Module: Biblical Hebrew 178
Lecturer: Prof Christo van der Merwe cvdm@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Coordinator: Mrs Miné de Klerk mine@sun.ac.za

Learning activity:
Blended learning
approach

Learning technology:
Paradigms Master Pro,
Anki & Logos Bible
Software

BLENDED LEARNING
CASE STUDIES 2016

Context
Background overview
The Department of Ancient Studies is responsible for studies of the ancient cultures and languages of North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Near East (West Asia) and offers modules in Ancient Cultures, Biblical Hebrew, Ancient Greek, Latin and Classical Legal Culture. The cultures studied include those of regions like Egypt, the Sudan, Ethiopia, the Levant (Syria, Jordan and Palestine/Israel), Anatolia (Turkey), Mesopotamia (Iraq), Persia (Iran), Greece and Rome.

Set against the background of the Biblical world, Biblical Hebrew 178 introduces students to the language and culture of the Old Testament. Students are given a brief introduction to the geography, peoples and general history of the Ancient Near East. Next, the module concentrates on the study of the Biblical region within its historical context. Initially, students are given insight into Biblical Hebrew as a written language. This is followed by the teaching of basic Biblical Hebraic vocabulary and grammar and the visual illustration of this with examples taken from the world and text of the Hebrew Bible. Finally, the aim is not only to promote among students a firm grasp of the nature of Biblical Hebrew as a language rooted within the Biblical world but also to enable them to utilise dictionary, grammar and electronic resources for the optimal reading of basic Biblical Hebraic narrative.

The challenge
Teaching ancient languages (i.e. languages that are no longer spoken) poses unique pedagogical challenges. Lecturers have to take into account that students may lack the very basis for learning a complex new language, such as a basic understanding (even in their mother tongue) of how language and vocabulary are constructed. Furthermore, the historical context of these languages is critical for constructing meaning with regard to understanding languages such as Biblical Hebrew.

In the lecturer's experience (and based on the literature on language acquisition teaching), learning a new language is highly dependent on student motivation. He therefore feels that he needs to support his students by taking a very pragmatic approach by helping them to practise, to access and to use available (including online) resources and by engaging with them – from the very start of the module – as a facilitator and coach who is vested in their success.

Advantages associated with the integration of technology
The use of online platforms affords students with the opportunities to practise key skills at their own pace, whilst getting continuous feedback on their level of understanding. Rich media (audio, visual and videos) help students to understand the vocabulary and language construction within their historical (i.e. Biblical) context.

Student overview
Approximately 40 undergraduate students enrol for this course. The study of Biblical Hebrew is available through either a BA in Language and Culture or a BTh with the original languages.
Other relevant role-players
Tutors are appointed to present the tutorial sessions. A student assistant administrates the written tests. Only the lecturer is responsible for the upload, update and management of the study material on SUNLearn.

Learning and assessment activities
Educational approach
The lecturer follows a cognitive approach to teaching language (Holme, 2009; Tyler, 2008). This implies that meaning is considered to be at the centre of any linguistic enterprise (in this case, the learning of a text-based language like Biblical Hebrew). It is assumed that lexical and grammatical constructions have a semantic potential. Typically, one dimension of that potential is construed in a particular context. At the initial stages of learning a language, students are expected to learn only the most prototypical usages. They are, however, sensitised to the fact that linguistic expressions can have a range of senses.

Cognitive linguistics (CL) makes the functional assumption that form is motivated by meaning. CL also analyses form-meaning pairings as products of how cognition structures perception. CL thus helps teachers to fit language to the nature of the cognition that learns whilst devising modes of instruction that are better attuned to the nature of the language that has to be learnt.

