



Discovering Ancient Greek and Latin

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Introduction

Learn the basics of either Ancient Greek or Latin with this OpenLearn course.

Knowledge of classical Greek or Latin is essential for anyone wanting to get beneath the skin of the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. This free course provides a taste of what learning Latin and Greek entails by taking you on the first steps of the journey towards learning these classical languages. It has been written with beginners in mind, especially those who have encountered the classical world through translations of Greek and Latin texts and wish to know more about the languages in which these works were composed. If you have looked at a classical text in the original language, you may recognise the gap that can exist between 1) possessing the ‘tools of the trade’ for reading ancient languages – such as a text, a dictionary, a commentary and a translation – and 2) actually being able to read the language! The aim of this material is to help you bridge this gap by introducing some of the linguistic skills required to navigate a passage of Latin, Ancient Greek or both.

Note that in this course all Greek is presented twice, first in Greek letters and secondly ‘transliterated’ into English letters. You can therefore study this material without knowledge of the Greek alphabet. You may, however, wish to acquire some knowledge of the alphabet and pronunciation before you begin, by looking at [Introducing Ancient Greek](#).

If you are interested in the pronunciation of Latin, you may wish to look at [Introducing Latin](#) before you begin this course.

Note that references to the Greek language in this course are to Ancient Greek rather than modern.



Figure 1 An inscription and column capital from Ancient Corinth

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course [A275 Reading Classical Greek: language and literature](#).

Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- explain why Greek and Latin are referred to as *classical* languages
- understand some of the distinctive features of Greek and Latin and some features they share in common with other languages
- understand why an English translation cannot represent a passage of Greek or Latin word for word
- contrast the role of *word order* and *word endings* in Greek and Latin with those in English
- explain the terms *case*, *declension* and (for Latin only) *conjugation*.

1 Characteristics of the Greek and Latin languages

If you embark on the study of Greek or Latin, what sort of language will you be learning? What are their distinctive features? What do they share in common with other languages? We can start with one obvious characteristic. Both are referred to as 'classical' languages, a word which seems to endow them with a special status. But what does that really mean? There is no single or simple answer to this question. The attempt to answer it, however, can shed light on important features of both languages. It also leads directly to another central issue for any student of Greek and Latin. What can these languages offer us today and why do they continue to deserve further study?

Activity 1

What does the term 'classical' suggest to you? What do you think it means when applied to Ancient Greek and Latin?

Jot down your thoughts in the box below.

Provide your answer...

Discussion

Your answer will no doubt differ from the one below, but you might have noted that the word 'classical' can be used to describe some of the following:

- something old and traditional that has stood the test of time (and is, we might say, 'timeless')
- an artefact of great quality
- a thing that deserves to be copied or emulated
- something that sets the standard by which other things should be measured
- something old (and possibly out-of-date) in contrast to something new; for instance, 'classical languages' as opposed to 'modern languages', or 'classical physics' as opposed to 'quantum physics'
- a particular style, embracing concepts such as balance, harmony, restraint and correctness. In this sense, 'classical' might be contrasted with the word 'romantic', denoting a more intuitive and free-spirited approach.

You might also have observed that the term is now applied very widely – to music, ballet, guitar, cuisine, economics, and so on. The range of applications can be extended even further by including the related word 'classic', as in 'classic' literature, films, cars and so on. Indeed to describe something as 'classic' sometimes amounts to little more than a vague statement of approval.

We shall look in more detail at the application of these terms to Latin and Greek at the end of this section. For the moment, note that each description in the list has at one time or other been applied to both Latin and Greek.

1.1 The spread of Greek

The origins of Greek are unknown and probably unknowable. The language is first found on Mycenaean clay tablets dating to around the middle of the second millennium BCE. This makes it the oldest attested European language still in use today. But its history as a language of literature begins not with the written word but with music and performance in the shape of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (eighth century BCE) and a great body of 'lyric' poetry performed at festivals and *symposia* (aristocratic drinking parties). At the same time it was also in daily use in Greek settlements across the Aegean sea, the coast of Turkey, Southern Italy, Sicily, North Africa and Asia Minor. But it was the great flowering of Greek literature in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE that established its prestige. This flowering took place chiefly in the theatres of Athens (in the work of the playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes), its *agora* (forum) and courtrooms (the orators Lysias and Demosthenes) and its philosophical schools (notably the Academy of Plato). We should also mention the *Histories* of Herodotus, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* and its continuation by Xenophon in his *Hellēnika* ('Greek events').

The defeat of the Persian empire by Alexander the Great (356–323 BCE) pushed what was still largely a coastal language further inland, notably in Egypt, the Middle East and Turkey. Crucially for the development of the Greek language, these events also led to the establishment of numerous Greek cities, the most important being Alexandria at the mouth of the river Nile (331 BCE). It was here rather than in mainland Greece that the greatest library of Greek literature was established. Subsequently a more standardised form of Greek developed to take the place of the variety of dialects that had existed to this point. This 'common dialect' (*koinē dialektos*), was heavily influenced by the literature of Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, making it accessible to a modern reader with some experience of authors from this period, such as the orator Lysias or the philosopher Plato. The most influential works written in *koinē* Greek are the 27 books of the New Testament.



Figure 2 Map showing the spread of the Greek language: 350–1 BCE

1.2 The spread of Latin

One clue about early Latin exists in the name. Why 'Latin' and not 'Roman'? The answer to that question is in the beginnings of Rome itself. Latin was originally the language not of Rome but of Latium, a small region south-east of the river Tiber inhabited by the 'Latini', now part of the much larger Italian region of Lazio. Rome was, at first, just one of a number of cities in this area, although by 300 BCE she was the dominant one and the conquest of Latium was complete.

In one respect the history of Latin is the opposite of Greek. Greek already had an impressive literary pedigree before being carried further afield by the imperial conquests of Alexander the Great. For Rome, on the other hand, empire came first. Latin literature

appears from around the middle of the third century BCE, by which time Rome was the strongest power in Italy and was beginning to create provinces overseas in Sicily, Corsica and Sardinia. More than two centuries later in the time of Virgil, Horace and Livy, Rome could already boast a long history as an imperial power, and its empire included provinces carved out of the kingdoms ruled by Alexander the Great's successors in Greece and Syria, along with the recently added kingdom of the Ptolemies in Egypt. The development of Latin, especially Latin literature, needs to be seen against this background. It can be understood in part as the conscious creation of a language and literature to match Rome's imperial achievements and a language appropriate for telling Rome's story.

1.3 Family resemblances

Let us now take a closer look at the languages themselves.

Neither language is unusual from a strictly linguistic point of view. It is easier to trace connections between them and other languages than to identify any unique characteristics. You can appreciate this by thinking in terms of a 'family tree' of languages, with younger languages inheriting characteristics from older ones. This so-called 'genetic' approach to language classification gathered momentum in the late eighteenth century, especially after the demonstration in 1786 that Greek and Latin shared roots with Sanskrit, the ancient language of India. The excitement generated by this discovery is neatly captured in the following contemporary account:

The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of the verbs and in the forms of the grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer [i.e. linguist] could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists.

Sir William Jones, 1786 address to the Royal Asiatic Society in Kolkata

1.4 Indo-European

The discovery of connections with Sanskrit made it possible to place Greek and Latin within a larger group known today as the 'Indo-European' family of languages. This family embraces almost all of Europe, Iran and Northern India. All of these speakers use languages descended from a common ancestor known as 'Proto-Indo-European' which, though lost, can be reconstructed to a certain extent. These shared origins across Indo-European languages are particularly clear in similarities of vocabulary, notably in words denoting family relationships.

Table 1 Words for 'father' in Indo-European languages

Language	Word for 'father'
Sanskrit	piter
Greek	patēr
Latin	pater

Irish Gaelic athair
 German Vater
 English father

Although the Indo-European family contains a relatively small number of languages (around 100; there are an estimated 6000 languages in use in the world today), it contains a larger number of native speakers than any other family. One estimate puts the number of people whose native language is Indo-European at roughly 1.7 billion.

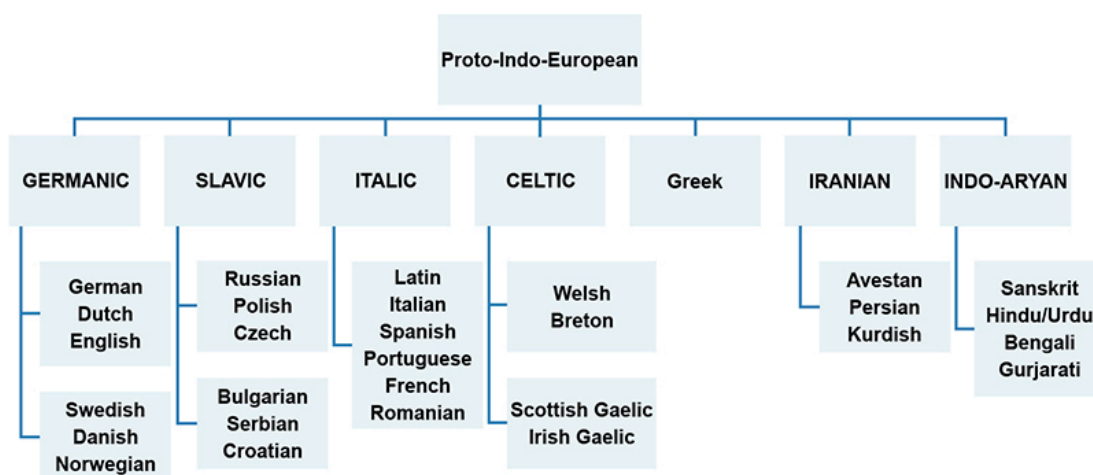


Figure 3 Some of the main branches of Indo-European languages

1.5 Word endings and word order

In addition to locating languages ‘genetically’ on a family tree, we can classify them ‘typologically’, on the basis of shared linguistic features – for example according to patterns in the way they use sounds, word endings or grammar. From this perspective too there is nothing special about Greek and Latin. Although both contain features unfamiliar to English speakers these can easily be paralleled elsewhere. Note, for instance, the following two points which set them apart from English (and which we will inspect in more detail later).

Word endings

Greek and Latin use a rich system of word endings to convey information such as the tense of a verb, the relationship between an adjective and the noun it describes, or the role of a noun within a sentence. This approach to conveying information would be recognisable to speakers of German, Russian, Finnish, or indeed any of a large group of ‘inflected’ languages, ‘inflection’ being the name given to a change in the shape of a word. English itself was originally more inflected than it is today, and still retains some examples, as we shall see later.

Word order

Where English says ‘Brutus murdered Caesar’, Greek and Latin prefer the word order ‘Brutus Caesar murdered’. Indeed they have the option of placing the words in any order without altering the meaning of the sentence. Again, we will leave the details for later. For the moment, notice again that this preference for placing the verb at the end, though

different from English, can be found in other languages (like Turkish) as can the greater flexibility in word order.

1.6 Language and literature

In addition to looking at the mechanics of languages, it is also important to consider the way they were actually used. One fact of great importance for the development of Greek and Latin is that they became vehicles for writing literature (which is not true of every language). This pushed them in novel and interesting directions, allowing them to express new ideas with freshly minted words or with existing words endowed with new meanings. We catch sight of this process in the development of Latin as a philosophical language. The responsibility for this lies primarily with Cicero, who has been credited with creating ‘nothing less than a whole language and literature of Latin philosophy’ (Taplin, (2001) *Literature in the Roman World*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 41). This ‘philosophical’ language included works such as ‘On The Republic’ (*De re publica*) and ‘On Laws’ (*De legibus*), inspired by Plato’s similarly named *Republic* and *Laws*, along with a great deal of new technical vocabulary for expressing philosophical ideas which until that point could only be expressed satisfactorily in Greek. Much of this work took place in a short burst of productivity during the years 45 and 44 BCE. We can only speculate what Cicero might have achieved, and its impact upon Latin, had he not been killed in 43 BCE on the instructions of Mark Antony. Here are some words coined by Cicero, with Greek equivalents where they exist.

Table 2 Latin words coined by Cicero

Latin	Greek	
quālitās	ποιότης (<i>poiotēs</i>)	quality, distinguishing characteristic
mōrālis	ἠθικός (<i>ēthikos</i>)	concerned with ethics, moral
essentia	οὐσία (<i>ousia</i>)	essence
hūmānitās		human nature

The Greek words had in their turn been invented centuries earlier for the purpose of philosophising. Indeed Plato, who coined the word ποιότης (*poiotēs*) for ‘quality’ (from ποῖος, *poios*, meaning ‘of what kind?’), apologised to his audience for its strangeness (*Theaetetus*, 182a).

If we wish to emphasise the expressive power of Greek and Latin, we need to think of this not as a built-in feature of either language, but as the result of a long process of development, stimulated by a number of factors which include:

- the ambition, imagination and sheer hard work of individual authors
- competition between writers, sometimes literal as in the dramatic contests in Athens and other Greek cities
- the existence of a rich and varied literary tradition for inspiration. For Romans, this tradition was Greek as much as Latin
- a supportive environment for writing – such as the cycle of festivals in classical Greece, the ‘bookish’ culture of the library of Alexandria, a circle of like-minded

aristocratic friends and readers in first century BCE Rome, or the patronage and encouragement of writers under the Emperor Augustus

- the role of both languages within long-lived historical institutions, such as the Empires of Alexander the Great and his successors, the Roman Empire and the Christian Church.

