

Getting started on ancient Greek



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Introduction

Introduction

Welcome to *Getting started on ancient Greek*. This free course offers a taster of the ancient Greek world through the study of one of its most distinctive and enduring features: its language.

This introduction will give you a brief historical overview to the Greek language. You will then start your study of the language by learning the alphabet. Sessions 1 to 3 introduce you to the letters, tackling them through a combination of reading, speaking, listening and writing.

Session 4 reinforces the first three sections by turning the focus onto whole words. It also asks you to reflect upon the influence that some of these words have exerted upon the English language.

Sessions 5 to 7 dip a toe into the waters of Greek grammar, especially the use of word endings, a device that plays a more central role in Greek than English.

Session 8 looks back upon the course, ties up some loose ends, and looks ahead, asking what it is like to study Greek in greater depth.

Along the way you will meet examples of Greek from the ancient world, including: a snippet from a Platonic dialogue, the genealogy of a Spartan king, a dedication by Alexander the Great from a temple in Turkey, Greek writing on pottery and coins, a law code from Crete and two boundary stones from Athens. Accompanying images will introduce you to Greek as it was actually written in the ancient world, which can differ in interesting respects from the standardised Greek familiar today.

We hope you enjoy the course.

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- read the letters of the ancient Greek alphabet
- recall a small set of ancient Greek words and their meanings in English
- read and understand simple sentences in ancient Greek
- understand some of the historical and geographical context of ancient Greek
- feel more confident about embarking on independent study of ancient Greek.

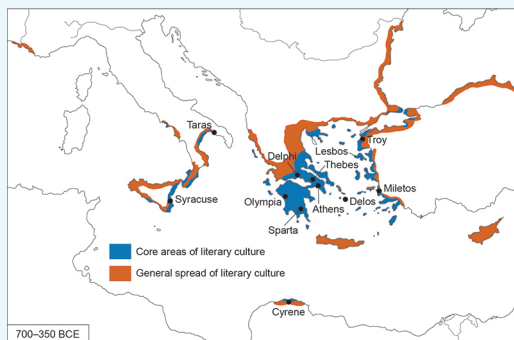
Historical overview

The Greek language predates the Greek alphabet by many centuries, although without written evidence it is difficult to determine its age exactly. One point that can be made with certainty is that Greek has the longest attested history of any European language still in use today. Modern Greek differs in some respects from its ancient counterpart but it is recognisably the same language.

Activity 1 Three maps

 Allow about 5 minutes

Study the three maps outlining the spread of Greek in successive historical phases in the ancient world. Can you identify Greek-speaking areas outside modern Greece?



Map 1: 700–350 BCE



Map 2: 350–1 BCE



Map 3: 1 CE–end of the classical era

Discussion

The Greek language was spoken wherever Greek communities settled and flourished. In addition to the area covered by modern Greece, these include parts of Turkey, Sicily, Southern Italy and North Africa (Map 1).

Greek extended its reach after the conquests of Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), when it became the language of culture and administration across the eastern Mediterranean and beyond. Egypt was of particular importance thanks to the foundation of Alexandria in 331 BCE and, subsequently, the great library established there by Ptolemy I (d. 282 BCE). Significant libraries were also created at Pergamon and Antioch, both in Turkey (Map 2).

Under the Roman empire, the Greek-speaking world was consolidated around the Eastern Mediterranean, where it continued as the language of culture and imperial administration (Map 3). The 'Greek' (eastern) and 'Latin' (western) halves of the Roman empire eventually separated in 395 CE, with each having its own emperor. The 'Greek' half survived the deposition of the last emperor in the West (476 CE), metamorphosing into the Byzantine Empire, which lasted until 1453 CE.

You can now get started with learning the language in [Session 1](#).

Session 1: The alphabet

Introduction

The Greek alphabet is the ancestor of the Roman alphabet, which is used today to write English and most European languages. Your first task is to learn the 24 Greek letters, upper and lower case, along with a small number of extra markings needed to read and write ancient Greek.

