

Preface

1/ Usual problem with vocabulary

Although grammar is not easy, one of the main problems that students face when they read a text in a foreign language is not grammar itself but an ever-increasing worrying lack of vocabulary. When reading a text written in a foreign language, there will always be the odd word that you will not know and maybe you can deduce an approximate meaning (for instance, some students of the English language, when reading the sentence “They were there, in the garden, sitting under an oak”, could perhaps not know what “oak” means, but it would not be too difficult to deduce that it’s a kind of tree), but the wider your vocabulary knowledge is, the more easily you will be able to understand the message of the text.

2/ A Greek example

The same happens in Greek. Observe this sentence from Demosthenes:

πάλιν ἔξαρνος ἐτόλμησε γενέσθαι

You have studied the strong aorist of γίγνομαι, you immediately recognize it in this sentence in its form of aorist infinitive, you recognise also an aorist indicative in another word... but what do the words ἔξαρνος and τολμάω mean? No matter how excellent your grammar is and your capacity for detecting strong aorists and infinitives, either you know the meaning of those words or you will not understand what Demosthenes is saying.

3/ How to learn vocabulary

Learning it from a list of words to be memorised does not bring very good results, as words learnt out of context tend to be easily forgotten, but learning them in context is much more useful for embedding them in your memory. With this in mind, we offer here a series of texts, glosses and exercises that may help you to consolidate and enhance your knowledge of it.

4/ But take into account...

It must be mentioned that one of the difficulties of any language is the large amount of meanings that some words may have. Think for instance of the word λόγος: *word, speech, rational reasoning...* It is impossible to present all the meanings for each word, therefore the word you learn here with a concrete meaning may appear in another context with another meaning. Allow not some flexibility to the language but much flexibility, just remember what a surprise it is for a student of English language to find out that “well” means both a pleasant state of health and a hole in the ground from which you take water (or oil, if you are lucky).

For each word, the meaning that is given is the meaning that it has in *that* text. For instance, you will find in Μελέτημα 57 the word ἀναιρέω defined as “to undertake” because this is the meaning it has in that text, but in another text it may have the meaning “to destroy”. So, if you ever come across the sentence τὸν τῶν πολεμίων στρατὸν ἠδέως ἀνεῖλεν do not translate it as "He undertook the enemy's army with pleasure" just because "to undertake" is the meaning you had learnt in this book.

5/ What will you find in this book?

a) A preliminary part on core vocabulary.

The main 520 words that form the 65% of any standard Greek prose text. More details about it at the beginning of that section.

b) A main part of exercises (Μελετήματα) for more advanced vocabulary.

More advanced vocabulary in groups of ten new words per exercise (with an additional part on very basic vocabulary again). More details about it at the beginning of that section.

6/ Appendixes

At the end of the book there is a key for the exercises related to the ten glossed words in each Μελέτημα (there is no key either for the preliminary part, as the result is sentences that you create on your own, or for the additional exercises on very basic vocabulary after each Μελέτημα).

There is also an index of authors from whom the texts have been taken. A quick glance will allow you to select the authors you prefer to deal with.

Finally, you will find an alphabetical vocabulary for the glossed terms, with an indication of the Μελέτημα in which each term appears. You will see that some appear in more than one.

7/ Final purpose

As important as learning the 520 core words and the ten glossed words for each Μελέτημα, or maybe even more important, is making sure that you know the meaning of all the words of each text, not only the ten selected ones, as the probability that you come across any of the other words of the text is much higher. It would not make much sense to learn the meaning of προτερέω but to let pass the meaning of such an important word like ἀληθής in the same text (if you see that you have forgotten its meaning or that for some reason you have never known it) just because it is not one of the chosen ten.

There is no magic book in the style of “Study this book and you will have solved the problem of a lack of vocabulary for the rest of your life,” unless you memorise a whole Greek dictionary. So, this book is not intended to solve this problem once and for all, but only to give a little help.

8/ Acknowledgements

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