely new to the students, the module required a lot of lateral thinking and thinking out of the box. The students had to creatively adapt their previous knowledge of ancient Greek (i.e. knowledge and familiarity with the language from a literature perspective) to an approach that required them to focus on ancient Greek as a language, i.e., more on its formal properties. Partly, this was facilitated by the introductory sessions on linguistics and linguistic methodology which I designed for the module (see above): students were here prompted to apply the general knowledge of how language works to the concrete examples of ancient Greek and, in so doing, develop a new approach to the language. But many students also brought their knowledge of other languages (including modern ones) and their phonetics and morphology to bear on ancient Greek, which had the amazing effect that their reflection about the modern languages, with which, as spoken, every-day languages, they were more familiar, of course, than with ancient Greek, enhanced their understanding of ancient Greek while this new understanding of the ancient language, in turn, enhanced their understanding of and reflection about the modern languages.

2. Opportunity recognition, creation and evaluation

Opportunity recognition is at the basis of the module design. Because the module itself was created as a response to the students' recognition of an opportunity to enhance their knowledge and understanding of their subject by studying it from a different angle. This i itself, I hope, made them realize how important and fruitful it is to think about their possibilities to see and create new opportunities for themselves and take the measures to realize them.

But by responding to the students' request and giving that request a concrete form and contents, the module also prompted them to see and seize different opportunities of developing new methodologies for the study of ancient Greek: to put it differently, the students were prompted to recognise the very enhancement of learning and knowledge, and the creative thinking on which that is based, as opportunities themselves. Beyond the subject-specific knowledge, the module thus also sought to enable students to develop an ever-inquisitive (i.e., scholarly) mind-set and creative thinking (see above) and to see their value and importance as part of their own intellectual development but also as a key requirement for any kind of success inside and outside of the academic world.

3. Decision making supported by critical analysis and judgement

Decision making and critical analysis and judgement were implement in and through this module at different levels. At the most basic level, because the module was entirely new and, therefore, presented a greater risk, from the student perspective, in terms of obtaining high grades, students had to make a much more informed decision about taking the module in the first place. The number of students requesting additional information about the module before choosing it was noticeably higher than for other modules I have taught over the past seven years. Students thus needed to weight carefully the risks of receiving lower marks again the opportunities of knowledge enhancement and the satisfying of intellectual curiosity. The module was fully booked in the end, so this critical process did, in most cases, clearly lead to a preference of the latter over the former, which is in itself and important and desirable pedagogical outcome, as one of our greatest struggles (at least in the School of Classics) is to prompt student to move from a grade-fixated mind-set which they receive at school to a more intellectual and scholarly mind-set required by higher education: research always bears the risk of failure, but this failure is then, often, balanced by the experience and enhanced knowledge resulting from that process.

In line with this, I gave the students greater freedom in their coursework than in other modules. The essays were deliberately designed as small research projects. The students could freely choose from a selection of six essay topics, which covered a broad range of different linguistic approaches, from more specialised and detailed linguistic analysis to a broader, cultural-linguistics approach focussed on the interplay of language use and social and cultural development (e.g., _why_ did a specific writer choose to write in a specific dialect at a specific time?). Students could thus decide for themselves on which end of the linguistic spectrum they preferred to work (or, indeed, as many did, try out different linguistic approaches in their essays!). This involved, again, risk assessment, especially for the more specialised, in-depth analyses of texts, because they had not done this kind of analysis before in their studies, and, in the end, a decision based on the process of balancing intellectual curiosity and profit against the probability of receiving a lower mark than usual because of the unfamiliar topic. Once more, students surprised me because almost all of them choose at least for one of the two essays one of the more specialised, language-analysis topics.

Finally, the essay topics themselves did, of course, require critical analysis and judgement from an academic point of view as they required in-depth study of unfamiliar topics and critical judgment on which material to include (and how to evaluate it) in order to write a convincing and well-founded answer to the essay questions.

4. Implementation of ideas through leadership

Class discussions were often organised in group-work in order to cover more material and give students the opportunity for in-depth discussion. This also provided students with the opportunity to become 'discussion leaders' and present the results of the work in the individual groups to the other students. Taking the lead in discussions (n.b. that such roles will change during discussions, so different students get this opportunity!) provides the students with the opportunity to develop and test their own approaches to, and ideas about, the material and see whether these ideas are able to secure the support of others so that they will, in the end, be represented as the results of the group as a whole.

5. Reflection and action

Reflection and action are integral to all the process of critical evaluation and decision-making outlined in the previous sections. They are part of making the decision of taking this module (with all its risks, from the student perspective) and of researching for and writing the answers to the essay questions as well as of the group discussions in which students need to reflect carefully about the tasks before speaking up in the group and putting their ideas forward (thus taking on, for a time, a 'leadership' position within that group or, indeed, the class as a whole). I would also argue that because the material and approach to that material were almost entire unfamiliar to the students, the module (both preparation and discussion in class and essay writing) required greater reflection (and resulting critical evaluation and decision making) than other modules where students can draw on their 'mental templates' developed in the course of several years of dealing with similar topics and approaches.