1.7 The quantity of Greek and Latin

It seems odd to consider the quantity of writing rather than its quality. Nevertheless, the sheer volume of classical writing, especially in Greek, is remarkable and forms an important backdrop against which to consider any individual author or work of classical literature. Most of this writing has been lost but we catch occasional glimpses of how much must have once existed. The library of Alexandria, for instance, is said to have contained half a million rolls of papyrus; its nearest rival, the library at Pergamum near Troy contained some 200,000.



Figure 4 The Library of Celsus, Ephesus, Turkey, built 110–135 CE

It is worth keeping this larger context in mind when researching a particular author. A useful question to begin with is what did he (or, rarely, she) write and how much has survived? The answer might be sobering. Try the following question.

Activity 2

Of the three great Athenian tragic playwrights, we possess 7 complete plays by Aeschylus, 7 by Sophocles and 19 by Euripides. How many plays in total do you think they wrote between them?

- roughly 100
- roughly 200
- roughly 300

Answer

Our best estimate is around 300. Although most of the plays do not survive, lists of titles are preserved from the Byzantine era.

Euripides seems more prolific than his rivals, but the figures are misleading. We possess more of his works thanks to the chance survival of a volume of plays

beginning with Greek letters from epsilon (the fifth letter of the alphabet) to kappa (the tenth).

Similar misfortunes have befallen Latin authors. Of the 142 books of Livy's history of Rome, only books 1–10 and 21–45 survive, with a few gaps. Likewise there are gaps in the works of the historian Tacitus, perhaps most frustratingly for historians his account in the *Annals* of the death of the emperor Tiberius, the reign of Gaius (Caligula) and the accession of Claudius.

Another important question is how much literary work was taking place outside the canon of well-known authors. Comedy provides an interesting comparison with tragedy here. The only complete comedies to survive from the fifth century BCE are those written by the comic playwright Aristophanes (eleven of whose plays survive in total, representing around 25 per cent of his total output). But as with tragedy, we know the names of many more comic playwrights whose works are either lost or survive only in fragmentary form.

Activity 3

How many comic poets do you think were writing in the fifth century BCE? What kind of scholarly tools might you use to help you arrive at an informed estimate?

.....

Discussion

Although we cannot hope to answer this question precisely, there are various resources we can use to help us to arrive at an estimate. An obvious place to start might be a reference work like the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* whose entry on 'comedy (Greek), Old' provides some basic information on early comedy ('Old Comedy' is the name given to the kind of comedy being written in the fifth century BCE, which differs from later 'Middle Comedy' and 'New Comedy'). This *OCD* entry contains the names of some of the better known fifth-century playwrights, and also points you towards further reading, such as modern collections of surviving fragments of comic writers.

Another approach is to use an online resource such as the [Thesaurus Linguae Graecae](#) ('Treasure Store of the Greek Language', usually abbreviated to TLG), a database which contains a list of ancient authors tagged by genre (e.g. 'comic.', 'epic.', 'hist.', 'trag.'). The basic *TLG* (which is free to use) is hugely useful for students and scholars alike, but since it contains only surviving, canonical works, it is hardly surprising that a search of this database reveals the name of just one fifth-century BCE comic writer: Aristophanes. But our search of the full database produced 49 results, giving a rough indication of the amount of non-Aristophanic comedy written in the fifth century BCE.

1.8 'Classical' languages

We can return now to the term 'classical'. As you study the classical world, you might like to reflect on the usefulness or otherwise of the term. Here are a few observations, although the list is by no means exhaustive or immune to challenge. The main thing is to

treat the word 'classical' carefully and critically, and to be aware that it can rule out as much as it rules in.

Here are a few potential weaknesses with the term:

- It can be used both to *describe* historical periods and to *evaluate* them (usually favourably). We might compare a term like '1960s', which is sometimes used in the same way, although in this case the evaluation is often unfavourable.
- It has both a narrow and a broad sense. It can be applied narrowly to 'classical' periods *within* Greek and Roman history (fifth- and fourth-century-BCE Athens, and Rome of the first centuries BCE and CE), and, more loosely, to the Ancient Greek and Roman worlds as a whole.
- Some fundamental works of Greek and Latin fall outside the narrow definition, including Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (eighth century BCE) and St. Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible, the so-called *Vulgate*, from the fourth century CE.
- It views the classical world through its art, above all its great literature. It may therefore divert attention from other traces of the ancient world such as coins, inscriptions, papyri, and, above all, the physical remains studied by archaeology.
- It emphasises the extraordinary over the ordinary. One could argue that 'ordinary' writing tells us as much about a society as 'extraordinary' literature. We must at least acknowledge that both emerge from the same society.
- Tastes change and the idea of what is 'classical' can change with them. The first-century-CE Roman poet Statius, for instance, is today known only to specialists, but his epic poem on the legend of Thebes (*Thebaid*) was profoundly influential in the medieval period, and he was read by both Dante and Chaucer (who refers to him as 'Stace').

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the term has a number of strengths:

- It expresses the influence of both languages on European culture.
- It is a historically important concept, central to the survival of interest in Greece and Rome, even if its influence is weaker today than in the past.
- It highlights one central reason for studying classics – direct access to important works of literature.
- The Greeks and Roman themselves thought in terms of 'classical' periods, i.e. periods where literature and art were believed to be authoritative and worth emulating. 'Classical' is itself a Latin term, from the Latin word 'classicus' meaning of the highest class.
- It captures the close relationship between Greek and Roman culture. It is useful to have a single word to make this point. 'Greco-Roman' is a more neutral term for expressing the same idea.

2 Beginning Latin

Your first encounter with a classical text is likely to take place through an English translation. To delve deeper, the next step might be to acquire the Latin text and a Latin–English dictionary. With these in hand you can inspect the text and translation in parallel, trying to relate one to the other.

Catullus 7	
quaeris quot mihi basiationes	You ask how many of your super-kisses,
tuae, Lesbia, sint satis superque.	Lesbia, are enough and more than enough for me.
quam magnus numerus Libyssae harenae	As great as the number of Libyan sands
lasericiferis iacet Cyrenis,	That lie in silphium-producing Cyrene,
oraclum Iovis inter aestuosi	Between the oracle of red-hot Jupiter
et Batti veteris sacrum sepulcrum,	And the sacred tomb of ancient Battus,
aut quam sidera multa, cum tacet nox,	Or as many as the stars, when night is silent,
furtivos hominum vident amores,	That see the furtive love-affairs of men.
tam te basia multa basiare	That is how many kisses are enough and
vesano satis et super Catullo est,	More than enough for Catullus to kiss you in his frenzy,
quae nec pernumerare curiosi	So many that busybodies will neither be able to count them
possint nec mala fascinare lingua.	Nor bewitch them with an evil tongue.

Figure 5 An example of a Latin parallel text: Catullus 7, with a facing-page English translation

You can make some headway with this approach. It has the great advantage of allowing you to work with ‘real’ Latin composed by a native Latin speaker. Eventually, however, its limitations will become clear. Two problems stand out in particular:

1. An English translation typically contains more words than its Latin equivalent. From the standpoint of English, some words appear to be ‘missing’ in Latin.
2. English word order will almost certainly differ from the Latin.

These problems arise because English and Latin work on different principles. If you can grasp these principles and their implications, you will have taken an important step on the path to reading Latin *as Latin* instead of through the medium of English.

In the following sections, you will work step by step through some short pieces of Latin, including two small extracts from the works of the Roman aristocrat Pliny the Younger and the poet Catullus to see how these differences work in practice.

2.1 Parallel text 1: Pliny

Here is a short extract from Pliny in English and Latin, together with notes on individual words and phrases. Spend a couple of minutes familiarising yourself with it and seeing how much, if any, you can understand. Then attempt the questions that follow with the aid of the translation and the dictionary entries provided in Table 3.

Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 6.16.1.

In this extract, Pliny begins his response to a request from the historian Tacitus for information about the death of his uncle after the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE.

English

You ask that I describe to you the death of my uncle, so that you can transmit it more truthfully to future generations.

Latin

petis ut tibi auunculī meī exitum scrībam, quō uērius trādere posterīs possis.

A note on long vowels

Long vowels in Latin have been marked with a horizontal line above the letter, called a 'macron' (from the Greek word for 'long'). Thus the 'i' in *scrībam* is pronounced like the vowels in the English word 'meet' rather than 'sit'.

A macron is an aid to pronunciation. In some situations, an understanding of pronunciation can help you understand the full meaning of a Latin word. The '[Introducing Latin](#)' site contains more information on the pronunciation of Latin.

Table 3 Dictionary entries for parallel text 1: Pliny

Latin	English	Dictionary entry
petis	you ask	petō – 'I seek, ask'
ut	that	ut – with requests, meaning 'that'
tibi	to you	tu – 'you' (singular)
auunculī	of (my) uncle	auunculus – 'uncle'
meī	my	meus – 'my'
exitum	death	exitus – literally 'departure', here meaning 'death'
scribam	I describe	scrībō – 'I write'
quō	so that	quō – 'so that' (literally, 'by which')
uērius	more truthfully	uērus – 'true'
trādere	transmit	trādō – 'hand over', 'transmit'
posterīs	to future generations	posterī – literally 'those who come later', i.e. 'future generations'
possis	you can	possum – 'I can'

Activity 4

Jot down the Latin equivalent for the following:

1. You ask
2. the death of my uncle
3. transmit
4. to future generations

Provide your answer...

Answer

English	Latin equivalent
You ask	petis
the death of my uncle	auunculī meī exitum
transmit	trādere
to future generations	posterīs

Activity 5

What do you notice about the ratio of Latin words to English in this passage?

Discussion

The English translation uses almost twice as many words as Latin (23 English words to Latin's 12). Most Latin words in this extract are represented by at least two English ones.

Of course a different English version might have deployed fewer words (or perhaps more). The chosen example is not, however, especially wordy or untypical. It would certainly be impossible to produce anything like a literal English translation in just 12 words.

2.2 Parallel text 2: Catullus

Now look at the opening lines of Catullus and the dictionary entries in Table 4 below.

Catullus, *Poems*, 1.1–2.

Catullus introduces his book of poetry.

English

To whom do I give my charming, new booklet

recently polished with dry pumice?

Latin

cui dōnō lepidum nouum libellum

āridā modo pūmice expolītum?

Table 4 Dictionary entries for parallel text 2: Catullus

Latin	English	Dictionary entry
cui	to whom?	quis? – ‘who?’
dōnō	do I give	dōnō – ‘I give’, ‘I present’
lepidum	my charming	lepidus – ‘pleasant’, ‘charming’, ‘elegant’
nouum	new	novus – ‘new’, ‘novel’
libellum	booklet	libellus – ‘little book’, ‘booklet’
āridā	dry	āridus – ‘dry’
modo	recently	modo – ‘recently’
pūmice	with pumice	pūmex – ‘pumice-stone’
expolītum	polished	expoliō – ‘polish’

Activity 6

Jot down the Latin equivalent for the following:

1. To whom do I give
2. booklet
3. with dry pumice

Provide your answer...

Answer

English	Latin equivalent
To whom do I give	cui dōnō
booklet	libellum
with dry pumice	āridā pūmice

Activity 7

The parallel text of Pliny suggested that Latin tends to use fewer words than English. Does the extract from Catullus support this idea or contradict it? Or does it have no implication either way?

- It supports it
 - It contradicts it
 - It has no bearing one way or the other
-

Discussion

The passage of Catullus supports this idea, with 14 English words being used to represent 9 Latin ones.

2.3 'Missing' words

Counting words is a rather simplistic way to analyse the difference between Latin and English. Nevertheless, it demonstrates one reason why it is impossible to relate English to Latin on a word-for-word basis. Some words in English have no direct equivalent in Latin. Where, then, are the 'missing' words?

There are some words which Latin cheerfully lives without. The lack of indefinite and definite articles ('a', 'an', 'the') is perhaps surprising for English speakers. Latin has no direct equivalents, in spite of the fact that the Latin words *unus* ('one') and *ille* ('that') are ancestors of the indefinite and definite article in Romance languages (such as 'un', 'una' and 'el', 'la' in Spanish).

However, the 'missing' words of most interest here are those which reveal something about the way Latin works. Look again at the translations. The words in bold have no direct equivalents in Latin but are instead represented by the endings of words. We will see how this works in detail in the following pages.

Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 6.16.1.

English

You ask that **I** describe **to** you the death **of** my uncle, so that **you** can transmit it **more** truthfully **to** future generations.

Latin

petis ut tibi auunculī meī exitum scribam, quō uērius trādere posterīs possis.

Catullus, *Poems*, 1.1-2.

Catullus introduces his poems.

English

To whom do **I** give my charming, new booklet recently polished **with** dry pumice?

Latin

cui dōnō lepidum nouum libellum
āridā modo pūmice expolītum?

2.4 Word endings

You might have noticed already that some Latin words used in the passages of Pliny and Catullus differ slightly from their dictionary entries. This is a sure sign that changes in the form of words play a role in the Latin language. Look, for instance, at the word for ‘uncle’. Compare the word as it appears in the text (*auunculī*) with its dictionary entry (*auunculus*) in Table 5. They differ by one letter at the end, which makes a crucial difference to the meaning of the word.