Activity 1 The Greek alphabet

 Allow about 10 minutes

Spend a couple of minutes looking at the table of letters, which contains both capitals and lower case. You will find it helpful to have the alphabet constantly available, whether that's by keeping it open in a separate window, or using the printable version underneath.

Pay particular attention to any letters that look unfamiliar. You might like to highlight these on your own version.

Table 1 The Greek alphabet, capitals and lower case

A α	alpha	I ι	iota	P ρ	rho
B β	beta	K κ	kappa	Σ σ ζ	sigma
Γ γ	gamma	Λ λ	lambda	T τ	tau
Δ δ	delta	M μ	mu	Υ υ	upsilon
E ε	epsilon	N ν	nu	Φ φ	phi
Z ζ	zeta	Ξ ξ	xi	X χ	chi
H η	eta	O ο	omicron	Ψ ψ	psi
Θ θ	theta	Π π	pi	Ω ω	omega

Sigma is written ζ at the *end* of a word, but otherwise σ. For example, σοφός (*sophos* = wise).

Iota following eta, omega, and, sometimes, alpha, is usually written in miniature underneath (η, ω, ϣ). This form of iota is known as 'iota subscript'. It is not usually pronounced.

If you would like a version of the alphabet for reference, either to print or to keep open in a separate window, follow this link: [Alphabet Guide](#).

1 First steps

Most Greek letters have an English counterpart. A few look and sound very much like their English equivalent. To take one example: the Greek letter 'beta' – written as lower case β or capital B – looks and sounds similar to the English letter 'b'.

Occasionally a Greek word will look identical to an English one. An example is the king and father of the Olympian gods:

Ζεύς (= Zeus)

Activity 2 Broken pottery

 Allow about 5 minutes

This is an *ostrakon* (Greek οστράκον), a broken piece of pottery, containing the name of an Athenian politician. His name is on the first line. What is it? (Hint: the letters are all capitals).



Figure 1 An ostrakon

Discussion

The politician's name is 'Kimon' (also spelled 'Cimon' in English). The *ostrakon* would have been inscribed during an 'ostracism', a process during which Athenian citizens, a group restricted to adult males, cast votes for a citizen to be exiled for ten years. If at least 6,000 votes in total were cast, then the citizen with the most votes was 'ostracised' (or, on an alternative interpretation, 6,000 votes had to be cast against a single individual).

More than 10,000 *ostraka* have been unearthed at excavations in Athens, in the *agora* (the marketplace or forum), which was a centre of Athenian civic life and commerce, and in the *Kerameikos* (the 'Potters' Quarter').

Cimon was ostracised in 461 BCE, after the failure of his policy of pursuing friendly relations between Athens and Sparta.

2 More letters

Some letters look unfamiliar but have an English counterpart. For instance, you can think of 'delta' (δ , upper case Δ) as an English 'd', or 'pi' (π , upper case Π) as an English 'p'.

Look at the name of the Greek god 'Poseidon', which contains a combination of letters that might look both familiar and strange:

Ποσειδών (= Poseidon)

Although Ποσειδών is trickier to decipher than Ζεύς, there is still a one-to-one correspondence between eight Greek letters and eight English ones.

Activity 3 Ostrakon continued

 Allow about 5 minutes

The second line of the *ostrakon* seen in Activity 2 contains the name of the politician's father. Can you identify all the letters and try to pronounce the name? (Note that you can ignore the faint final mark on the right-hand side which looks like a 'u' or a 'c' on its side: this is just an additional scratch rather than a letter.)



Figure 1 (repeated) An ostrakon

Discussion

The word is 'Miltiado' (Μιλτιάδο), a form of the Greek name Miltiades (Μιλτιάδης). The *ostrakon* reads 'Kimon, son of Miltiades' (literally, 'Kimon, of Miltiades').

