**Language and Culture Show and Tell: Ancient Greek**

**Dr Antony Makrinos**

**Transcript**

**Slide 1**

My name is Antony Macrinos, and today I'm going to talk to you about ancient Greek as part of the very exciting new exhibition at UCL, *Not just words: Learning languages through art and objects*.

In particular, I'm going to talk to you about how we are trying to teach our students ancient Greek through object-based learning and in specific through the use of mummy labels.

**Slide 2**

Now, when our students are trying to learn Greek, or when they start learning the language, they tell me that they find they find it difficult because of some specific challenges. So one of them is the Greek alphabet. They find difficult how to write and type it. Sometimes they have got problems with access and breathings. Some other times they do not have a knowledge of the grammar or the syntax, and some other times they find difficulties with the terminology, so terms like noun, verb, adjective, participle, gender, case, etc. They cannot understand the syntax of the Greek language, the word order. But the most significant problem that some of the students face is that they think that Greek is a dead language. This is a statement that I would like to refute, and I'm going to give you some of the reasons. That I believe that Greek is not a dead language at all.

**Slide 3**

So at UCL we have got a number of very exciting and important museums, which we're trying to embody into our everyday teaching in order to enrich the learning of our students. One of these museums is the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, which was named after the first Professor of Egyptology, and the Petri Museum has got a large collection of about 80,000 objects, and indeed it has got more than a thousand objects from Greco-Roman Egypt that include Greek inscriptions.

**Slide 4**

The Petrie Museum is a university museum. It was set up as a teaching resource for the department of Egyptian archaeology and philology at UCL and its collections have been enriched throughout the years from different kinds of people: the writer, Amelia Edwards and, of course, Professor William Flinders Petrie himself. And this is why we nowadays are trying to use this material culture, these objects that we find in the collections in order to enrich the teaching of Greek and in order to make it much more interesting for our students.

**Slide 5**

Now, the methodology that we are using is called, of course, object-based learning and this methodology engages and motivates us in our learning of Greek grammar and syntax. It enables us to explore the meaning of short passages or inscriptions in Greek from objects. It engages us in active learning. It helps us use digital technologies in order to challenge the idea of Greek as a dead language, and it makes our teaching public and very inclusive to a wider group of learners in the community, such as our students or the visitors in museums.

**Slide 6**

In specific a couple of words about mummy labels. Now mummy labels are found next to sarcophagi or attached to sarcophagi from Greco-Roman Egypt. They are divided into 3 main categories: the tabula and santa (on the left) which are mammy labels with handles or ears, as we call them; the mummy labels with which have got rectangular or arbitrary shapes (these are the ones on the right); or the mummy labels that have got a stele shape.

**Slide 7**

And all those different kinds of mummy labels can be found in the collections of the Petrie Museum.

**Slide 8**

In specific, we're going to see one particular example which will be exhibited in the exhibition. This is a wooden mummy label which reads on one side, in Greek, and I'm going to read the Greek text now:

CΩΜΑ ΑΠΟΛΙ

ΝΑΡΙΟΥ ΥΙΟΥ ΔΙ

ΟΚΛΕΟΥC ΕΡΙ

ΕΜΠΟΡΟΥ ΑΡCI

ΝΟΕΙΤΟΥ

and the translation of this into English is ‘the body of Apolinarios, son of Diokles, the wool merchant of Arsinoe’. This is a might be a mummy label inscribed in black ink. On the other side we have got the same text in less clear Greek characters, and it comes from 100 to 200 AD from Hawara.