Table 5 Dictionary entry for ‘uncle’

Latin	English	Dictionary entry
auunculī	of (my) uncle	auunculus – ‘uncle’

Activity 8

How many words in the [extract from Pliny's letter](#) differ from their dictionary entry? You may find it helpful here and elsewhere to open the Latin text in a separate tab or window by right-clicking the link.

- Fewer than half
- More than half

Answer

More than half of the words are used by Pliny in a different form from their dictionary entry. They are listed below.

Dictionary entries

Latin	English	Dictionary entry
petis	you ask	petō – ‘I seek, ask’
tibi	to you	tu – ‘you’ (singular)
auunculī	of (my) uncle	auunculus – ‘uncle’
meī	my	meus – ‘my’
exitum	death	exitus – literally ‘departure’, here meaning ‘death’
scrībam	I describe	scrībō – ‘I write’

uērius	more truthfully	uērus – ‘true’
trādere	transmit	trādō – ‘hand over’, ‘transmit’
posterīs	to future generations	posterī – literally ‘those who come later’, i.e. ‘future generations’
possis	you can	possum – ‘I can’

Your results could differ from these if you have used your own dictionary. Some dictionaries will contain entries for certain forms like *tibi*, although this would refer back to the entry for *tu*.

Now try the same activity with [the English translation](#).

Activity 9

How many words in the English translation would appear in a dictionary with a different word ending?

- Fewer than half.
- More than half.

.....

Answer

Very few and, certainly, less than half. The precise number may differ depending on the dictionary you use. ‘Generations’ will appear under ‘generation’; ‘truthfully’ might appear under ‘truthful’.

Activity 10

What problem would arise with a dictionary containing an entry for the word ‘generations’?

.....

Discussion

A dictionary containing ‘generations’ would need to include every plural noun, such as ‘cats’, ‘dogs’, ‘bicycles’, and so on.

When learning English, it would be a pointless to learn all the forms of nouns that have plurals ending with ‘-s’. Instead, it is more sensible to learn a rule: that regular English nouns in the plural follow a pattern of adding ‘-s’ (or ‘-es’ if the noun ends in -ch, -sh, -s, -x or -z). There are exceptions like ‘mouse / mice’ and ‘goose / geese’ which must be learned individually and may well have their own entries in an English dictionary. But the majority follow a pattern that English speakers need to learn.

2.5 Word order

You have seen the first difficulty in relying entirely upon a translation and a dictionary. Some English words are not represented by Latin words at all. Now let us consider a second problem.

Activity 11

Look again at the verbs highlighted in Pliny's letter to Tacitus. What do you observe about the position of verbs in Latin compared with English?

petis ut tibi auunculī meī exitum **scrībam**, quō uērius trādere posterīs **possis**.

You **ask** that I **describe** to you the death of my uncle, so that you **can** transmit it more truthfully to future generations.

Discussion

The verb 'ask' (*petis*) in Latin appears at the start of the sentence, as in English. By contrast, the verbs 'write' (*scrībam*) and 'can' (*possis*) are delayed until end of their respective clauses. The placement of a verb at the end of its clause is typical of Latin, which can be classified as a 'Subject – Object – Verb' language, or 'SOV' language for short.

Activity 12

Examine the phrase *āridā modo pūmice expolītum* in Catullus. What would an English translation with the same word order look like? What would be wrong with such a translation?

Discussion

The English would be 'with dry recently pumice polished'. This is so odd that it is difficult to make a sensible comment about it! It certainly does not qualify as a translation or even as a piece of English.

Nevertheless, we can make one useful observation. In English, related words are usually close to each other, giving two natural 'chunks', 'recently polished' and 'with dry pumice'. In Latin, by contrast, these chunks can be broken up.

ĀRIDĀ **modo** PŪMICE **expolītum**

2.6 Recap

You cannot map an English translation word for word onto its Latin equivalent for two main reasons:

1. English tends to use more words than Latin, especially little words such as pronouns ('I', 'you') and prepositions ('of', 'to').
2. Latin word order is more free than English and usually different.

Activity 13

Why is the fifth word in a Latin text unlikely to be the equivalent of the fifth word in a parallel English translation?

- a. The English word might be in a different position.
- b. The English word might not be represented by a Latin word at all.
- c. Both a. and b.
- d. Neither a. nor b.

For English speakers, coming to grips with word endings is usually the main challenge in learning Latin. It involves not only knowing the endings, but, more importantly, understanding their uses and their implications for the meaning of a sentence. We shall explore this in more detail in the next two sections. In the process, you may find yourself acquiring insights into the workings of English as well as Latin. And if you can overcome the thought that Latin is a language of missing words and a strange word order, then you are well on your way to thinking in Latin rather than in English.

3 Latin noun endings

Latin has six cases, each with its own ending and functions. In this section we will look at three of these: the genitive, dative and ablative.

3.1 'Of' and the genitive case

When Pliny mentions 'the death of my uncle' he uses the phrase *auunculi mei exitum*. Uncle is *auunculus*, but the change of ending from '-us' to '-ī' signals a relationship between the noun 'uncle' and the noun 'death' (*exitum*). In English this relationship is expressed by the preposition 'of' ('the death **of** my uncle').

English can also express the same idea with a change of word ending, as in 'my uncle's death', with an apostrophe followed by the letter 's'. This is a rare instance of English working like Latin by deploying a noun ending.

Examples

- *carmina Catullī* – the poems of Catullus
- *dīvi filius* – son of a god (one of the titles of the Emperor Augustus, a reference to his adoptive father Julius Caesar)
- *altae moenia Rōmae* – the walls [*moenia*] of lofty Rome
- *amīcī Cicerōnis* – friends of Cicero
- *Iēsus Nazerēnus Rēx Iūdaeōrum* – Jesus from Nazareth, King of the Jews

The genitive case

These endings are examples of the 'genitive' case in Latin. You can think of the genitive case as the 'of' case. It generally links two nouns (as in *carmina Catullī*).

Caution

English uses 'of' in a wider range of situations than Latin

- I speak **of** many things

Note that 'of' here does not express a relationship between two nouns. It is closely related to the verb 'speak' and is equivalent in meaning to 'about'.

Practice

Activity 14: the genitive case

Select the Latin nouns in the genitive case.

- a) *Rōma caput mundī* – Rome, head of the world
- Rōma*
 - caput*
 - mundī*
-
- b) *Caesaris uxor* – Caesar's wife
- Caesaris*

- uxor
-
- c) Turnus rēx Rutulōrum – Turnus, king of the Rutuli
- Turnus
 - rēx
 - Rutulōrum

3.2 'To', 'for' and the dative case

When Pliny wants to say 'to you', he takes the word 'you' (*tu*) and uses the form *tibi*. To say 'for future generations' he changes the ending of the word *posterī* (literally 'those who come afterwards') and writes *posterīs*. These endings are examples of the **dative case**, which in English would typically be expressed by the prepositions 'to' or 'for'.

The dative case often involves the idea of someone giving or transmitting something **to someone**. (The word 'dative' derives from the Latin verb *dō*, 'I give'). Note that English can say both 'I gave a book **to him**' or 'I gave **him** a book'. In both examples, Latin would typically use a dative case.

Examples

- scrībō **tibi** – I write to you
- grātiās agimus **Augustō** – we give thanks to Augustus
- sōl **omnibus** lucet – the sun shines for everyone (or 'upon') everyone
- **cui** dōnō ...? – To whom do I give

Catullus begins his collection of poems with a dative case (*cui?* – 'to whom?'), appropriately so in a poem whose topic is a dedication. He answers his own question in the third line with another dative, referring to the biographer Cornelius Nepos:

Cornelī, **tibi**. ...

to you, Cornelius ...

The dative case has a range of uses, but it is reasonable to think of it as the 'to' or 'for' case, especially when the noun in the dative case is 1) a person and 2) on the receiving end of something, usually beneficial but occasionally disadvantageous. It is often found with the verb 'give' or 'say'.

Caution

The English words 'to' and 'for' cover a wider range of ideas than the dative case in Latin. Note in particular that the dative would not be used in Latin to express the following:

- 'I am going **to** the shops'. Here 'to' expresses the idea of motion towards something, not a person on the receiving end of anything. Latin would express 'to' in this instance with a preposition.
- 'I want **to** speak with you this morning'. In this instance 'to' goes closely with the verb 'speak' (grammatically, they form an infinitive).

Practice

Activity 15: the dative case

Remember that the dative case is usually reserved for a person on the receiving end of something. With this in mind, which of the expressions in bold would typically be expressed in Latin by a noun in the dative case?

- a. The Gauls provided supplies **for Caesar**.
Correct.
- b. Caesar sailed **to Africa**.
Incorrect. A dative does not imply motion towards a place.
- c. Agrippa gave a gift **to his wife**.
Correct.
- d. Agrippa gave **his wife** a gift.
Correct. c. and d. mean the same.
- e. I want **to live** well.
Incorrect. The dative case is use with nouns, not verbs.

3.3 'By', 'with' and the ablative case

cui dōnō lepidum nouum libellum

āridā modo **pūmice** expolītum?

To whom do I give this charming new booklet
recently polished **with** dry **pumice**?

'With' is conveyed by the 'ablative' case, used here to convey the means or instrument by which something is done. Here the book has been polished 'with' or, less elegantly, 'by' or 'by means of' pumice stone. This use of the ablative case is typically found when 1) the verb is passive ('he was hit with a sword', 'she was struck by a stone') and 2) the noun is inanimate, i.e. not a living thing.

Examples

- multitudō nōn **ratiōne** dūcitur sed **impetū** – the crowd is led not **by reason** but **by impulse**

When an action is carried out **by** a person, Latin uses the ablative case in combination with the preposition 'ā' or 'ab'.

- Caesar **ā Brūtō** interfectus est – Caesar was killed **by Brutus**

Caution

The ablative case has a range of uses. It is difficult to single out one that characterises the ablative as a whole. You may come across the idea that the ablative is the 'by, with or from' case. There is some truth in this, although the best way to understand the ablative case is to work through examples of the different uses. Here we have concentrated on one important use, the ablative of means or instrument.

Practice

Activity 16: genitive, dative and ablative cases

Match the underlined word or phrase in English with the appropriate Latin equivalent.

A noun in the dative case

A noun in the genitive case

A noun in the ablative case

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Caesar gave **Cleopatra** many gifts.

Antony's slaves escaped.

The soldier was struck **by an arrow**.

3.4 The first declension

The endings of Latin nouns are predictable. Each noun belongs to one of five patterns, called **declensions**. If you know the declension to which a noun belongs – in other words if you know its pattern – you can determine its possible endings.

The first declension

Table 6 below shows the genitive, dative and ablative case endings of the first declension, using the noun *puella* ('girl') as an example. Almost all nouns whose dictionary entry ends in -a belong to the first declension, i.e. they form endings in the same way as *puella*. This group includes most names of Roman women, such as *Iūlia* ('Julia') and *Octāvia* (Octavia).

Note that the ablative ending is a long '-ā', not a short '-a'.

Table 6 First declension nouns

case	ending	puella
singular		
genitive	-ae	puellae
dative	-ae	puellae
ablative	-ā	puellā

Activity 17

a) The name *Octāvia* is a first declension noun. What case is *Octāviā*?

- genitive
- dative
- ablative
- none of the above

b) The name *Iūlia* is a first declension noun. What case is *Iūliae*?

- genitive
- dative
- ablative
- either genitive or dative

The context would help you determine whether the noun was in the genitive or dative case.

- none of the above

c) What is the dative singular of the first declension noun *Cleopatra*?

- Cleopatra
- Cleopatrae
- Cleopatrā

3.5 The second declension

Table 7 below shows the genitive, dative and ablative case endings of the second declension, using the noun *populus* ('people') as an example. Again, we will concentrate on the singular endings. Most nouns ending in -us belong to the second declension. This group includes a large number of male *praenōmina* (forenames) such as *Gāius*, *Lūcius* and *Marcus*.

Table 7 Second declension nouns

case	ending	populus
singular		
genitive	-ī	populī
dative	-ō	populō
ablative	-ō	populō

Activity 18

a) What is the genitive singular of the second declension noun *Antōnius*?

- Antōnius
- Antōniī
- Antōniō

b) The name *Marcus* is a second declension noun. In what case is *Marcō*?

- genitive
- dative
- ablative
- either dative or ablative

The context would help you decide which case.

Practice**Activity 19**

Which Latin word could be used to translate the English word in bold?

1. **Antony's** father

- Antōnius
- Antōniī

Yes, the genitive case is required.

- Antōniō

2. Antonius presented a gift **to Cleopatra**

- Cleopatra
- Cleopatrae

Yes, the dative case is required.

- Cleopatrā

3. Harold was struck **by an arrow**

- sagitta
- sagittae
- sagittā

Yes, the ablative case is required.

4 Latin verb endings

We saw earlier from Pliny and Catullus that Latin can express phrases like 'I give' and 'you ask' without using the personal pronouns 'I' and 'you'. Although these words exist in Latin, they are usually omitted unless a writer wishes to emphasise them. The ending of the verb is enough to show who is doing the giving. Catullus could have written *ego dōnō* for 'I give', but *dōnō* is sufficient. Likewise Pliny refers to the request of his friend Tacitus with the words *petis* ('you ask'), rather than *tu petis*.