Module: Biblical Hebrew 178
Lecturer: Prof Christo van der Merwe cvdm@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Coordinator: Mrs Miné de Klerk mine@sun.ac.za

Learning activity:
Blended Learning approach

Learning technology:
Paradigms Master Pro, Anki & Logos Bible Software

Page 1
Context
Learning and assessment activities

Page 2
Learning environment

Page 3
Learning environment (continues)

Page 4
Student experience

Page 5
General
References

BLENDED LEARNING
CASE STUDIES 2016

Learning activities

Students are expected to prepare for lectures by closely consulting the course booklet (module outline). The booklet outlines the activities that they are expected to complete for each week (Figure 1). They can further prepare by using the external online tools Paradigms Master Pro, Anki and Logos Bible Software.
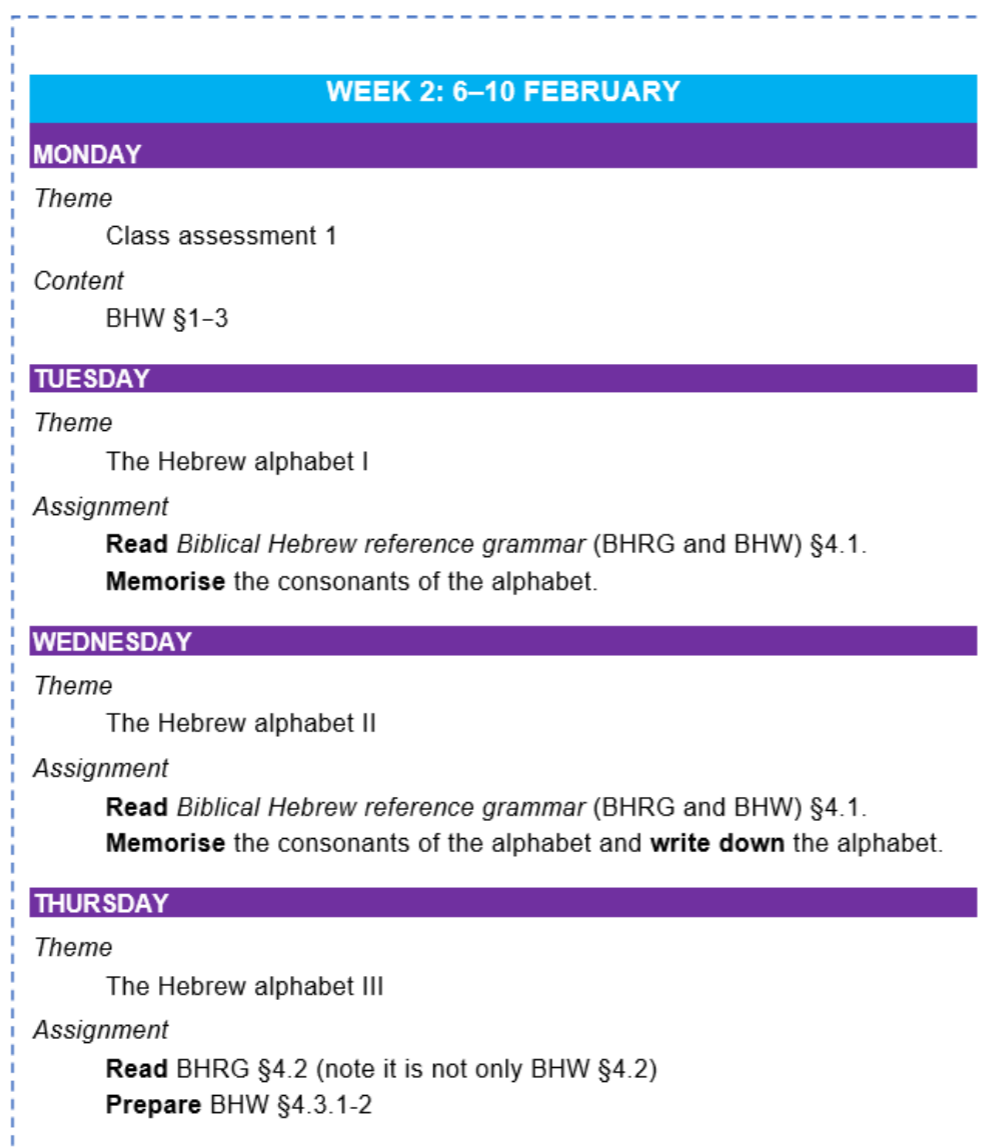

Figure 1: Example of a guide for lecture preparation

Assessment activities

The module follows a continuous assessment model. Students are given marks for class tests and class participation (20%), an oral assessment (5%), six semester tests (5%, 5%, 15%, 10%, 15% and 20%) and a revision test (5%).