**Slide 9**

Now, what is really interesting with this mommy label is the different kind of information that it that it provides about the diseased. So first of all, we have got the first word is ΣΩΜΑ. This is a 3rd declension noun in Greek, which means ‘body’. So this identifies what is inside the sarcophagus, and then we have got a genitive of possession with a proper name ‘of Apolinarios’, ΑΠΟΛΙΝΑΡΙΟΥ, which is the name of the diseased, so the body of Apolinarios. Then, exactly after that we have got the, let's say the surname, which is nothing else than the patronymic of the diseased, so the name of his father, ΥΙΟΥ ΔΙΟΚΛΕΟΥΣ, ‘son of Diokles’, so ‘the body of Apolinarios, the son of Diokles’. The word that comes after that, ΕΡΙΕΜΠΟΡΟΥ, is again a Greek word, it is the word from where ‘emporium’ comes in English, and it means ‘wool merchant’. And so that word informs us about the profession of the diseased. And the final word that we have is ΑΡΣΙΝΟΕΙΤΟΥ, in other words ‘from Arsinoe’. Arsinoe, as you know, is an Egyptian city, it is also called Faiyum, and it is the place of origin of the deceased. So all these different kind of information compose a very detailed image about what the identity of the deceased is and it sort of incites our imagination in order to understand both the language, but also understand and imagine the person who is behind this this mummy label.

**Slide 10**

It is interesting that in the Petrie Museum we also have got the famous Faiyum portraits. The Petrie Museum has got a very big collection of the portraits, portraits of the diseased that were found in Faiyum. And they have been painted. It's basically the diseased painted at their best. We do not have a lot of information about this, but these Faiyum portraits are really amazing, and they give us a very good image of the people we are talking about.

**Slide 11**

And so sometimes we are using these kinds of portraits in order to inspire our students and to try to make them imagine the everyday life of the people, or imagine the lives of the people that these mummy labels are talking about.

Furthermore, another interesting thing is that the Petrie Museum has created 3D images for learning and teaching of some of the objects that they have, including the mummy labels.

**Slide 12**

And this here is the virtual mummy label that the Petrie Museum has got as a 3D object in their collections. And this is the mummy label that is part of our exhibition. So if you go online, you can actually see the mummy label, see all the different sites up and down, left and right and also there is a link to the catalogue entry, which is very helpful, gives you all this sort of information that I talked about before.

**Slide 13**

This is very inspiring, both for visitors and students who have reported that they love the use of 3D scanned objects in learning and teaching. If you want more information about this, please visit the links that I have included in the slide about the 3D Petrie Museum and the research that comes.

**Slide 14**

If you want to include this as part of one of the classes, the best way to do this is actually to produce some blank mummy labels and have some ink, and some of the *styli* that could help the students write their Greek on the mummy labels or copy the original mummy labels that the Petrie Museum has got.

This has been done many times in many of our classes, and it really helps the students imagine how the mammal labels were produced, what were the people behind them, different kinds of challenges that sometimes people have when they produce these mammie labels.

**Slide 15**

The knowledge gained whilst reading the mummy labels is absolutely important. It has to do with the general knowledge about the Petrie Museum, the different categories of the mummy labels, the grammar and syntax of the words that we find there, the exact knowledge that comes with the labels and the knowledge that comes with how people were creating these mummy labels.

We have noticed that when we do that there is increased student motivation and academic achievement.

**Slide 16**

And this is very much reflected on the actual student feedback which you can see here on this slide. People find that this is a very nice class. They find that the resources are very useful. There are very clear presentations of grammar, and that you know, it gives a very imaginative way of teaching Greek. It is a very imaginative way of teaching Greek.

**Slide 17**

So students comment on reading Greek, on real artifacts on handling the labels of the objects, they love touching the labels if they can as well.

**Slide 18**

And when we have asked the students how likely would it be that they recommend this workshop to other students, 90% of them said that it would be highly likely.

**Slide 19**

So the student, the students feedback has been absolutely amazing for these classes and it proves that object based learning is a very imaginative way of teaching Greek to the students.

**Slide 20**

If you would like more resources about learning ancient Greek, you can see here some of the textbooks that we have and that we use in learning ancient Greek. They are not the only ones, but there is just a selection for more information. Please send me an email on to [a.makrinos@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:a.makrinos@ucl.ac.uk), and thanks for listening.