4.1 Person and number

Examples

perīculum videō – I see the danger
 Octāvium exspectāmus – we await Octavius
 in Italiam nāvīgātis – you [plural] sail to Italy

The endings here express, among other things, the grammatical concept of **person** and **number**. There are three 'persons':

1. the 1st person corresponds to the speaker ('I', or 'we')
2. the 2nd person corresponds to the person addressed by the speaker ('you')
3. the 3rd person refers to a third party ('he / she / it' or 'they'). It is the standard person used in narrative prose, e.g. the descriptive passages of novels.

Persons can also be **singular** or **plural** in number, i.e. one or many. The difference between 'I' and 'we' is not one of person (they are both 1st person), but number. Table 8 below shows the possible combinations of person and number:

Table 8 Person and number

person	number	
1	singular	I give
2	singular	you (singular) give
3	singular	he / she / it gives
1	plural	we give
2	plural	you (plural) give
3	plural	they give

Latin verb endings provide a lot of information about a verb in addition to its number and person. This includes the **tense** of the verb, i.e. whether the action was done in the

present ('I give'), the past ('I gave') or the future ('I will give'). We will not cover this in detail here. If you study Latin, you will be introduced to the different features of verbs and their endings gradually and over an extended period of time. For the moment, be aware that word endings provide important information for both verbs and nouns.

4.2 The first conjugation

The endings of Latin verbs, like those of nouns, are predictable because verbs belong to one of four groups, known as **conjugations**. A **conjugation** is a pattern of verb endings, just as a **declension** is a pattern of noun endings.

The verb *dōnō* ('I give', 'I present') belongs to the first conjugation. It takes the following endings in the present tense (strictly speaking, the present indicative active):

Table 9 The endings of the verb *dōnō* ('I give') in the present indicative active

Number and person	Latin	English equivalent
singular		
1	<i>dōnō</i>	I give
2	<i>dōnās</i>	you (singular) give
3	<i>dōnat</i>	he / she / it gives
plural		
1	<i>dōnāmus</i>	we give
2	<i>dōnātis</i>	you (plural) give
3	<i>dōnant</i>	they give

Activity 20

Do English verbs change their endings?

- Yes
- No

Answer

Yes, but nothing like to the same extent as Latin. With 'he/she/it' or a singular noun (e.g. 'the dog', 'the cat'), English verbs in the present tense add '-s' ('she walks' or 'the cat skulks').

Most English verbs also change their ending in the past tense (i.e. when describing events in the past) by adding '-ed', thus 'I walk' becomes 'I walked'. Some verbs undergo a more radical change, e.g. 'I eat' becomes 'I ate'.

Practice

Activity 21

Using the conjugation table (repeated below), match the following first conjugation verbs with their English equivalents.

amant

rogās

ambulāmus

festīnat

Match each of the items above to an item below.

they love

you (singular) ask

we walk

she hurries

Table 10 The endings of the verb *dōnō* ('I give') in the present indicative active

Number and person	Latin	English equivalent
singular		
1	dōnō	I give
2	dōnās	you (singular) give
3	dōnat	he / she / it gives
plural		
1	dōnāmus	we give
2	dōnātis	you (plural) give
3	dōnant	they give

4.3 Agreement

So far, we have concentrated on verbs with personal pronouns as subjects ('I', 'you', 'we', etc.). A more common scenario, especially in descriptive prose composed by historians such as Livy and Tacitus, is for the subject to be a person or a thing ('the consul', 'the dog', 'the cat', and so on). In this situation, the third person forms of the verb are used. If the noun is singular, the verb form is the third person singular. If the noun is plural, the third person plural form of the verb is used.

3rd person verbs

singular

pugnat – he/she/it fights.

Antōnius pugnat – Antonius fights

plural

pugnant – they fight

Rōmānī pugnant – the Romans fight

This is the grammatical concept of **agreement**. A singular noun is accompanied by a third person singular verb; a plural noun by a third person plural verb.

Activity 22

Which form of the verb *festīnō* ('I hurry') could be combined with the plural noun *Poenī* ('the Carthaginians') to produce the Latin equivalent of 'the Carthaginians hurry'.

- festīnō
- festīnat
- festīnāmus
- festīnant

Which form of the verb *festīnō* ('I hurry') could be combined with the singular noun *Hannibal* to produce the Latin equivalent of 'Hannibal hurries'.

- festīnō
- festīnat
- festīnāmus
- festīnant

5 Simple sentences

To construct a complete sentence you need at least a verb (e.g. 'walks', 'jogs', 'runs') and a subject (the person or thing doing the 'walking', 'jogging' or 'running').

Subject plus verb

1. George walks.
2. Sheila jogs.
3. Sam runs.

5.1 Subject and object in English

Certain verbs also demand an object to make the meaning complete. The objects are highlighted in the following sentences.

Subject, verb and object

1. George carried **the shopping**.
2. Sheila brought **cake**.
3. Sam found **happiness**.

Sentences of this form are common in both English and Latin. They are, however, constructed according to quite different principles. Let us consider English first.

Activity 23

Look at the sentence below and answer the questions that follow:

Tiberius loves Livia

Part 1

Identify the subject, verb and object.

Subject

Verb

Object

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Tiberius

loves

Livia

Part 2

What tells you that *Tiberius* is the subject of the sentence and not *Livia*?

.....

Answer

The order of the words. In English, the word order is usually a subject followed by a verb followed by an object (if the sentence has an object. Not all do). This is why English belongs to the category of 'Subject – Verb – Object' languages, or 'SVO' languages for short.

Part 3

What happens to the meaning of the sentence if you swap the words *Tiberius* and *Livia*?

.....

Answer

Livia becomes the subject and Tiberius the object, i.e. the roles of Tiberius and Livia are reversed.

This use of word order to provide information about the role of nouns has one important consequence. It means that the order of words in English, unlike Latin, has to be fairly rigid if sentences are to be understood.

5.2 Subject and object in Latin

In Latin, the subject and object are indicated not by their position in the sentence but by the ending of the word.

Tiberius **Līviam** amat – Tiberius loves Livia

In Latin the subject is placed in the **nominative** case, the object in the **accusative** case. Nouns are recorded in the dictionary in the nominative case, e.g. *puella* or *populus*. As a result, if you are familiar with a Latin word you already know its nominative singular form. Nouns in the accusative case are formed using a variety of endings across the five declensions. However, singular nouns in the accusative case almost always end in a vowel followed by the letter 'm', like *Līviam* in the example.

The chief use of the nominative and accusative cases is to mark subjects and objects. It is therefore helpful to think of the nominative case as the 'subject' case, and the accusative case as the 'object' case.

Activity 24

If subjects and objects in Latin are marked by word ending rather than word order, what, if any, is the difference in meaning between the following sentences?

1. Tiberius Līviam amat.

2. Līviam Tiberius amat.
3. amat Tiberius Līviam.

Answer

There is no difference of meaning because the word endings are identical in all three sentences. *Tiberius* is always the subject; *Līviam* is always the object.

There may, however, be a slight change of emphasis. By shifting the object to the front, the writer of the second sentence might be trying to emphasise Livia. You could bring this out in English by translating, 'It is Livia whom Tiberius loves'.

5.3 Word ending in English

Although English uses word order to indicate subjects and objects, traces of something like 'nominative' and 'accusative' cases are still visible in English personal pronouns. That is to say, English personal pronouns operate like Latin nouns because their role is indicated by their form. In the following example, to change the subject and object, you must change not only the word order but also the form of the pronouns 'I' and 'he'.

English personal pronouns as subjects and objects

I love Livia → Livia loves **me**.

He loves Livia → Livia loves **him**.

Activity 25

Do other English pronouns besides 'I' and 'he' change form when used as objects?

Answer

Yes.

Subject	Object
I	me
he	him
she	her
we	us
they	them

'You' takes the same form whether it is subject or object, but the archaic form 'thou' (subject) becomes 'thee' when used as an object. Note also the relative pronoun 'who' (subject) and 'whom' (object). These examples are remnants of what was once a more widespread use of cases by English nouns.

You have already seen that the use of word endings in Latin allows the order of words to be less rigid. This can also occur in English, especially where personal pronouns are involved.

Activity 26

In what order are the subject, verb and object in the following sentences?

Part 1

With this ring I thee wed.

- Subject – Verb – Object
 - Subject – Object – Verb
 - Object – Subject – Verb
-

Answer

I (subject) thee (object) wed (verb).

Part 2

Two massy [i.e. massive] keys he bore of metals twain.

Milton, *Lycidas*, 110

- Subject – Verb – Object
 - Subject – Object – Verb
 - Object – Subject – Verb
-

Answer

keys (object) he (subject) bore (verb)

The golden rule when shifting English words into unexpected positions is to keep the meaning of the sentence clear. The use of subject forms ('I' and 'he') and object forms ('thee') help to clarify the meaning in the above examples, in spite of the unusual word order.

5.4 Word order in Latin

Latin writers could use the flexibility of Latin word to achieve some striking effects. Virgil's epic poem *Aeneid*, for example, begins with two nouns in the accusative case: *arma* ('arms', 'weapons', i.e. war) and *virum* ('a man', i.e. the hero of the poem, Aeneas).

arma virumque cano ...

I sing of **arms** and **a man** ...

Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.1

This order of words allows the topic of the poem to take centre stage. It also enables Virgil to echo Homer, who started his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in a similar way, with nouns in the accusative case indicating *his* subject matter.

μήνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος ...

mēnin aeide thea Pēlēiadeō Achilēos ...

Sing, goddess, of the **anger** of Achilles, son of Pelias ...

Homer, *Iliad*, 1.1

ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μουσα, πολύτροπον ...

andra moi ennepe, mousa, polytropon ...

Tell me, Muse, of the **man** of twists and turns ...

Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.1

This use of word order creates such an impact that English translators have sometimes opted to preserve it. Thus Robert Fagles in his translation of *Aeneid* writes 'Wars and a man I sing ...', which is about as close to Virgil's Latin as it is possible to get.

5.5 Practice

Nouns in the nominative singular exhibit a great variety of endings, but in the first declension they always end in '-a' and in the second they mostly end in '-us'. Nouns in the accusative singular across all declensions almost always end in a vowel followed by the letter 'm'.

Table 11 First and second declension nouns, nominative and accusative singular

Case	1st declension	2nd declension
singular		
nominative	puella	populus
accusative	puellam	populum

Activity 27

Who is the subject in the following sentences?

1. Antōnius Cleopatram amat.

Antony

Yes, *Antōnius* is in the nominative case and is therefore the subject.

Cleopatra

2. Cleopatram Antōnius amat.

- Antony

Yes, *Antōnius* is in the nominative case and is therefore the subject.

- Cleopatra

3. Cleopatra Antōnium amat.

- Antony

- Cleopatra

Yes, *Cleopatra* is in the nominative case and is therefore the subject.

Activity 28

Which word could complete the following sentences?

1. amat Cleopatram _____.

- Antōnium

The sentence already has an object (*Cleopatram*).

- Antōnī

This is the genitive case.

- Antōnius

Yes, *Antōnius* is in the nominative case and would therefore provide a subject for *amat*.

2. Antōnius _____ amat.

- Cleopatra

The sentence already has a subject (*Antōnius*).

- Cleopatram

Yes, *Cleopatram* is in the accusative case and would therefore provide an object for *amat*.

- Cleopatrae

This is the genitive case.

5.6 Declensions summary

We are now in a position to summarise the case endings for *puella* and *populus*. Table 12 below includes plural endings as well as singular.

Table 12 First declension nouns

Case	1st declension, puella	2nd declension, populus
singular	puella	populus
nominative	puella	populus
accusative	puellam	populum
genitive	puellae	populī
dative	puellae	populō
ablative	puellā	populō
plural		
nominative	puellae	populī
accusative	puellās	populōs
genitive	puellārum	populōrum
dative	puellīs	populīs
ablative	puellīs	populīs

Latin also has a 'vocative' case, used for direct address, e.g. *ō puella*, 'girl!', The ending is routinely the same as the nominative, the notable exception being 2nd declension singular nouns, where -us usually becomes -e, as in the dying words of Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: *et tu, Brūte?* ('You too, Brutus?').

6 Reading Latin

Learning a language inevitably involves learning the meanings of individual words. You will be familiar with this process if you have studied a foreign language before. Perhaps you have created flash cards or drawn up lists of those troublesome words that, for some reason, never seem to stick in the memory. Latin is no exception in this respect, although in learning Latin you have the advantage that many Latin words are the ancestors of English ones.

6.1 Words

The following activity will enable you to explore the links between some Latin and English words.

Activity 29

Try to find at least one English word derived from the vocabulary used in the passages of Pliny and Catullus (listed in tables 13 and 14 below). Write down your answers in the box provided.

Table 13 Vocabulary used in passage from Pliny

Latin words
petō – ‘I seek, ask’
auunculus – ‘uncle’
exitus – ‘departure’, ‘death’
scrībō – ‘I write’
uērus – ‘true’
trādō – ‘hand over’, ‘transmit’
posterī – literally ‘those who come later’, i.e. ‘future generations’
possum – ‘I can’

Table 14 Vocabulary used in passage from Catullus

Latin words
dōnō – ‘I give’, ‘I present’
nouus – ‘new’, ‘novel’
āridus – ‘dry’
modo – ‘recently’

Provide your answer...

Answer

The list below is not complete, but covers some of the most obvious derivations.