Miltiades was an Athenian general at the battle of Marathon, which took place on the shore near Athens against a Persian expeditionary force in 490 BCE. He is mentioned a number of times by the Greek historian Herodotus in his *Histories*, composed around 430 BCE.

3 Unfamiliar letters

The Greek alphabet contains a few letters with no opposite number in English. An example would be the letter 'psi' (ψ, Ψ) which in English has to be represented by a combination of two letters, 'p' and 's'.

Activity 4 Letters with no English equivalent

 Allow about 5 minutes

Using the table of letters seen earlier (here's the link to the downloadable version again: [Alphabet Guide](#)), identify any Greek letters with no English equivalent.

Discussion

Your list should include at least the consonants:

θ, Θ (theta)
φ, Φ (phi)
χ, Χ (chi)
ψ, Ψ (psi)

There are also two versions of 'e' and 'o', a short and a long:

ε, Ε (epsilon) and η, Η (eta)
ο, Ο (omicron) and ω, Ω (omega)

Omicron just means 'little o' (μικρος, *mikros* = small), while omega is 'big o' (μεγας, *megas* = large).

You might need to give these letters extra attention in the initial stages of learning the alphabet.

4 'False friends'

A few Greek letters resembling English ones can be misleading at first. The letter 'rho' (ρ, Ρ), for instance, looks like an English 'p', whereas the 'p' sound in Greek is represented by the letter 'pi' (π, Π).

Activity 5 False friends

 Allow about 5 minutes

Look at the Greek letters and note any which might be mistaken for English ones. Consider both lower case and capitals.

Discussion

Your list might differ from the one presented here, but it probably includes some of the following letters:

γ (gamma)
ν (nu)
ρ (rho)
σ (sigma), but sigma at the *end* of a word (ς) looks more familiar
χ (chi)
ω (omega)

Perhaps you also identified these capitals:

Η (eta)
Ρ (rho, again)

Υ (upsilon)
Χ (chi, again)

5 Places and people

In this section, you get to test your knowledge of Greek letters by trying to match the ancient Greek names of various places and people with their English equivalents.

Activity 6 Pairing names

 Allow about 15 minutes

Here are some Greek place names with their English equivalents. Try to match them up, using the Greek alphabet to guide you.

Hint: the letters won't always correspond exactly, but they are close. Any divergence will usually occur towards the end of the word. (Consider, for example, the English name for the city of 'Munich' with the German 'München'.)

Athens

Delos

Thebes

Corinth

Sicily

Chios

Match each of the items above to an item below.

Αθηναι

Δηλος

Θηβαι

Κορινθος

Σικελια

Χιος

Discussion

The words in brackets below are the Greek letters represented in English. These 'transliterations', which are helpful guides for students new to the alphabet, are presented in more detail in the next section.

Αθηναι (*Athēnai*) = Athens
Δηλος (*Dēlos*) = the island of Delos
Θηβαι (*Thēbai*) = Thebes
Κορινθος (*Korinthos*) = Corinth
Σικελια (*Sikelia*) = Sicily
Χιος (*Chios*) = the island of Chios

Now try to match the names of these peoples with their English equivalents. Some are easier than others, which means you might need to use a process of elimination.

Egyptians

Babylonians

Lacedaimonians

Persians

Romans

Phoenicians

Match each of the items above to an item below.

ΑΙΓΥΠΤΙΟΙ

ΒΑΒΥΛΩΝΙΟΙ

ΛΑΚΕΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΟΙ

ΠΕΡΣΑΙ

ΡΩΜΑΙΟΙ

ΦΟΙΝΙΚΕΣ

Discussion

Here are the answers with transliterations in brackets:

Αιγυπτιοι (*Aiguptioi*) = Egyptians
Βαβυλωνιοι (*Babulōnioi*) = Babylonians

Λακεδαιμόνιοι (*Lakedaimonioi*) = Lacedaimonians (= the Spartans)
Περσαι (*Persai*) = Persians
Ρωμαίοι (*Rhōmaioi*) = Romans
Φοινίκες (*Phoinikes*) = Phoenicians

6 Transliteration

There is a standard system for representing, or 'transliterating', Greek letters in English. A transliteration can be a useful tool in the initial stages of learning Greek, because it can confirm that you have understood each individual letter correctly.

