BOOK REVIEW

Whitacre, Rodney A., *Using and Enjoying Biblical Greek: Reading the New Testament with Fluency and Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015). xiii + 258 pp. Pbk. $25.00.

Rodney Whitacre is professor emeritus of biblical studies at Trinity School for Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania. Since he published his dissertation, *Johannine Polemic: The Role of Tradition and Theology* (SBLDS, 67; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), his continued academic research led to the publications of *John* (IVP New Testament Commentary Series, 4; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), *A Patristic Greek Reader* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) and the present volume, *Using and Enjoying Biblical Greek*. For this volume, Whitacre wants to motivate students to go 'much further with Greek ... and thereby to discover for themselves its joys and benefits' (p. vii). I think, however, that *Using and Enjoying Biblical Greek* falls short of accomplishing his goal.

    Chapter 1 demonstrates why learning Greek is important despite its challenges. Whitacre introduces the testimonies of a variety of people, from an internet blogger to renowned theologians such as Augustine, C.S. Lewis and A.T. Robertson. With these examples he encourages students to take up the task.

    Chapter 2 explains how to memorize Greek vocabulary more efficiently. Whitacre suggests two easy-to-learn techniques: memorizing major suffixes such as –σις (for 'an activity'), –ια (also for 'an activity'), –μος (for 'agent of an action') or –μα (for 'result of an action') (pp. 11-12), and some basic rules for recognizing Greek words such as through cognates, semantic domains, etymology and variations.

    Chapter 3 introduces 'Essential Parsing' through a multitude of paradigms with running annotations. Whitacre seems to follow the approach of William Mounce's *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 3rd edn, 2009), and he recommends *The*

Morphology of Biblical Greek (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) as an exemplary resource.

Chapter 4 is entitled, 'Making Sense of Sentences'. Whitacre attempts to deal with the core elements of Greek sentence composition. He also introduces Greek word order, the role of the Greek article and discourse features that differ from English. On this foundation he presents the central idea of the book, which he calls 'Three Techniques for Sorting Out a Sentence'.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how students should analyze basic Greek sentences by parsing words, sorting them in parts, configuring structures and finally translating.

Chapter 6 demonstrates how one's knowledge of Greek can be utilized. Whitacre recommends meditation on the Greek New Testament. From the general to the specific, he offers three approaches. He then integrates them into a hybrid model, including advice on how the medieval practice of *Lectio divina* can become useful to students.

Chapter 7 invites students to draw sentence maps. He argues that drawing a sentence map is the climax of sentence analysis. The amount of emphasis Whitacre places on this topic is also captured in one of the appendices. He argues that 'mapping' equips students to tackle different kinds of Greek, including Homeric, Classical and Patristic. With some reviews and sample exercises Whitacre brings the body of this work to an end.

In the first two appendices, he provides more information about sentence mapping. Appendix 3 is a 'Reader's Note for John 3:16-18'. Appendix 4 is an extension of the discussion of Greek morphology from Chapter 3. Appendix 5 deals with some recent monographs that treat discourse features. Here, Whitacre expresses his interest in the discussion regarding Greek tenses and voices.

As this summary shows, Whitacre's work offers a simple three step review of the Greek language: basic grammar drills, simple translation exercises and daily practices such as meditation. However, the simplicity of its steps also causes some confusion for the reader. First, his emphasis on parsing Greek words and mapping sentences seems to be in conflict with his support for Bible software and online sources. Moreover, this is a relatively short volume for its topic. It consists of 142 pages of the main chapters plus 64 pages of appendices. Whitacre devotes almost forty percent of his work to parsing and mapping. I

doubt if parsing and mapping alone can make students go 'much further with Greek'.

Secondly, throughout the book Whitacre utilizes resources with little criticism, as if they are authoritative. For example, Danker's so-called BDAG is constantly referenced to give answers to most of his exegetical demonstrations, although others have questioned its credibility. Certainly, James Barr's criticism of diachronic and etymological lexical semantics is not accounted for in Whitacre's work. He does introduce Louw-Nida's Lexicon as another helpful reference, but again with no disclaimer for its entirely different lexicography than BDAG. In the same way, he makes liberal use of popular resources such as BDF and TDNT, but does not inform students of their diachronic, theological and polysemous approach to lexical semantics.

I believe every author must provide criteria for his or her arguments. In this work, however, I had hard time finding any rationale for the choice of one idea or resource over the other notions or resources available. It seems that Whitacre prefers common assumptions about how language works, as if these warrant authentic knowledge of Greek. However, Greek is a morphologically sophisticated language with a highly inflected use of words. Its non-configurational structure does not align neatly with the syntax of English, which the author liberally uses to make his arguments. The decisions and choices made to explain the structure and grammar of Greek should be stated and supported with arguments and data appropriate to their linguistic foundation. For this reason, the Greek of the New Testament should be analyzed with exegetical precision as well as a level of linguistic competency that is both critical and sensitive to the development of the Greek language. But this work seems to lack such competency.

For example, utilizing precise linguistic and grammatical terms is essential for discussing grammar and its application. Whitacre, however, tends to use 'vocabulary' and 'lexeme' synonymously, and often blends 'word' with 'gloss'. Other terms he conflates are 'sense' and 'meaning', and 'translation' and 'interpretation'. Moreover, he lumps all Greek word formatives—such as σα- for the aorist and κα- for the perfect tense—into simply 'suffixes', and as a result he ends up referring to indicative verb endings—such as -ω, -εις, -ει—as suffixes. In the same vein, his discussion of the 'etymology' of Greek word**s** turns into a study of 'morphology' without any transition signal.

Third, it is certainly helpful to use insights from modern linguistic theories to study Greek grammar. But it can be problematic when the author is not well-informed linguistically. For example, it would be helpful if he distinguished functional grammar from generative grammar rather than lumping them together. Likewise, it makes little sense that he praises the usefulness of modern linguistics, then turns around and solely relies on so-called 'traditional grammar' following popular works such as those of Mounce and Wallace. Thus, his confusing lessons are a poor representation of how modern linguistics can be useful for learning and using Greek.

Whitacre's work will be helpful to some students, although it may not help them to develop into self-sufficient and independent exegetes, especially when his work constantly encourage students to use newer Bible software and more recent resources. I have little doubt that students will find encouragement and motivation for learning Greek. They may even gain new insights by learning a new way to use Greek for their personal 'meditation' or various public ministries. However, all these strengths and benefits seem to be obscured by the confusion that the book also brings.

JC Jason Jung
McMaster Divinity College
Hamilton, ON