Pliny	English derivations
petō – ‘I seek, ask’	petition
auunculus – ‘uncle’	avuncular
exitus – ‘departure’, ‘death’	exit
scrībō – ‘I write’	scribe, script
uērus – ‘true’	veracity, verify, veritable
trādō, ‘hand over’, ‘transmit’	tradition
posterī, literally ‘those who come later’, i.e. future generations	posterity
possum, ‘I can’	possible

Catullus

dōnō, ‘I give’, ‘I present’	donate
nouus, ‘new’, ‘novel’	novel
āridus, ‘dry’	arid
modo, ‘recently’	modern

The study of Latin vocabulary can also help your understanding of English words. Look, for example, at the abstract English nouns in Table 15 below, which each derive from a Latin word whose meaning is quite specific.

Table 15 English nouns deriving from Latin words

English	Latin
equality	aequus – ‘flat’, ‘level’
essence	esse – the Latin verb ‘be / is’, i.e. the ‘is-ness’ of a thing
humility	humilis – ‘low’ (also ‘humus’, ‘ground’)
quantity	quantus – ‘how much?’

quality quālis – ‘of what kind?’

ubiquitous ubīque – ‘everywhere’

6.2 Beyond words

Words are the building blocks of language. It therefore makes sense to devote plenty of time to studying them. Nevertheless, understanding the meaning of words is not enough to allow you to read Latin, or any other language, with fluency and confidence.

What else is needed? Many factors are relevant here, including an appreciation of grammar and an exposure to a great deal of Latin. We will close by highlighting just one important skill possessed by experienced readers, namely the ability to see not just words but groups of related words. As a fluent reader of English this will be second nature to you. Without it, you would find the process of reading unbearably slow and laborious. Look, for instance, at the opening sentence of Edward Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

In the second century of the Christian Era, the Empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilised portion of mankind.

This sentence can be broken into a number of smaller chunks. Even if you know very little about grammar, you will instinctively recognise that some sets of words form natural groups, such as:

in the second century
the Empire of Rome
the fairest part of the earth
the most civilised portion of mankind

On the other hand you would be very unlikely to take the words ‘of Rome comprehended the’ as a unit. Why? Because it is incomplete and therefore not meaningful in its own right.

6.3 Larger units

The ability to recognise words that relate to one another is an important part of fluent reading. It takes some time to acquire this skill, but it is useful to be aware of it as a goal at an early stage. Even spotting two or three related words represents an advance over reading word by word and can help to speed up the reading process. Here are a few word groups that have been mentioned so far:

a preposition and its noun	to the lighthouse
an adjective and its noun	green onions
two nouns, one in the genitive case	Martha’s brother
a subject, a verb and a direct object	the dog chased the cat

Let us look more closely at one example, noun–adjective pairs.

Activity 30

Find four examples of adjectives and their nouns in the passage from Gibbon.
In the second century of the Christian Era, the Empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilised portion of mankind.

Answer

In the **second century** of the **Christian Era**, the Empire of Rome comprehended the **fairest part** of the earth, and the most **civilised portion** of mankind.

Note that in the above passage the adjectives are adjacent to their nouns, the standard pattern in English. This is frequently true of Latin too, as with Catullus' 'charming new booklet' (*lepidum nouum libellum*). But the noun–adjective pair can also be separated, and frequently is in Latin poetry. Remember the 'dry pumice' in Catullus, split by the word *modo* ('recently').

āridā modo **pūmice** expolītum?

Here are some more examples, the last of which contains two noun-adjective pairs.

magnā cum **laude** – 'with great praise'

altae moenia **Rōmae** – 'the walls of lofty Rome' (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.7)

aurea purpuream subnectit **fībula** vestem – 'a golden brooch binds her purple cloak' (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 4.139)

In Latin, as you might have suspected by now, the word endings provide you with important clues for relating words to one another. The meaning usually also provides some clue, but it is only the meaning combined with the word order that really decides the issue. In the final example, the meaning would allow a 'golden cloak' and a 'purple brooch', but the word endings establish that the brooch is golden (*aurea ... fībula*) and the cloak purple (*purpuream ... vestem*).

Key point

The study of small units like words and word endings is a central part of learning Latin.

But reading a Latin text also involves seeing how the words fit together into larger units such as phrases, clauses and indeed whole sentences. The word endings can help you spot these larger units, by allowing you to see which words relate to one another. If you can start to blend these approaches together – the small and the large – then you really will be on your way to reading Latin like a citizen of ancient Rome!

6.4 Closing thoughts

We began with parallel texts and the act of reading an English translation alongside its Latin counterpart, looking across from one to the other and back again. We saw that this

was not purely a matter of mapping one text to another word by word. We explored the reasons for this and traced them to basic differences in the workings of the two languages. In particular, we noted the role of *word endings* in Latin, a role fulfilled in the English language either by *word order* or by the presence of words not required in Latin.

If the specific endings of nouns and verbs are already starting to fade from memory, not to mention the terminology of datives, genitives, declensions and conjugations, do not worry at this stage. If you choose (or have already chosen) to study Latin, these will be reintroduced to you gradually and you will be given many opportunities to reinforce what you have learned through practice and by applying your knowledge to the reading of Latin texts. We do, however, hope that after working through this material, you have a deeper understanding of why these details matter and how they contribute to the goal of understanding Latin.

7 Beginning Greek

Your first encounter with a Greek text is likely to take place through an English translation. To delve deeper, the next step might be to acquire the Greek text and a Greek–English dictionary. With these in hand you can inspect the text and translation in parallel, trying to relate one to the other.

Lysisas, <i>On the Murder of Eratosthenes</i> 9	
9. πρῶτον μὲν οὖν, ὦ ἄνδρες, (δεῖ γὰρ καὶ ταῦθ' ὑμῖν διηγήσασθαι) οἰκίδιον ἔστι μοι διπλοῦν, ἴσα ἔχον τὰ ἄνω τοῖς κάτω κατὰ τὴν γυναικωνίτιν καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἀνδρωνίτιν. ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὸ παιδίον ἐγένετο ἡμῖν, ἢ μῆτηρ αὐτὸ ἐθήλαζεν ἵνα δὲ μή, ὁπότε λούεσθαι δέοι, κινδυνεύη κατὰ τῆς κλίμακος καταβαίνουσα, ἐγὼ μὲν ἄνω διητώμην, αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες κάτω.	In the first place, gentlemen of the jury (for I must tell you these details), my dwelling has two floors, the upper being the same size as the lower, with the women's quarters above and the men's quarters below. When our baby was born, its mother breast-fed it. And so that she could avoid the risk of going down the stairs every time the baby needed washing, I began living upstairs and the women below.

Figure 6 An example of a Greek parallel text: Section 9 of Lysias 1 (*On the Murder of Eratosthenes*) with a facing-page English translation

You can make some headway with this approach. It has the great advantage of allowing you to work with 'real' Greek; that is, Greek composed by a Greek speaker for a Greek-speaking audience. Eventually, however, its limitations will become clear. Two problems stand out in particular:

1. An English translation is likely to contain more words than its Greek equivalent.
2. English word order will probably differ from Greek.

These problems arise because English and Greek work according to different principles. If you can grasp these principles and their implications, you will have taken an important step on the path to reading Greek as *Greek* instead of through the medium of English.

In the following sections, you will see these principles at work in an extract from the *Bacchae* of Euripides. Ideally you will be familiar with the Greek alphabet and understand the basics of Greek pronunciation, perhaps from working through the relevant sections of '[Introducing Ancient Greek](#)'. However, all Greek on this site is transliterated, which means you can acquire some appreciation for the way the Greek language works without knowing the Greek letters.

7.1 Parallel text: Euripides

Here are the first three lines of the prologue from Euripides' play, *Bacchae*, together with notes on individual words and phrases (see Table 16). Spend a couple of minutes familiarising yourself with it and seeing how much, if any, you can understand. Then attempt to answer the questions that follow.

Euripides, *Bacchae*, 1.1–3.

The god Dionysus (Bacchus) announces his arrival at the Greek city of Thebes.

English

I, son of Zeus, have reached this land of Thebans, Dionysos, whom the daughter of Kadmos, Semele, once bore, brought to labour by lightning-bearing flame.

Greek

ἤκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα
Διόνυσος, ὃν τίκτει ποθ' ἡ Κάδμου κόρη
Σεμέλη λοχευθεῖσ' ἀστραπηφόρῳ πυρί

transliteration

hēkō Dios pais tēnde Thēbaiōn chthona
Dionysos, hon tiktei poth' hē Kadmou korē
Semelē locheutheis' astrapēphorōi pyri

Table 16 Dictionary entries for *Bacchae* 1–3.

Greek	English	Dictionary entry
ἤκω (<i>hēkō</i>)	I have reached	ἤκω (<i>hēkō</i>) – ‘I have come’
Διὸς (<i>Dios</i>)	of Zeus	Ζεὺς (<i>Zeus</i>) – ‘Zeus’
παῖς (<i>pais</i>)	son	παῖς (<i>pais</i>) – ‘son’
τήνδε (<i>tēnde</i>)	this	ὄδε (<i>hode</i>) – ‘this’
Θηβαίων (<i>Thēbaiōn</i>)	of Thebans	Θηβαῖος (<i>Thēbaios</i>) – ‘Theban’, i.e. from the city of Thebes
χθόνα (<i>chthona</i>)	land	χθών (<i>chthōn</i>) – ‘land’
Διόνυσος (<i>Dionysos</i>)	Dionysos	Διόνυσος (<i>Dionysos</i>) – ‘Dionysos’
ὃν (<i>hon</i>)	whom	ὅς (<i>hos</i>) – the Greek relative pronoun ‘who’
τίκτει (<i>tikteī</i>)	bear, give birth to	τίκτω (<i>tiktō</i>) – ‘give birth to’
ποθ' (<i>poth'</i>)	once	πότε (<i>pote</i>) – ‘once’
ἡ (<i>hē</i>)	the	ὁ (<i>ho</i>) – the Greek definite article
Κάδμου (<i>Kadmou</i>)	of Kadmos	Κάδμος (<i>Kadmos</i>) – ‘Kadmos’ (or ‘Cadmus’), founder of the city of Thebes
κόρη (<i>korē</i>)	daughter	κόρη (<i>korē</i>) – ‘daughter’

Σεμέλη (<i>Semelē</i>)	Semele	Σεμέλη (<i>Semelē</i>) – ‘Semele’ (the daughter of Kadmos)
λοχευθεῖσ' (<i>locheutheis'</i>)	brought to labour	λοχεύω (<i>locheuō</i>) – ‘bring to labour or childbirth’
ἀστραπηφόρω (<i>astrapēphorōi</i>)	lightning- bearing	ἀστραπηφόρος (<i>astrapēphoros</i>) – ‘carrying lightning’ (or ‘carried by lightning’)
πυρί (<i>pyri</i>)	by fire	πύρ (<i>pyr</i>) – ‘fire’

Activity 31

Identify all proper nouns in this passage (i.e. the names of individuals or peoples). Proper nouns in Greek, as in English, begin with a capital letter.

Provide your answer...

Answer

The passage contains five proper nouns in total.

Proper nouns

English	Greek	Notes
Zeus	Διός (<i>Dios</i>)	father of Dionysos
Thebans	Θηβαίων (<i>Thēbaiōn</i>)	inhabitants of the city of Thebes in central Greece
Dionysos	Διόνυσος (<i>Dionysos</i>)	the god Dionysos
Kadmos	Κάδμου (<i>Kadmou</i>)	founder of the city of Thebes and father of Semele
Semele	Σεμέλη (<i>Semelē</i>)	mother of Dionysos (by Zeus) and daughter of Kadmos

Activity 32

What do you notice about the ratio of Greek words to English in this passage?

Discussion

The English translation uses more words than the Greek (25 English words to Greek's 17).

Of course, a different English version might have deployed fewer words than 25, or perhaps more. The chosen example is not, however, especially wordy or untypical. It would certainly be difficult to create a literal English translation with just 17 words.

7.2 ‘Missing words’

Counting words is a crude way to analyse the difference between Greek and English. Nevertheless, it demonstrates one reason why it is impossible to relate English to Greek on a word-for-word basis. Some words in English have no direct equivalent in Greek (occasionally the reverse is true, although not in this passage). Where, then, are the ‘missing’ words?

There are some words which Greek can happily live without. The indefinite article (‘a’, ‘an’) is perhaps the most important, although Greek does have a definite article (‘the’), unlike Latin. Sometimes, Greek is simply more economical with words. λοχευθεῖς (*locheutheis*, ‘brought to child-birth’) is hard to represent with a single English word. Perhaps ‘childbirthed’ or ‘midwifed’ would be the closest.

However, the examples we are interested in here are those that reveal major differences between the way Greek and English work as languages. Look again at the translation. The English words marked in bold are all represented in Greek not by separate words but by the endings of words (also in bold). You will learn more details about Greek word endings later. For the moment, just take note of the difference between the two languages.

Euripides, *Bacchae*, 1.1–3.

The god Dionysus (Bacchus) announces his arrival at the Greek city of Thebes.

English

I, son **of** Zeus, have reached this land **of** Thebans, Dionysus, whom the daughter **of** Cadmus, Semele, once bore, brought to childbirth **by** lightning-carried flame.