For example:

Ποσειδών *Poseidōn*
λέγω *legō* (= 'I say')
σοφός *sophos* (= 'wise')

The following letters are represented in English by two letters:

θ (theta) *th*
φ (phi) *ph*
χ (chi) *ch*
ψ (psi) *ps*

The long vowels are represented by their English equivalents, 'e' and 'o' with a horizontal line above, called a macron.

η (eta) *ē*
ω (omega) *ō*

Gamma is transliterated as 'n', when it precedes gamma, kappa, xi or chi. This reflects the way in which these combinations of letters were pronounced by the ancient Greeks:

αγγελος *angelos* (= 'messenger')
αγκυρά *ankura* (= 'anchor')

Upsilon can be represented as 'u' or 'y'.

The transliteration of Greek names often follows a Latinised form, especially if a name is well known. Thus 'Aeschylus' is the usual spelling of the name of the Greek playwright, rather than the technically correct 'Aischulos' (Αἰσχύλος).

Activity 7 Letter counting

 Allow about 5 minutes

How many Greek letters are needed to write the following words?

1. *theatron* (= 'theatre')
2. *philosophos* (= 'philosopher')
3. *chaos* (= 'chaos')

4. *psuchē* (= 'soul', 'mind')
 5. *ōphthē* (= 'he/she was seen')
-

Discussion

1. Seven letters – *θεατρον* (*theatron*)
2. Nine letters – *φιλοσοφία* (*philosophos*)
3. Four letters – *χaos* (*chaos*)
4. Four letters – *ψυχη* (*psuchē*)
5. Four letters – *ωφθη* (*ōphthē*)

7 Learning the letters

There are many ways to learn the letters of the Greek alphabet. You should spend a little time considering what might work best for you. Here are a few tips:

1. Aim for a mixture of reading, speaking and writing. You might prefer one of these but it is important to try all three. Speaking and writing will be introduced in Sessions 2 and 3 of the course.
2. A few regular short practice sessions of around 20-25 minutes are likely to be more productive than the occasional long session.
3. Be patient and allow yourself time.
4. Keep track of any letters that cause particular difficulty. Mistakes provide valuable feedback which you can incorporate into your next session.

Activity 8 OU practice site

 Allow about 20 minutes

Go to the following Open University website and look at the two sections entitled 'Review' and 'Letters'. The second of these provides an interactive tool for checking and reinforcing your study of the alphabet. Aim for a session of about 20 minutes, but do increase or decrease the timing depending on your progress.

[Introducing Ancient Greek](#) (Make sure to open this link in a new tab/window so you can return easily)

8 Alphabetical order

As well as learning to recognise the letters, it is useful to be able to recite the alphabet, from alpha to omega. Not only will this help to reinforce your knowledge of the letter names, it will also assist later when looking up words in a dictionary.

Activity 9 Comparing alphabets

 Allow about 5 minutes

Look again at the Greek letters, and the order of the alphabet. Are there any that seem to be in an unexpected position when compared with English?

.....

Discussion

The order of Greek letters is very close to the order of the English alphabet. But students are often caught out by:

‘zeta’ (ζ / Z) and ‘xi’ (ξ / Ξ), which, from the standpoint of English, look misplaced

letters with no English counterpart, like ‘eta’ or ‘phi’. Memorising the jingles ‘zeta-eta-theta’ and ‘phi-chi-psi-omega’ can help overcome most of the difficulties.

Think about the best way for you to learn the order of the alphabet. You might choose to learn it in chunks, for example in four groups of six letters. Or perhaps you would find it easier to learn everything at once. Whichever approach you take, it will likely be a few days or weeks before you really master it. Keep in mind that spreading this study across a few short learning sessions will likely be more productive than one long one.