6. Communication and strategy skills

The module required the students to develop further their communication skills in different ways: in class, both in the group discussions, in discussions with the entire class and when presenting results of in-group discussion to all students, students had to think carefully about what they wanted to present and, given the challenging nature of the material (see above), how they wanted to present it in a manner that was clear and understandable to all students. In order to do so, the students had to develop the necessary scholarly and technical vocabulary required for the discussion of linguistic topics, but they also had to think creatively about ways in which to describe complex and unfamiliar linguistic phenomena for which they might not have the technical terminology at hand. The same process did, of course, apply in situations when students observed phenomena in a specific piece of material and then had to find ways to formulate a question about these phenomena in order to ask me or the other students about it.

Assessment:

Highlight the link between capability development and assessment if relevant.

See above no. 3 on the design of the coursework which particularly encouraged risk-taking, critical evaluation, creative and innovative thinking, the development of new communication skills (no. 6 above) and prompted recognition of opportunities by giving the students great freedom of choice, thus enabling them to define and develop their own 'intellectual profile' as young scholars. Group discussions also provided students with opportunity to develop leadership skills and capabilities of presenting complex problems and ideas in a group setting (no. 4 above).

Challenges:

Highlight any challenges faced and overcome (or not)

Because of the lack of precedents, and because the material was new to the students and myself (I have a grounding in linguistic approaches to ancient Greek and a strong interest in the subject, of course, but I do not research actively in the field and had never taught on the subject before) module design was certainly a challenge, as was – for the students – the process of coming to terms with the new material and approach and methodology. This did cause concern among some students at the beginning, but the further the module proceeded,

the more certain and confident did the students become and, in the end, they operated freely with the linguistic material and methodology and even used it to enhance their knowledge of languages generally. Concerns about lower marks were present as well (due, again, to the entirely new material with which the students had to deal); this required encouragement on my part and, in terms of marking, an adaptation of our usual marking criteria that reflected that the students had no prior experience with the subject (i.e. rewarded risk-taking and initiative as well as contents, presentation and style). I also tried to help students cope with the material by including much more guidance and information in the module handbook than usual in Honours modules and by offering an extra, voluntary hour in which students could ask questions about the material or simply translate in group and under my guidance more of the set-text material.

The grades were, in the end, perhaps slightly lower than in other modules, but the results were impressive: the moderator, a very senior colleague and internationally renowned specialist of ancient Greek, was impressed with the skills, abilities and the knowledge which students had acquired in the course of the semester and demonstrated in the exam.

Impact:

1. What impact has it had and for whom?

Three types of impact: first and foremost, on the students who have significantly increased their knowledge not only of ancient Greek but also, more generally, deepened their understanding of how languages work in general. For the department, inasmuch as this module fills a real lacuna in our programme and thus, I think, considerably enhances the profile of our programme also within the UK at large. For myself, as the module was a great opportunity to develop further my interest and knowledge in ancient and Indo-European linguistics and my skills and abilities to teach and explain material of that kind to my students.

2. How have you measured and evidenced the impact?

Mainly through my own observation of the students' intellectual and scholarly development in class and in the essays and exam; the comments of the moderator on the impressive quality of the work demonstrated by the students in the exam; and the feedback from students.

3. How has the work contributed to enterprise education?

See above under "development of capabilities" and "assessment": the modules implements through its subject, its design and the design of the coursework the full gamut of enterprise capabilities.

4. Give examples of feedback (from Students, Staff, others)

The module was awarded a student-led teaching award for excellent module in 2017/8.

On the feedback forms, the module received 'marks' in the 1-2 range on all questions. Some significant comments on aspects of the module students found most helpful include:

Looking at the various Greek dialects has made me more sure of my knowledge of Attic(-Ionic!) Greek, which I feel will be helpful in future Greek modules, since I'll notice/understand forms I would otherwise usually overlook. I think the essays have

given me a good opportunity to really delve into researching a topic, which I will definitely take forward for future assessments.

The opportunity to study aspects of Greek which normally lie outside of standard degree subjects (Mycenaean Linear B, Archaic inscriptions with different alphabets, and New Testament Greek) was my favourite aspect of the module

The whole thing, I liked how the module kind of just built up on everything that came before it.

I felt that a course of this type was really needed in our curriculum, as it explained the basis on which we work with rigorous methodology and clarity. It has helped me a lot to focus on the text with a more complete and informed point of view

The module handbook for this module is particularly good: it is clear in what needs to be read/translated/analysed, and the questions have been very helpful for reflecting on what's important in the reading, and I think will be helpful for revision.

I have really enjoyed the broad scope of this module. One seminar that has stood out to me was the discussion on Dionysius and the nature of 'classicism' and 'imitation'. I enjoyed the class discussion, and although identifying dialect features etc. after reading texts has been important, it was nice to have a session that felt more like a seminar than a lecture, looking at content as well as form. Overall, I think this has been an excellent module and I'm glad I got the opportunity to do something so different

I think this module should be made compulsory for all Classics students, as it really provides the background of our studies. It would be really nice if we could see something similar for Latin, too.

Future Development (Potential)

1. What are the next steps, if any?

The module will now be offered every other year and become a permanent element of our course catalogue. Contents and designed will be reviewed in light of the teaching experience and the student comments in the questionnaires, but, on that basis, no major changes are necessary at present.

*Please include an image for your case study.