Greek

ἤκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα

Διόνυσος, ὃν τίκτει ποθ' ἡ Κάδμου κόρη

Σεμέλη λοχευθεῖς ἀστραπηφόρῳ πυρί

transliteration

hēkō Dios pais tēnde Thēbaiōn chthōna

Dionysos, hon tiktei poth' hē Kadmou korē

Semelē locheutheis' astrapēphorōi pyri

7.3 Word endings

Perhaps you have already noticed that some words in the passage of Euripides differ slightly from their dictionary entries. This is a sure sign that changes in the form of words play some role in the Greek language. Look, for instance, at the name ‘Kadmos’. Compare the word as it appears in the text (Κάδμου, *Kadmou*) with its dictionary entry (Κάδμος, *Kadmos*) in Table 17. They differ by one letter, which has a crucial effect on the meaning of the word.

Table 17 Dictionary entry for Κάδμος, *Kadmos*

Greek	English	Dictionary entry
Κάδμου (<i>Kadmou</i>)	of Kadmos	Κάδμος (<i>Kadmos</i>), Kadmos (or 'Cadmus'), founder of the city of Thebes

Activity 33

How many words in the [opening lines of the *Bacchae*](#) differ from their dictionary entry?

You may find it helpful here and elsewhere to open the Greek text in a separate tab or window by right-clicking the link.

- Fewer than half
- More than half

Answer

More than half of the words are used by Euripides in a different form from their dictionary entry. They are listed below.

Dictionary entries for *Bacchae* 1–3.

Greek	English	Dictionary entry
Διός (<i>Dios</i>)	of Zeus	Ζεύς (<i>Zeus</i>) – 'Zeus'
τήνδε (<i>tēnde</i>)	this	ὄδε (<i>hode</i>) – 'this'
Θηβαίων (<i>Thēbaiōn</i>)	of Thebans	Θηβαῖος (<i>Thēbaios</i>) – 'Theban', i.e. from the city of Thebes
χθόνα (<i>chthona</i>)	land	χθών (<i>chthōn</i>) – 'land'
ὄν (<i>hon</i>)	whom	(ὄς, <i>hos</i>) – the Greek relative pronoun, 'who'
τίκτει (<i>tikteī</i>)	bear, give birth to	τίκτω (<i>tiktō</i>) – 'give birth to'
ποθ' (<i>poth'</i>) (strictly speaking, this word has not changed its ending, but has been elided with the following word)	once	πότε (<i>pote</i>) – 'once'
ἡ (<i>hē</i>)	the	ὁ (<i>ho</i>) – the Greek definite article.
Κάδμου (<i>Kadmou</i>)	of Kadmos	Κάδμος (<i>Kadmos</i>) – Kadmos (or 'Cadmus'), founder of the city of Thebes

λοχευθειῖς (<i>locheutheis</i>)	brought to labour	λοχεύω (<i>locheuō</i>) – ‘bring to labour or childbirth’
ἀστραπηφόρῳ (<i>astrapēphorōi</i>)	lightning-bearing	ἀστραπηφόρος (<i>astrapēphoros</i>) – ‘carrying lightning’ (or ‘carried by lightning’)
πυρί (<i>pyri</i>)	by fire	πῦρ (<i>pyr</i>) – ‘fire’

Your results might differ slightly if you have used your own dictionary. Some dictionaries will contain entries for common forms like ὄν (*hon*) or ἦ (*hē*).

One of these words has undergone a radical transformation (Διὸς / *Dios* from Ζεὺς / *Zeus*). For this reason it is more accurate to speak of changes of ‘word shape’ or ‘morphology’ (from the Greek word μορφή / *morphē* meaning ‘shape’) instead of ‘word endings’. In practice, however, as it is the ending that is most likely to change in Greek, we will continue to speak in terms of word-ending here. Incidentally, changes as drastic as those affecting the word ‘Zeus’ are reassuringly rare!

Now try the same activity with the English translation.

Activity 34

How many words in [the English translation](#) would appear in a dictionary with a different word ending?

- Fewer than half
- More than half

Answer

There is room for discussion over the exact number, but it will be fewer than half and certainly fewer than the number in the equivalent passage of Greek. ‘Reached’ will appear under ‘reach’; ‘Thebans’, if it appeared at all, would appear under ‘Theban’. ‘Whom’ might have its own entry, although this would refer back to the entry for ‘who’.

Activity 35

What problem would arise with a dictionary containing entries for the word ‘reached’ or ‘Thebans’?

Discussion

A dictionary containing ‘reached’ would need to include ‘walked’, ‘jogged’, ‘asked’, and every other verb form ending with ‘-ed’. A dictionary containing ‘Thebans’ would have to contain ‘dogs’, ‘cats’, ‘crocodiles’, and so on.

When learning English, it would be a pointless to learn all the forms of verbs that end in ‘-ed’. Instead, it is more sensible to learn a rule: that regular English verbs in the past

tense follow a pattern of adding '-ed'. There are exceptions ('eat' becomes 'ate', 'run becomes 'ran', and so on). These must be learned individually and may well have their own entries in a dictionary. But the majority follow a pattern which can be learned.

7.4 Word order

You have seen the first difficulty in relying entirely upon a translation and a dictionary. Some English words are not represented by Greek words at all. Now consider a second problem, the difference in the order of words.

Activity 36

What do you notice about the position of the verb (in bold) when compared with English?

... ὃν **τίκτει** ποθ' ἡ Κάδμου κόρη

... *hon tiktei poth' hē Kadmou korē*

... whom once the daughter of Kadmos **bore**.

Discussion

The verb appears before the subject. This is result of the greater flexibility of Greek word order, in contrast to the more rigid order of English.

7.5 Recap

You cannot map an English translation word for word onto its Greek equivalent for two main reasons:

1. English tends to use more words than Greek, especially little words like pronouns ('I', 'you') and prepositions ('of', 'to').
2. Greek word order is more free than English and usually different.

Activity 37

Why is the third word in a Greek text unlikely to be the equivalent of the third word in a parallel English translation?

- a. The English word might be in a different position.
- b. The English word might not be represented by a Greek word at all.
- c. Both a. and b.
- d. Neither a. nor b.

For English speakers, coming to grips with word endings is usually the main challenge in learning Greek. It involves not only knowing the endings, but, more importantly,

understanding their uses and their implications for the meaning of a sentence. We shall explore this in more detail in the next two sections. In the process, you may find yourself acquiring insights into the workings of English as well as Greek. And if you can overcome the thought that Greek is a language of missing words and a strange word order, then you are well on your way to thinking in Greek rather than in English.

8 Greek noun endings

Greek nouns belong to one of five **cases**, each with its own ending and functions. In this section we will look at two of these: the genitive and dative cases.

8.1 'Of' and the genitive case

'The daughter of Kadmos' in Euripides' *Bacchae* is ἡ Κάδμου κόρη (*hē Kadmou korē*), literally 'the of Kadmos daughter'. There is no Greek word for 'of' here. Instead, the -ου (-ou) ending of the word Kadmos signals the relationship between 'Kadmos' and 'daughter'. The 'of' relationship is frequently one of ownership, although here it is the relationship between a father and a daughter.

Here are some more examples:

Examples

- Διὸς παῖς (*Dios pais*) – son **of** Zeus
- τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα (*tēnde Thēbaiōn chthona*) – this land **of** Thebans
- βασιλεὺς βασιλέων (*basileus basileōn*) – king **of** kings
- Παῦλος δούλος θεοῦ, ἀπόστολος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ *Paulos doulos theou, apostolos Iēsou Christou* – Paul, slave **of** god, apostle **of** Jesus Christ (*Paul's Letter to Titus*, 1.1).

Unusually, English can also express this 'of' relationship through a change of ending. If we were referring to 'the daughter of Martha', we might choose to say 'Martha's daughter', with an apostrophe followed by the letter 's' tacked onto the end of the word 'Martha'. This is a rare instance of English working just like Greek by modifying the ending of a word.

The genitive case

These endings are examples of the **genitive** case. Although the genitive case has a range of meanings, it is helpful when beginning Greek to think of it as the 'of' case.

Caution

English uses 'of' in a wider range of situations than Greek

- I speak **of** many things

Note that 'of' in the above example does not express a relationship between two nouns. Instead it relates closely to the verb 'speak' and is similar in meaning to 'about'.

Practice

Activity 38: the genitive case

In the following phrases, which noun would be in the genitive case in Greek?

1. 'Penelope, wife of Odysseus'
 - Penelope
 - wife
 - Odysseus

Answer

Odysseus (Ὀδυσσεύς) would be in the genitive case:
Πηνελοπεία Ὀδυσσεύς γυνή (*Pēnelopeia Odysseōs gynē*).

2. 'The houses of Hades'

- houses
- Hades

Answer

Hades would be in the genitive case.
δόμοι Ἅιδου (*domoi Haidou*)

3. 'Caesar Augustus, son of a god' ['god' being a reference to Augustus' adoptive father, the deified Julius Caesar]

- Caesar
- Augustus
- son
- god

Discussion

'God' would be in the genitive case.
Καίσαρ Σεβαστός, θεοῦ υἱός (*Kaisar Sebastos, theou huios*)

8.2 'To', 'for' and the dative case

So much for the genitive or the 'of' case. Now let us look at the dative case. If I were to write a letter in Greek, I might use a noun in the dative case to refer to the recipient. The letters of the *New Testament* offer numerous examples. Nouns in the dative case and their English equivalents are emphasised in bold.

Example 1

Paul ... to Philemon

Παῦλος ... **Φιλήμονι**

*Paulos ... **Philēmoni***

Paul's *Letter to Philemon*, 1.

Example 2

John to the seven churches ...

Ἰωάννης ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις ...

Iōannēs tais hepta ekklēsiais

The Revelation of John, 1.4.

A letter might also begin or end with a standard phrase such as:

Example 3

Grace to you and peace

χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη

charis humin kai eirēnē

Used widely in the *New Testament*, e.g. *Philemon*, 3.

There is no word for ‘to’ in these passages. Instead, Greek conveys the same idea by changing the ending of the recipient (‘Philemon’, ‘the churches’, ‘you’), specifically, by putting it in the **dative** case.

8.3 Uses of the dative case

The dative case is frequently used where someone is giving or transmitting something **to someone**. (The word ‘dative’ is derived from the Latin verb *dō*, meaning ‘I give’). Note that English can say both ‘I gave a book **to him**’ or ‘I gave **him** a book’. In both situations, Greek could use a dative case.

Further examples

- δώσω ἱερά τῷ Διονύσῳ (*dōsō hiera tōi Dionysōi*) – I shall give sacrifices **to Dionysus**
- χάριν ἔχομεν τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις (*charin echomen tois Athēnaiois*) – we are grateful **to the Athenians**

The dative case has a range of uses – you will meet another in the next section. Nevertheless, when beginning Greek it is reasonable to think of it as, in part, the ‘to’ (or sometimes ‘for’) case. This is especially likely when the noun in the dative case is 1) a person and 2) on the receiving end of something beneficial, or, occasionally, disadvantageous.

Caution

The English preposition ‘to’ covers a wider range of meanings than the dative case in Greek. Note in particular the following cases where Greek would not use a dative case:

- ‘I am going **to** the shops’. Here ‘to’ expresses the idea of motion towards a thing, not someone on the receiving end of anything. In this situation, Greek would use a preposition.
- ‘I wish **to** depart this house’. In this instance ‘to’ accompanies the verb ‘depart’. In grammatical terms, they form an ‘infinitive’, ‘to depart’.

Practice

Activity 39: the dative case

Remember that the dative case can be used to indicate a person on the receiving end of something. With this in mind, which of the expressions in bold might be expressed in Greek by a noun in the dative case?

- a. The Athenians provided supplies **for Themistocles**.
Correct.
- b. The Athenians sailed **to Sicily**.
Incorrect. A dative does not imply motion towards a place.
- c. Odysseus gave a gift **to his wife**.
Correct.
- d. Odysseus gave **his wife** a gift.
Correct. c. and d. mean the same.
- e. I want **to live** well.
Incorrect. The dative case is nouns, not verbs.

8.4 'By', 'with' and the dative case

A second important use of the dative case is to indicate the means or instrument by which something is done. Euripides provides an example in the shape of the bolt of lightning that induced Semele to give birth to Dionysus:

Semele, brought to labour **by** lightning-carried flame

Σεμέλη λοχευθεῖσ' ἀστραπηφόρῳ πυρί

Semelē locheutheis' astrapēphorōi pyri

There is no Greek word for 'by' in this passage. Instead, this idea is expressed by placing the word 'fire' (πυρί, *pyri*) in the dative case. The adjective 'lightning-carried' which describes the noun fire must also be in the dative case, by a process known as noun-adjective *agreement*.

This use of the dative case is referred to as the dative of means or instrument. It is used to mark the means or instrument by which a thing is accomplished. It is typically found when 1) the verb is passive ('she was brought to labour') and 2) the noun in the dative case is inanimate, i.e. not a living thing.

Examples

- Pyrrhus was struck **by a roof-tile** – Πύρρος κεραμίδι ἐπλήγη (*Pyrrhos keramidi eplēgē*)

When an action is carried out **by** a person, Greek prefers the genitive case in combination with the preposition ὑπό (*hypo*).

- Caesar was murdered **by Brutus** – Καίσαρ ἐφονεύθη ὑπὸ Βρούτου (*Kaisar ephoneuthē hypo Broutou*)

If you have studied Latin, you may recall that Latin has an ‘ablative’ case. There is no ablative case in Greek, the same functions being provided by the genitive and dative cases.