If you like, you can test your progress with this by using the ‘Sequence’ option on the [Introducing Ancient Greek](#) OU website from Activity 8.

9 Practise your learning

When you feel reasonably confident about the order of the letters, try the following activities.

Activity 10 Session practice

 Allow about 10 minutes

1. Which word from each of the following three pairs should appear first in the dictionary?

- ☐ δουλος (slave)
- ☐ γη (earth, land)
- ☐ θεος (god)
- ☐ τιμη (honour)
- ☐ ξενος (stranger, foreigner)
- ☐ νικη (victory)

2. Place the names of these people in alphabetical order:

Ζευς

Θεμιστοκλη□

Ξερξη□

Πλατων

Ραμψινιτος

Σωκρατη□

Match each of the items above to an item below.

First in order

Second

Third

Fourth

Fifth

Last in order

Discussion

This is the correct order, along with some description of the figures in question:

Ζευς (*Zeus*), father of the gods.

Θεμιστοκλη□ (*Themistoclēs*), Athenian politician and general; victor over the Persians at the battle of Salamis in 480 BCE.

Ξερξη□ (*Xerxēs*), king of Persia, 486-465 BCE.

Πλατων (*Platōn* = Plato), Athenian philosopher, c. 429-347 BCE; author of numerous philosophical dialogues.

Ραμψινιτος (*Rhampsinitos*), legendary Egyptian pharaoh mentioned by Herodotus in his *Histories*.

Σωκρατη□ (*Sōcratēs*), Athenian philosopher, teacher of Plato; put to death on a charge of impiety in 399 BCE.

10 A Greek inscription

Now that you're more familiar with the alphabet, you can have a go at identifying Greek letters on an ancient inscription.

Activity 11 Inscribed block

 Allow about 10 minutes

This inscribed marble block is from the city of Priene on the western coast of Turkey. The letters are all capitals, with the first word being:

ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ (*basileus* = king)

Look for this word at the start of the first line. Try to identify each of the 8 letters. Are the letter forms similar to the ones you have learned? Are there any surprises?



Figure 2 First lines of the Priene block inscription

Discussion

These letter forms, from the fourth century CE, are similar to those in use today. The horizontal lines of the sigma are angled slightly, and the two uprights of the upsilon are curved instead of straight. But overall the shapes are recognisable.

The remainder of the first line contains the king's name. Can you identify him?

Discussion

The second word is ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ (*Alexandros*). There were many king Alexanders in the ancient world. This inscription refers to the most famous, Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE). In lower case, the first line would read:

βασιλεὺς Ἀλεξάνδρος

Once again, the letter forms are quite close to printed Greek. The exception is the fourth letter, 'xi', which has the usual square shape, but also a vertical line down the middle

11 Summary

This session has introduced you to the Greek alphabet and presented two examples of Greek writing from the ancient world, an *ostrakon* and an inscription.

You have also begun to develop two important skills:

1. recognising the Greek letters, lower case and capitals
2. reciting the Greek alphabet, from alpha to omega.

You certainly aren't expected to have mastered everything yet, but hopefully this session has seen you off to a good start. You will continue to reinforce and develop your understanding as you progress through the course.

If you would like more practice, you could revisit the [Introducing Ancient Greek website](#) from Activity 8 – especially the sections entitled 'Letters' and 'Sequence'. A second go at the 'Letters' section might be particularly valuable before embarking on the study of pronunciation in Session 2.

You can now move on to [Session 2](#).

Session 2: Sounds

Introduction

In this session, you will discover more about how ancient Greek was spoken and what it might have sounded like. You will receive plenty of opportunities to develop and practise your own pronunciation. You will also learn about how the sounds of an ancient language can be reconstructed without access to native speakers.