Small, informal, written class tests on sets of vocabulary are given weekly. These are not necessarily graded but are often used at the beginning of lectures and tutorials as a roll-call tool. There are also weekly vocabulary tests. These are graded and the feedback is shared with students throughout the course.

Learning environment
Learning setting

A weekly cycle is followed in the module (Figure 2). It commences on a Tuesday and ends on a Thursday. Mr Ruan Etsebeth (tutor and co-lecturer) and Prof Van der Merwe (lecturer) are responsible for the formal lectures on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. An assistant sees to the tutorials on Fridays and the tests on Mondays.
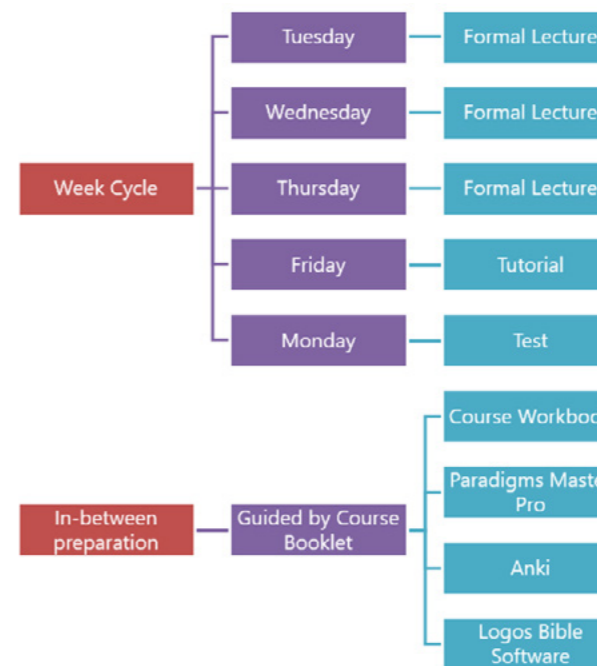

Figure 2: Structuring of learning activities during a week

Module: Biblical Hebrew 178
Lecturer: Prof Christo van der Merwe cvdm@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Coordinator: Mrs Miné de Klerk mine@sun.ac.za

BLENDED LEARNING
CASE STUDIES 2016

Students are expected to come to lectures prepared; a class test can be given at any time and the mark will form part of their final results. They should consult their course outline booklet every day so that they know exactly what is expected of them in every lecture.

The lectures are presented partly in a question-and-answer format, i.e. partly in the form of formal lectures and partly in the form of discussions. Participation in the classes by students is taken into account in the determination of final marks.

During the tutorial sessions, the content covered during the week is revised and exercises are done. On Mondays, a test is written on the content covered during the week. In their own time, students can use the course booklet, course workbook, Paradigms Master Pro, Anki and Logos Bible Software to prepare for lectures.

Content and technology resources
Online, interactive tools (i.e. language learning platforms) are recommended to students for language practise. These tools are the heart of the module and are seen as instruments that they will be able to use for the rest of their lives. These software tools are electronic libraries and resources focusing on Bible information that is continuously updated.

Paradigms Master Pro is a software program that quizzes users on word forms in various languages (Figure 3). It shows the user a form and the user has to tell the program what that form is, morphologically. The intended outcome is to learn the morphology of a language and to retain what has been learnt.

According to the website, "'Repetition is the mother of all learning,' the ancients said. PMP gives you repetition to help you really learn the forms, while also using technology to give you variety, so it doesn't get boring."