Practice

Activity 40: the dative case

Which of the following phrases in bold could be represented in Greek by a noun in the dative case?

- Themistocles was struck **by an arrow**.
- Calypso gave **Odysseus** many gifts.
- Corinth is **by the sea**.

‘By’ here does not express the means or instrument by which something is done. It is a preposition equivalent in meaning to ‘near’.

8.5 The first declension

The endings of Greek nouns are predictable. Every noun belongs to one of three groups, called **declensions**, each of which contains further subdivisions. A declension is a patterns of endings. If you know which pattern a noun follows, you can determine its possible endings.

Table 18 below shows the genitive and dative case endings of the first declension noun τιμή (*timē*, ‘honour’). Almost all nouns ending in -α or -η belong to the first declension. This group includes most female names, such as the goddesses Athene (Ἀθήνη), Aphrodite (Ἀφροδίτη) and Hera (Ἥρα). The endings also vary according to **number**, i.e. whether a noun is singular (‘It was a great *honour*’) or plural (‘she was awarded many *honours*’). For the moment, we will concentrate on singular nouns.

Table 18 τιμή, genitive and dative singular

case	ending	τιμή
singular		
genitive	-ης (<i>ēs</i>)	τιμῆς (<i>timēs</i>)
dative	-ῃ (<i>ēi</i>)	τιμῇ (<i>timēi</i>)

Activity 41

a) In which case is the noun Ἑλένη (*Helenēi*, 'Helen')?

- genitive
- dative
- none of the above

b) What is the genitive singular of the first declension noun Ἀθήνη (*Athēnē*, 'Athene')?

- Ἀθήνη (*Athēnē*)
- Ἀθήνης (*Athēnēs*)
- Ἀθήνη (*Athēnēi*)
- none of the above

8.6 The second declension

Table 19 below shows the genitive and dative endings of the second declension noun λόγος ('word'). Again, we will concentrate on the singular endings. Most nouns ending in -ος belong to the second declension.

Table 19 λόγος, genitive and dative singular

Case	Ending	λόγος
singular		
genitive	-ου (-ου)	λόγου (<i>logou</i>)
dative	-ω (-δῖ)	λόγῳ (<i>logōi</i>)

Activity 42

1. What is the genitive singular of the second declension noun Δαρείος (*Dareios*), the Persian king 'Darius'?

- Δαρείος (*Dareios*)
- Δαρείου (*Dareiou*)
- Δαρείῳ (*Dareioi*)
- none of the above

2. The name of the Greek god Hephaistos is a second declension noun, Ἥφαιστος (*Hēphaistos*). What case is Ἥφαιστῳ (*Hēphaistōi*)?

- genitive

- dative
- none of the above

Practice

Activity 43

Which Greek word could be used to translate the English word in bold?

Part A

Antigone's father

- Ἀντιγόνην (*Antigonēn*)
- Ἀντιγόνης (*Antigonēs*)
- Ἀντιγόνη (*Antigonēi*)

Answer

The genitive case is needed to indicate Antigone's relationship with her father.

Part B

Paris gave the apple **to Aphrodite**.

- Ἀφροδίτην (*Aphroditēn*)
- Ἀφροδίτης (*Aphroditēs*)
- Ἀφροδίτῃ (*Aphroditēi*)

Answer

The dative case is needed to indicate the recipient of the apple.

Part C

Goliath was struck **by a stone** ('a stone' in Greek is λίθος, *lithos*)

- λίθου (*lithou*)
- λίθῳ (*lithōi*)

Answer

A noun in the dative case is needed to indicate the instrument by which Goliath was struck.

9 Greek verb endings

We saw earlier from Euripides that Greek can express phrases like ‘I have come’ without using the personal pronoun ‘I’. Although personal pronouns exist in Greek, they are usually omitted unless an author wishes to emphasise them. The ending of the verb is enough to show who is doing the giving. Euripides could have added the word ἐγώ (*egō*, ‘I’) but the omega at the end of the verb ἤκω (*hēkō*) makes this unnecessary.

9.1 Person and number

Take a look at the following examples:

Examples

ὁρῶ τὸν ποταμόν (*horō ton potamon*) – **I** see the river
 ὀρθῶς λέγεις (*orthōs legeis*) – **you** speak correctly
 θάπτομεν τὸν στρατιώτην (*thaptomen ton stratiōtēn*) – **we** bury the soldier

The endings here express (among other things) the grammatical concepts of **person** and **number**. There are three ‘persons’:

1. the 1st person corresponds to the speaker (‘I’, or ‘we’)
2. the 2nd person corresponds to the person addressed by the speaker (‘you’)
3. the 3rd person refers to a third party (‘he / she / it’ or ‘they’). It is the standard person used in narrative prose, e.g. in the descriptive passages of novels.

Persons can also be **singular** or **plural** in number, i.e. one or many. The difference between ‘I’ and ‘we’ is not one of person (they are both 1st person), but number. Table 20 below shows the possible combinations of person and number:

Table 20 Person and number

Person	Number	
1	singular	I give
2	singular	you (singular) give
3	singular	he / she / it gives
plural		
1	plural	we give
2	plural	you (plural) give
3	plural	they give

Greek verb endings provide a lot of information about a verb in addition to its number and person. This includes whether a verb describes action in the present ('I give'), the past ('I gave') or the future ('I will give'). We will not cover these and other features here. If you choose to study Greek, you will be introduced to the different verb endings and their implications gradually and over an extended period of time. For now, be aware that word endings provide important information for both verbs and nouns.

9.2 -ω (omega) verbs

The endings of Greek verbs, like those of nouns, follow patterns. The first person singular of most Greek verbs ends in the letter omega. These verbs are sometimes referred to as -ω or omega verbs. Here is the present tense of one common verb παύω (*pauō*), 'I stop' (strictly speaking, the present active indicative).

Table 21 The endings of the verb παύω (*pauō*, 'I stop') in the present indicative active

number and person	Greek	English equivalent
singular		
1	παύω (<i>pauō</i>)	I stop
2	παύεις (<i>pauēis</i>)	you (singular) stop
3	παύει (<i>pauēi</i>)	he / she / it stops
plural		
1	παύομεν (<i>pauomen</i>)	we stop
2	παύετε (<i>pauete</i>)	you (plural) stop
3	παύουσι(ν) (<i>pauousi(n)</i>)	they stop

The letter 'nu' (ν) at the end of the third person plural is used when the following word begins with a vowel.

Activity 44

Do English verbs change their endings?

- Yes
- No

Answer

Yes, but nothing like to the same degree as Greek. With 'he/she/it' or a singular noun (e.g. 'the dog', 'the cat'), English verbs in the present tense add '-s' ('she walks' or 'the cat skulks').

Most English verbs also change their ending in the past tense (i.e. when describing events in the past) by adding '-ed'; thus 'I walk' becomes 'I walked'. Some verbs undergo a more radical change, e.g. 'I eat' becomes 'I ate'.

Practice

Activity 45

Using the verb table repeated below, match the following -omega verbs with their English equivalents.

γράφουσι (*graphousi*)

διώκει (*diōkei*)

θύετε (*thujete*)

τρέχομεν (*trechomen*)

Match each of the items above to an item below.

they write

he chases

you (plural) sacrifice

we run

Table 22 The endings of the verb παύω (*pauō*, 'I stop') in the present active indicative

Number and person	Latin	English equivalent
singular		
1	παύω (<i>pauō</i>)	I stop
2	παύεις (<i>pauεις</i>)	you (singular) stop
3	παύει (<i>pauει</i>)	he / she / it stops
plural		
1	παύομεν (<i>pauομεν</i>)	we stop

2	παύετε (<i>pauete</i>)	you (plural) stop
3	παύουσι(ν) (<i>pauousi(n)</i>)	they stop

9.3 Agreement

So far, we have concentrated on verbs with personal pronouns as subjects ('I', 'you', 'we', etc.). A more common scenario, especially in the descriptive prose of historians such as Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon, is for the subject to be a person or a thing, such as 'Themistocles', 'Pericles' or 'the army'. In this situation, the third person forms of the verb are used. If the noun is singular, the verb form is the third person singular. If the noun is plural, the third person plural form of the verb is used.

3rd person verbs

singular

μένει (*menei*) – he/she/it waits

Δαρείος μένει (*Dareios menei*) – Darius waits

plural

μένουσι (*menousi*) – they wait

οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι μένουσι (*hoi Athēnaioi menousi*) – the Athenians wait

This is the grammatical concept of **agreement**. A singular noun is accompanied by a third person singular verb; a plural noun by a third person plural verb.

Activity 46

a) Which form of the verb σπεύδω (*speudō*, 'hurry') could be combined with the plural noun οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι (*hoi Lakedaimonioi*, 'the Spartans') to give the Greek equivalent of 'the Spartans hurry'?

- σπεύδω (*speudō*)
- σπεύδει (*speudei*)
- σπεύδομεν (*speudomen*)
- σπεύδουσι (*speoudousi*)

b) Which form of the verb σπεύδω (*speudō*, 'hurry') could be combined with the singular noun Δαρείος (*Dareios*, 'Darius') to give the Greek equivalent of 'Darius hurries'?

- σπεύδω (*speudō*)
- σπεύδει (*speudei*)
- σπεύδομεν (*speudomen*)
- σπεύδουσι (*speoudousi*)

10 Simple sentences

A complete sentence requires at least a verb (e.g. 'walks', 'jogs', 'runs') and a subject (the person or thing doing the 'walking', 'jogging' or 'running').

Subject plus verb

1. George walks.
2. Sheila jogs.
3. Sam runs.

10.1 Subject and object in English

Some verbs also need an object to make the meaning complete. The objects are highlighted in the following sentences.

Subject, verb and object

1. George carried **the shopping**.
2. Sheila brought **cake**.
3. Sam found **happiness**.

Sentences of this 'Subject – Verb – Object' type are common in both English and Greek. They are, however, constructed according to quite different principles in each language. Let us consider English first.

Activity 47

Look at the sentence below and answer the questions that follow:

Cerberus chases Persephone

Part 1

Identify the subject, verb and object.

Subject

Verb

Object

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Cerberus

chases

Persephone

Part 2

What tells you that 'Cerberus' is the subject of the sentence and not 'Persephone'?

.....

Answer

The order of the words. In English, the standard word order is a subject followed by a verb followed by an object (if the sentence has an object. Not all do). This is why English can be classified as a 'Subject – Verb – Object' language, or 'SVO' language for short.

Part 3

What happens to the meaning of the sentence if you swap the words 'Cerberus' and 'Persephone'?

.....

Answer

Persephone becomes the subject and Cerberus the object, i.e. the roles of Cerberus and Persephone are reversed.

The use of word order to provide information about the role of nouns has one important consequence. It means that the order of words in English, unlike Greek, has to be fairly rigid if sentences are to be understood.

10.2 Subject and object in Greek

In Greek, the subject and object are indicated not by their position in the sentence but by the ending of the word.

Κέρβερος διώκει Περσεφόνην (*Kerberos diōkei Persephonēn*)

Cerberus chases Persephone

In Greek the subject is placed in the **nominative** case, the object in the **accusative** case. Nouns are recorded in the dictionary in the nominative case, e.g. 'τίμη' (*timē*, 'honour') or 'λόγος' (*logos*, 'word'). Therefore if you are familiar with a Greek word, you already know its nominative singular form. Singular nouns in the accusative case in the first two declensions always end with a vowel followed by the letter 'νυ' (ν), like Περσεφόνην (*Persephonēn*) in the example.

The chief use of the nominative and accusative cases is to mark subjects and objects. It is therefore helpful to think of the nominative case as the 'subject' case, and the 'accusative' case as the 'object' case.

Activity 48

If subjects and objects in Greek are marked by word ending rather than word order, what, if any, is the difference in meaning between the following sentences?

1. Κέρβερος Περσεφόνην διώκει (*Kerberos Persephonēn diōkei.*)
2. διώκει Κέρβερος Περσεφόνην (*diōkei Kerberos Persephonēn.*)
3. Περσεφόνην Κέρβερος διώκει (*Persephonēn Kerberos diōkei.*)

Answer

There is no difference of meaning because the word endings are identical in all three sentences. 'Κέρβερος' (*Kerberos*) is always the subject; 'Περσεφόνην' (*Persephonēn*) is always the object.

There may, however, be a slight change of emphasis. By shifting the object to the front, the writer of the third sentence might be trying to emphasise Persephone. You could bring this out in English by translating, 'It is Persephone whom Cerberus chases'.

10.3 Word ending in English

Although English uses word order to indicate subjects and objects, traces of something like nominative and accusative cases are still visible in English personal pronouns. That is to say, English personal pronouns operate like Greek nouns because their role is indicated by their form.

In the following example, to change the subject and object, you must change not only the word order but also the form of the pronouns 'I' and 'he'.

English personal pronouns as subjects and objects

I love Persephone → Persephone loves **me**.

He loves Persephone → Persephone loves **him**.

Activity 49

Do other English pronouns besides 'I' and 'he' change form when used as objects?

Answer

Yes.

Subject	Object
I	me
he	him
she	her

we	us
they	them

'You' takes the same form whether it is subject or object, but the archaic form 'thee' (subject) becomes 'thou' when used as an object. Note also the relative pronoun 'who' (subject) and 'whom' (object). These examples are remnants of what was once a more widespread use of cases by English nouns.