Speaking and listening offer another way to absorb Greek, in addition to reading (introduced in Session 1) and writing (Session 3). For this reason, it is highly recommended that you take every opportunity to read aloud.

An additional reason to pay attention to the sounds of Greek is that most literature in the ancient world was meant to be heard – sometimes through song or performance – and not just read in silence. When learning Greek, it is important to keep in mind that the language was encountered through the ears as well as the eyes.



Figure 1 Douris cup

This fifth-century scene depicts the musical and literary education of a young boy. The stringed instrument, of which there are four examples, is a 'barbitos' (βαρβίτος), a relative of the lyre. The teacher holds open a papyrus roll, containing what appears to be the beginning of a poem. The poem begins with an address to the muse (Μοῖσα), as do the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

1 The sounds of Greek

As a living language, Greek would have varied in pronunciation across different locations and time periods, and, no doubt, within the same city. For the purposes of study, the key point is to be pragmatic, and to focus on speaking clearly and with confidence.

If you know how to speak Greek already, you are welcome to continue with your current pronunciation. It would still be important, however, for you to understand the pronunciation

outlined here, as it is a reasonable reconstruction of how Greek was spoken in Classical Athens, i.e. during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, based on the best available evidence.

Activity 1 Speaking aloud (1) – historical figures

 Allow about 5 minutes

Try to say the names of these historical figures. Then listen to the audio, and repeat the word out loud.

Αλεξανδρος

Audio content is not available in this format.



Θεμιστοκλης

Audio content is not available in this format.



Ξερξης

Audio content is not available in this format.



Κλεοπατρα

Audio content is not available in this format.



Περικλης

Audio content is not available in this format.



Σωκρατης

Audio content is not available in this format.



Discussion

The names are:

Αλεξανδρος, *Alexandros* = Alexander

Θεμιστοκλης, *Themistoclēs* = Themistocles

Ξερξης, *Xerxēs* = Xerxes

Κλεοπατρα, *Kleopatra* = Cleopatra

Περικλης, *Periclēs* = Pericles

Σωκρατης, *Sōcratēs* = Socrates

2 Breathings

Every Greek word beginning with a vowel (α, ε, η, ι, ο, υ, ω) or 'rho' (ρ) has a little mark above it, resembling an inverted comma. This mark is called a 'breathing'.

A *rough* breathing indicates a word that should be spoken with an 'h' sound (i.e. with a 'breath'). The Greeks called a rough breathing 'shaggy' or 'hairy':

ἵππος (*hippos* = 'horse')

Audio content is not available in this format.



ὅπλα (*hopla* = arms, weapons)

Audio content is not available in this format.



A *smooth* breathing indicates an absence of an 'h' sound. It can be ignored for the purpose of pronunciation, but it should be used when writing. In Greek a smooth breathing was described as 'bare' or 'hairless':

ἀκουω (*akouō* = 'I hear')

Audio content is not available in this format.



ἐχῶ (*echō* = 'I have')

Audio content is not available in this format.



Greek words beginning with 'rho' or 'upsilon' always take a rough breathing. English words beginning 'rh-' ('rhythm', 'rhododendron') and 'hy-' ('hypochondria', 'hydroelectric') tend to derive from Greek words starting with ρ or υ. The breathings on the other vowels can be either smooth or rough:

ῥόδον (*rhodon* = 'rose')

Audio content is not available in this format.



ὑπερ (*huper* or *hyper*, 'over', 'beyond')

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Breathings are written to the left of capital letters:

Ἀριστοφάνης (*Aristophanēs*, the Greek comic poet)

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Ὅμηρος (*Homēros* = the poet Homer)

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Activity 2 Speaking aloud (2) – breathings

 Allow about 5 minutes

Say the following words aloud, paying close attention to any breathings. Listen to the answer and repeat.

ἀγαθος ('good')

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Ἀθηναῖος ('Athenian')

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ἐπιστολή ('letter')

Audio content is not available in this format.



Ἑκάτη (goddess of the underworld)

Audio content is not available in this format.



