

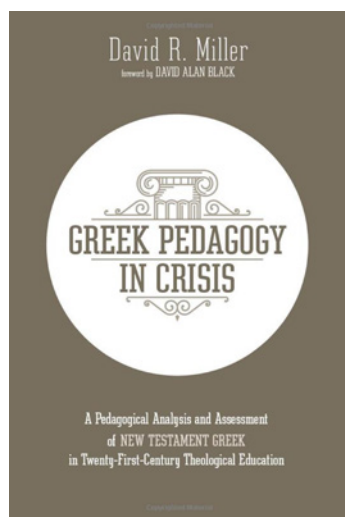
Book Review

Greek Pedagogy in Crisis

Miller (D.R.) Pp. xiv + 247. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019. Paper, £23, US\$31. ISBN: 978-1-5326-9093-8.

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This book began as a thesis assessing the state of Greek pedagogy in theological educational establishments, primarily in the USA. The structure is introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. About 40% of the volume comprises appendices, including copies of the survey responses informing the research. Miller is concerned that there has not been much research on what constitutes good pedagogy in ancient Greek. He has a point; it has been an under-researched

area. Unfortunately, however, he misses much of the work which has gone on, and the changing landscape.

He compares the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) with Second Language Acquisition (SLA) methodology, focusing on Krashen's theories. This yields a useful summary of key ideas, although they are set against each other in rather a false opposition. There is more to language pedagogy than GTM or Communicative Language Teaching, and it is important to blend, refine, and tailor approaches. He is particularly concerned about the role of translation, which resonates with this methodological split. He never clearly differentiates between reading and translating, however, but does make constant reference to the challenges in translating the New Testament facing those who have only studied a little Greek. This poses the question of what the goal of intense, compressed language study might be, which is not something Miller discusses, so much as assumes.

Research participant choice seems awkward. Miller explains how he chose participants, with criteria including publishing textbooks, having more than ten years in the field, or personal recommendation; several of the most important potential contributors did not engage, however, and the group demographics are not representative of international Greek teaching. The group is 90% male, for example, so when he uses feminine pronouns for professors throughout the book, it feels awkward. 11 of the participants remain anonymous in their answers, but by publishing

a full list of participants at the end, and naming all the others, those 11 do become exposed.

The literature review is the most extensive part of the book. It offers an excellent survey of available resources and their approaches, within the niche of New Testament Greek. It is a shame this volume reaches the Journal of Classics Teaching so late, as it was published in 2019, and resources do not refer to anything post-2017. This is particularly important with reference to the role of technology in language pedagogy, as the Covid-19 pandemic changed digital engagement so much.

He argues the GTM is not fit for purpose, the purpose being teaching those going through seminary (or equivalent) to translate and exegete. He surveys 32 Greek teachers, seeking positive and negative comments about the GTM. He lists 118 positive and 114 negative comments, and classifies them into categories. These include structure, the role of translation, student motivation and engagement, and the availability of support resources. Memorisation is assumed to be a good thing, which I would challenge in the context of teaching students to use Greek rather than learn about Greek. There's a tail-chasing sense to justifying GTM – one participant notes adult learners think more systematically and so like it, whilst another claims the method itself teaches such systematic thinking. The way the GTM is used to reinforce the status quo is clear throughout, in reasons such as supporting students to access existing materials, the large range of support materials, GTM having 'stood the test of time', and it conforming with student expectations.

The final section sets out his application of course design principles to creating, in ten steps, what he calls 'Exegetical Greek', with tasks in place of topics or approaches. As this is a hypothetical course design, his reflection and evaluation steps are theoretical. His inclusion of 'verbal aspect' as a key topic demonstrates the ways NT Greek research is developing, but he does not engage directly with NT linguistics and the relationship between research and teaching; I doubt many UK Greek teachers would be so concerned about aspect as to prioritise it like this. He insists that this is a departure from the GTM, but easily converted from it so that professors do not have to struggle to adapt. The pragmatic 'academics do not like change' (p. 148) alongside the idealistic thrust of wanting the best possible Greek teaching to serve his theological mission makes this a slightly disorientating read.

Miller also discusses Melanchthon and Erasmus. On first reading, this ties together threads in the history of language learning and teaching. In fact, it is part of a theological mission underpinning this book, whose stridency is problematic, in bemoaning both the state of Greek pedagogy, and people's ability to understand and explain the mind of God. One of Miller's survey respondents is Rob Plummer, who also cites Melanchthon in *Greek for Life* (Merkle and Plummer, 2017). Similarly, Dan Wallace (author of *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Wallace, 1996), highly recommended in this book) gives a passionate appeal to Melanchthon and principles of *ad fontes* and *sola scriptura* (p.114). Erasmus, furthermore, is made responsible for an artificial schism between 'ancient' and 'modern Greek'. This book is a prime example of attempts to use philology to drive theology. The purpose of learning Greek is solely to inform a particular kind of exegetical

approach to the New Testament, which the majority of British Greek teachers would not recognise.

Miller asks important questions, although they are so tied to a specific mission, and the educational approaches are left until after this mission is well-established, that the book is hard for someone who does not share that mission to benefit from. This book is worth reading, however, for anyone wanting to understand American NT Greek pedagogy, especially with a view to understanding the real-world impact of ancient language teaching.

References

- Merkle B and Plummer R** (2017) *Greek for Life: Strategies for Learning, Retaining, and Reviving New Testament Greek*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Wallace D** (1996) *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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