You have already seen that the use of word endings in Greek allows the order of words to be less rigid. This occurs in English too, especially where personal pronouns are involved.

Activity 50

In what order are the subject, verb and object in the following sentences?

Part 1

'With this ring I thee wed.'

- Subject – Verb – Object
 - Subject – Object – Verb
 - Object – Subject – Verb
-

Answer

I (subject) thee (object) wed (verb).

Part 2

'Two massy [i.e. massive] keys he bore of metals twain.'

Milton, *Lycidas*, 110

- Subject – Verb – Object
 - Subject – Object – Verb
 - Object – Subject – Verb
-

Answer

keys (object) he (subject) bore (verb)

The golden rule when shifting English words into unexpected positions is to keep the meaning of the sentence clear. The use of subject forms ('I' and 'he') and object forms ('thee') helps to clarify the meaning in the above examples, in spite of the unusual word order.

10.4 Word order in Greek

Greek authors could use the flexibility of Greek word order to achieve some striking effects. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for example, both start with a noun in the accusative

case, 'μήνιν' (*mēnin*, 'anger', i.e. the anger of Achilles) and 'ἄνδρα' (*andra*, 'a man', i.e. the hero of the poem, Odysseus).

μήνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος ...

mēnin aeide thea Pēlēiadeō Achilēos ...

Sing, goddess, of the **anger** of Achilles, son of Pelias ...

Homer, *Iliad*, 1.1

ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μουσα, πολύτροπον ...

andra moi ennepe, mousa, polytropon ...

Speak to me, Muse, of the **man** of twists and turns ...

Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.1

This use of word order creates such a strong impact that translators have sometimes attempted to preserve it. Here is the beginning of Robert Fagles's version of the *Iliad*:

Rage – Goddess, sing the rage of Peleus' son Achilles.

Homer, *Iliad*, 1.1, translated by Robert Fagles

10.5 Practice

First and second declension nouns in the accusative singular almost always end with the letter 'nu' (ν).

Table 23 First and second declension nouns, nominative and accusative singular

Case	1st declension	2nd declension
singular		
nominative	τίμη (<i>timē</i>)	λόγος (<i>logos</i>)
accusative	τίμην (<i>timēn</i>)	λόγον (<i>logon</i>)

Activity 51

Who is the subject in the following sentences, Telemachus or Penelope? (The verb φιλεῖ, *philei*, means 'loves'.)

- a) Τηλέμαχος φιλεῖ Πηνελόπειαν (*Tēlemachos philei Pēnelopeian*)
 Telemachos

- Penelope

- b) Τηλέμαχον φιλεῖ Πηνελόπεια (*Tēlemachon philei Pēnelopeia*)
 - Telemachos
 - Penelope

- c) Τηλέμαχος Πηνελόπειαν φιλεῖ (*Tēlemachos Pēnelopeian philei*)
 - Telemachos
 - Penelope

Activity 52

Which word could complete the following sentences?

1. φιλεῖ Πηνελόπειαν _____ (*philei Pēnelopeian* _____)

- Τηλέμαχον (*Tēlemachon*)

The sentence already has an object (Πηνελόπειαν, *Pēnelopeian*).

- Τηλέμαχος (*Tēlemachos*)

Yes, the nominative form Τηλέμαχος (*Tēlemachos*) would provide a subject for φιλεῖ (*philei*).

2. Τηλέμαχος φιλεῖ _____ (*Tēlemachos philei* _____).

- Πηνελόπεια (*Pēnelopeia*)

The sentence already has a subject (Τηλέμαχος, *Tēlemachos*).

- Πηνελόπειαν (*Pēnelopeian*)

Yes, the accusative form Πηνελόπειαν (*Pēnelopeian*) would provide an object for φιλεῖ (*philei*).

10.6 Declensions summary

We are now in a position to summarise the case endings for τιμή (*timē*) and λόγος (*logos*). Table 24 below includes plural endings as well as singular.

Table 24 First and second declension nouns, singular and plural

Case	1st declension, τιμή	2nd declension, λόγος
singular		
nominative	τιμή (<i>timē</i>)	λόγος (<i>logos</i>)
accusative	τιμήν (<i>timēn</i>)	λόγον (<i>logon</i>)
genitive	τιμῆς (<i>timēs</i>)	λόγου (<i>logou</i>)

dative	τιμῇ (<i>timēi</i>)	λόγῳ (<i>logōi</i>)
plural		
nominative	τιμαί (<i>timai</i>)	λόγοι (<i>logoi</i>)
accusative	τιμάς (<i>timas</i>)	λόγους (<i>logous</i>)
genitive	τιμῶν (<i>timōn</i>)	λόγων (<i>logōn</i>)
dative	τιμαῖς (<i>timais</i>)	λόγοις (<i>logois</i>)

Greek also has a 'vocative' case, used for direct address, e.g. ὦ θεά (*ō thea*), 'O goddess!', ὦ Σώκρατες (*ō Sōkratēs*), 'O Socrates!'.

11 Reading Greek

Learning a language inevitably involves learning the meanings of individual words. You will be familiar with this process if you have studied a foreign language before. Perhaps you have created flash cards or drawn up lists of those annoying words that, for some reason, never seem to stick in the memory. Greek is no exception in this respect, although in learning Greek you have the advantage that some Greek words are the ancestors of English ones.

11.1 Words

The following activity will enable you to explore the links between some Greek and English words.

Activity 53

For each Greek word listed in Table 25 below think of an English word that derives from it. Use the box to jot down your answers.

Table 25 Greek words with English derivations

Greek words
βιβλίον (<i>biblion</i>) – ‘book’
γλῶσσα (<i>glōssa</i>) – ‘tongue’
γράφω, (<i>graphō</i>) – ‘write’, ‘paint’, ‘draw’
θεραπεύω (<i>therapeuō</i>) – ‘care’
μῦθος (<i>mythos</i>) – ‘tale’, ‘story’
στρατηγός (<i>stratēgos</i>) – ‘a general’
ὑπνος (<i>hypnos</i>) – ‘sleep’

Provide your answer...

Answer

Here are some English derivations, although the list is by no means exhaustive. You may have found different examples.

Greek words with English derivations

Greek words	English derivations
βιβλίον (<i>biblion</i>) – ‘book’	bible, bibliography
γλῶσσα (<i>glōssa</i>) – ‘tongue’	glossary

γράφω (<i>graphō</i>) – ‘write’, ‘paint’, ‘draw’	graph, graphic
θεραπεύω (<i>therapeuō</i>) – ‘care’	therapy
μῦθος (<i>mythos</i>) – ‘tale’, ‘story’	myth
στρατηγός (<i>stratēgos</i>) – ‘a general’	strategy
ὑπνος (<i>hypnos</i>) – ‘sleep’	hypnotic

Activity 54

A number of English words derive from two Greek words in combination. Thus ‘rhododendron’ literally means ‘rose-tree’, from *ρόδον* (*rhodon*), ‘rose’ and *δένδρον* (*dendron*), ‘tree’.

Try to match the English words below with their (translated) Greek ancestors.

empty-tomb

horse-river

eight-foot

against-expectation

light-bringer

flesh-eater

Match each of the items above to an item below.

cenotaph

hippopotamus

octopus

paradox

phosphorus

sarcophagus

Some Greek words can be used to generate new English words almost indefinitely. The suffix ‘-logy’ from *λόγος* (*logos*), ‘word’, is used to denote fields of study, such as biology

(the study of *bios*, 'life'), epistemology (*epistēmē*, 'knowledge'), theology (*theos*, 'god') and zoology (*zōon*, 'animal').

Likewise φοβία (*phobia*) and φιλία (*philia*) denoting respectively an irrational fear of something and a love of something, as in xenophobia (*xenos*, 'stranger') and bibliophile (*biblion*, 'book').

Activity 55

The suffix '-crazy', from κράτος (*kratos*, 'power') is used to describe forms or styles of government. Try to match the words below with their definitions.

rule by the best

rule by the people

rule by thieves

rule by the mob

rule by wealth

rule by god

Match each of the items above to an item below.

aristocracy

democracy

kleptocracy

ochlocracy

plutocracy

theocracy

Answer

In these examples '-crazy' is combined with another Greek word. You might like to find some of these words in a Greek dictionary. An example using a non-Greek word is 'bureaucracy', from the French *bureau* ('desk').

11.2 Beyond words

Words are the building blocks of language. It therefore makes sense to devote plenty of time to studying them. Nevertheless, understanding the meaning of words is not enough to allow you to read Greek, or any other language for that matter, with fluency and confidence.

What else is needed? Many factors are relevant here, including an understanding of grammar and exposure to a lot of Greek. We will end, however, by highlighting one important skill possessed by all experienced readers. That is the ability to see not just words but groups of related words. As a fluent reader of English this will be second nature to you. Without it, you would find the process of reading English to be unbearably slow and laborious. Look, for instance, at the opening sentence of Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

In the second century of the Christian Era, the Empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilised portion of mankind.

This sentence is composed of a number of smaller chunks. Even if you know very little about grammar, you will instinctively recognise that some sets of words form natural groups, such as:

in the second century
the Empire of Rome
the fairest part of the earth
the most civilised portion of mankind

On the other hand you would be very unlikely to take the words 'of Rome comprehended the' as a unit. Why? Because it is incomplete and therefore not meaningful in its own right.

11.3 Larger units

The ability to recognise words that relate to one another is a feature of fluent reading. When learning a new language, even spotting two or three words that belong together represents a significant advance over reading word-by-word and can help to speed up the reading process. Here are a few simple groupings:

a preposition and its noun	to the lighthouse
an adjective and its noun	green onions
two nouns, one in the genitive case	Martha's brother
a subject, a verb and a direct object	the dog chased the cat

In each of these examples in Greek, the word ending will help you make the connection. Let us take genitive cases as one example.

Activity 56

Find the Greek expressions for 'this land of Thebans' and 'the daughter of Cadmus'. You may wish to refer back to the [vocabulary provided earlier](#).

Euripides, *Bacchae*, 1.1–3.

English

I, son of Zeus, have reached this land of Thebans, Dionysus, whom the daughter of Cadmus, Semele, once bore, brought to childbirth by lightning-bearing flame.

Greek

ἤκω Διὸς παῖς τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα
 Διόνυσος, ὃν τίκτει ποθ' ἡ Κάδμου κόρη
 Σεμέλη λοχευθεῖσ' ἀστραπηφόρῳ πυρί

transliteration

hēkō Dios pais tēnde Thēbaiōn chthona
Dionysos, hon tiktei poth' hē Kadμου korē
Semelē locheutheis' astrapēphorōi pyri

Answer

ἤκω Διὸς παῖς **τήνδε Θηβαίων χθόνα**
 Διόνυσος, ὃν τίκτει ποθ' ἡ **Κάδμου κόρη**
 Σεμέλη λοχευθεῖσ' ἀστραπηφόρῳ πυρί
hēkō Dios pais tēnde Thēbaiōn chthona
Dionysos, hon tiktei poth' hē Kadμου korē
Semelē locheutheis' astrapēphorōi pyri

Activity 57

What do you notice about the word order of these phrases? Do you detect a pattern?

Answer

The noun in the genitive case is 'sandwiched' between the article 'the' (or a similar word like 'this') and its noun. Although article and noun are separated, they agree with each other in gender, number and case, which helps to tie them together. This 'sandwich' construction – definite article + noun in the genitive case + noun agreeing with the definite article – is common in Greek.

Key point

The study of small units like words and word endings is a central part of learning Greek.

But reading a Greek text also involves seeing how the words fit together into larger units like phrases, clauses and indeed whole sentences. The word endings can help you spot these larger units, by allowing you to see which words relate to one another. If you can start to blend these approaches together – the small and the large – then you really will be on your way to reading Greek like an ancient Greek!

11.4 Closing thoughts

We began with parallel texts and the act of reading a Greek text alongside its English counterpart, looking across from one to the other and back again. We saw that this was not purely a matter of mapping one text to another word by word. We explored the reasons for this and traced them to basic differences in the workings of the two languages. In particular, we noted the role of *word endings* in Greek, a role fulfilled in the English language either by *word order* or by the presence of words not required in Greek.

If the specific endings of nouns and verbs are already starting to fade from memory, not to mention the terminology of cases, declensions, datives and genitives, do not worry at this stage. If you choose (or have already chosen) to study Greek, these will be reintroduced to you gradually and you will be given many opportunities to reinforce what you have learned through practice and by applying your knowledge to the reading of Greek texts. We do, however, hope that after working through this material, you have a deeper understanding of why these details matter and how they contribute to the goal of understanding Greek.

Conclusion

We hope you have enjoyed this taste of what it is like to work with these two ancient languages. One important point to take away is that even a small amount of knowledge of Latin and/or Greek can help you to get more out of your study of ancient literature, even if, like most students, your main experience of Latin and Greek texts is in English translation. The ability to look at a passage in greater depth using a parallel (bilingual) text and being able to look up a word effectively in a Greek or Latin dictionary are important skills in themselves. And while you may feel that you have only begun to scratch the surface of these rich languages, I hope you share our view that even a small amount of linguistic knowledge can help you to get that bit closer to understanding cultures in which classical texts were composed and consumed, debated and enjoyed.

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