The course workbook is therefore supplemented by the use of the program Paradigms Master Pro. It provides students with a general introduction and overview of Hebrew grammar and treats only the most basic and frequently occurring constructions. As far as irregular (weak) verbs are concerned, Paradigms Master Pro has proved to be very helpful for practising the parsing of these verbs. It has been licensed to be used by students and staff of Stellenbosch University; it is available free of charge from the lecturer or it can be downloaded from SUNLearn.
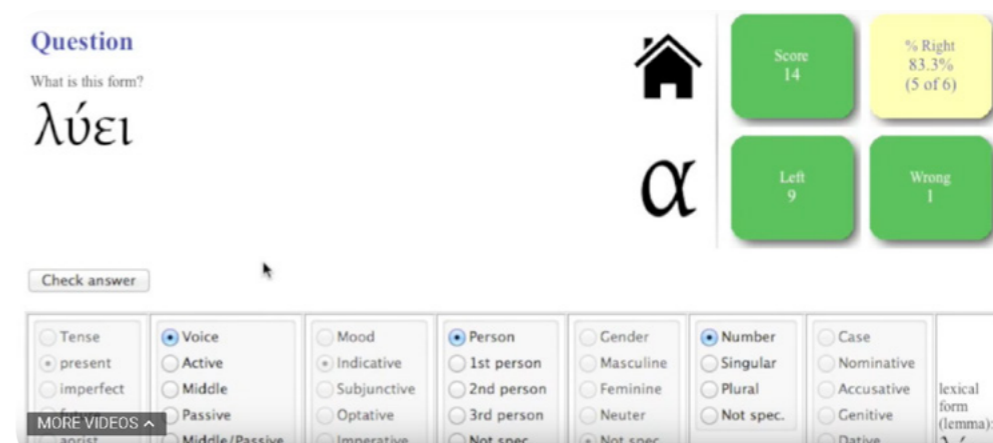

Figure 3: Screenshot of a Paradigms Master Pro activity

Anki is a program that places emphasis on remembering (Figure 4). Various packs of flashcards focusing on certain topics, such as Hebrew, are available. The app can be accessed free of charge on Android and via a web browser.

Figure 4: Screenshot of an Anki flashcard exercise

Module: Biblical Hebrew 178
Lecturer: Prof Christo van der Merwe cvdm@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Coordinator: Mrs Miné de Klerk mine@sun.ac.za

Learning activity:
Blended learning approach

Learning technology:
Paradigms Master Pro, Anki & Logos Bible Software

Page 1
Context
Learning and assessment activities

Page 2
Learning environment

Page 3
Learning environment (continues)

Page 4
Student experience

Page 5
General
References

BLENDED LEARNING CASE STUDIES 2016

Logos Bible Software is a complementary resource to the Bible that allows students to explore cultural and historical contexts, do in-depth exegesis and study original Hebrew with interactive tools (Figure 5).
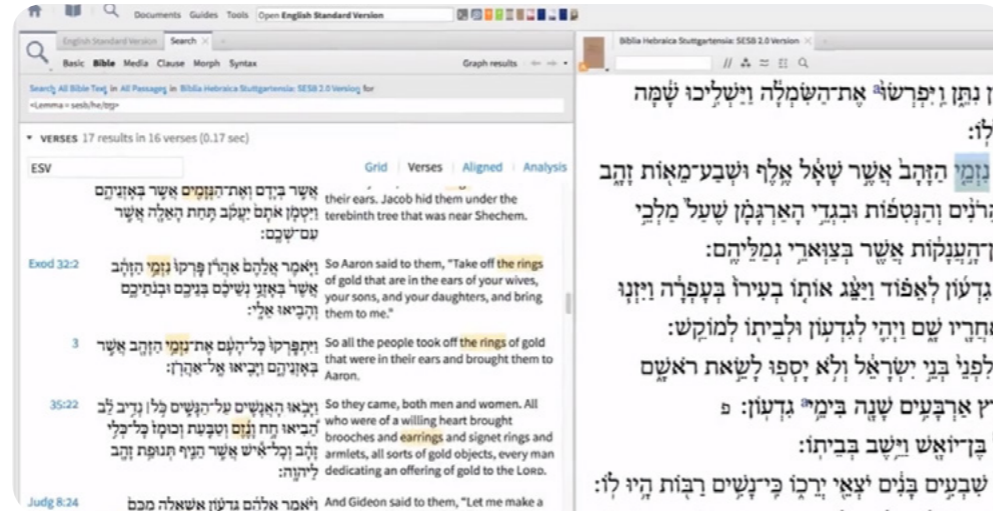

Figure 5: Screenshot of a Logos Bible Software learning activity

Offline resources consist mainly of the course workbook developed by the lecturer (available on SUNLearn, to be printed as hard copy) (Figures 6 and 7). The workbook includes scaffolds for students learning to grasp the historical and geographical context of the language, followed by relevant exercises related to weekly themes and vocabulary.
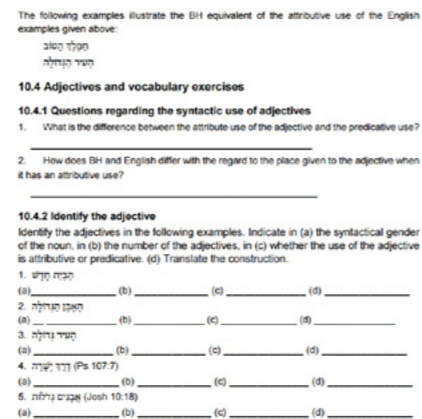

Figure 6: Example of a typical learning exercise included in the workbook

Figure 7: Screenshot of resource available in the offline content

Students can access the Anki tool only via Androids and tablets but, since they are a small group, they help each other to access the computer desktop version as well. They find the other online tools and exercises easy to use and are clearly guided on the outputs expected from them by their course workbook.

Student experience
Student feedback on the learning experience
Students indicate that they enjoy the use of the various blended tools and that the weekly quizzes motivate them to keep abreast of course material.

Assessment impact
Students receive continual feedback on their level of understanding by writing weekly tests (Monday vocabulary tests) and can then rely on the online tools and workbook to further their learning.

Module: Biblical Hebrew 178
Lecturer: Prof Christo van der Merwe cvdm@sun.ac.za
Blended Learning Coordinator: Mrs Miné de Klerk mine@sun.ac.za

BLENDED LEARNING
CASE STUDIES 2016

General
Opportunities
• Overall: The course is designed to incorporate student-centred pedagogical techniques by making the course interesting (with, for example, a range of interactive, blended learning opportunities), by motivating students to keep taking responsibility for their own learning at the prescribed pace (with written class tests as a roll call activity) and by the lecturer engaging with students as a language coach. The lecturer aims to facilitate the learning of students as much as possible.

• Rich visual media further help students to link content (vocabulary and grammar) to context. All learning resources (including PowerPoint presentations) are designed to convey language meaning as opposed to pure form.

• The online tools recommended to students are pedagogically sound and user-friendly and the students can continue to use them after they complete the course to further their lifelong study and translation of the language.

• The element of gamification embedded in the course (small-stake challenges, such as quizzes, to start a class or interactive online exercises) should serve to motivate students. This could be further enhanced in the future by exploring ways to monitor, assess and provide feedback on the students' use of the relevant online libraries and language software platforms.

Challenges
• Students cannot be assessed via the external platforms, which means that their learning cannot be analysed or tracked. The use of workbook and regular quizzes therefore has to be carefully monitored.

• Hebrew fonts are hard to access and use on SUNLearn, which makes the use of external tools a necessity.

• Logos content (e-books) have to be acquired as a package but students all have access to the full e-library developed for the Department.

• The lecturers involved in this module feel that there is still room for improvement with regard to how the use of important online platforms and software can be taught in a structured way and how students' skills in terms of using the required software can be assessed.

Advice
• Students can be supported and motivated by leveraging active learning opportunities, gamification techniques, rich media and interesting historical context, where applicable.

• For online TLAs to be effective, students need to know exactly what is expected of them and how to use the various tools (i.e. students need to be taken on board). Their learning needs to be scaffolded carefully while their time and available resources need to be taken into account at the same time (i.e. they should not be overburdened).

• Providing continuous feedback to students builds trust with lecturers and teachers. Small-stake assessments help students to understand how and where they can improve and to view these as opportunities to advance their learning.

References
Holme, R. 2009. *Cognitive linguistics and language teaching.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tyler, A. 2008. Cognitive linguistics and second language instruction. *Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition*, 456–488.