ἡμέρα ('day')

Audio content is not available in this format.



ὁδός ('road', 'way')

Audio content is not available in this format.



ὄρος ('mountain')

Audio content is not available in this format.



ῥίς ('nose')

Audio content is not available in this format.



ὕπνος ('sleep')

Audio content is not available in this format.



ώρα ('hour')

Audio content is not available in this format.



Discussion

The words are:

ἀγαθος (*agathos*)
Ἀθηναῖος (*Athēnaios*)
ἐπιστολή (*epistolē*)
Ἑκατὴ (*Hekatē*)
ἡμέρα (*hēmera*)
ὁδός (*hodos*)
ὄρος (*oros*)
ῥίς (*rhis*)
ὕπνος (*hupnos*)
ώρα (*hora*)

From this point in the course, Greek words will be displayed with breathings.

3 Refinements

Four sounds can prove troublesome for English speakers:

1. theta (θ / Θ) in classical Greek was probably sounded like the 't' in 'top' as opposed to the 't' in 'stop'. But this is a subtle distinction for native English speakers, and you will often hear it pronounced as 'th', as in 'theatre'.

θεος (god)

strict:

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simplified:

Audio content is not available in this format.



2. phi (φ / Φ) was probably similar to the 'p' in 'pot' as opposed to the 'p' in 'spot'. You will commonly hear it pronounced in a simplified form, like an English 'f':

φιλοσοφία (philosophy)

strict:

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simplified:

Audio content is not available in this format.



In fact θ and φ were pronounced like English 'th' and 'f' at some point after the fifth century BCE – as they are in modern Greek – although when this change occurred is debated.

3. chi (χ / X) was pronounced as 'k' followed by 'h'. If possible, you should pronounce this like 'ch' in loch, to distinguish it from a kappa, but you will hear it as a 'k' sound as well:

χρὸνος (time)

strict:

Audio content is not available in this format.



simplified:

Audio content is not available in this format.



4. zeta (ζ / Z) is properly pronounced like the 's' + 'd' sounds in the phrase 'it is done'. However, many English speakers simply pronounce it like the 'z' in 'zoo'.

Ζεύς (Zeus)

strict:

Audio content is not available in this format.



simplified:

Audio content is not available in this format.



Activity 3 Speaking aloud (3) – mythological figures

 Allow about 5 minutes

Say the names of these figures from Greek mythology, listen to the pronunciation, and repeat.

Ἀθηνῆ

Audio content is not available in this format.



Ἀνδρομαχη

Audio content is not available in this format.



Ἀφροδίτη

Audio content is not available in this format.



Ζεὺς

Audio content is not available in this format.



Θυεστής

Audio content is not available in this format.



Χαὸς

Audio content is not available in this format.



4 Accents

Greek words are usually printed with one of three accents: acute (´), grave (`) or circumflex (^). You will meet them in dictionaries and printed texts, so it is important to be able to recognise them. But they can be ignored in the early stages of learning Greek,

except on rare occasions where they affect the meaning of a word. From this point in the course, Greek words will be displayed with accents.

The following statement contains a grave, an acute, and a circumflex, in that order:

χείρ νίπτει χείρα

cheir níptei cheira = a hand washes a hand (or, 'one hand washes the other')

The system of accents was devised in antiquity, probably around 200 BCE at the great library of Alexandria in Egypt. Its purpose was to help readers pronounce Greek syllables with the correct melodic 'pitch', that is with a rising tone (*acute*), a falling tone (*grave*) or a rising followed by a falling tone (*circumflex*), similar to that found in modern tonal languages like Chinese. Since syllables in English are not expressed with pitch, but with stress, i.e. a greater or lesser degree of emphasis, accents are difficult for native English speakers to use as intended. They are typically reserved for more advanced students of Greek, who may find them of great interest.

Study note:

Learners are rarely asked to use accents in the early stages of studying ancient Greek. For the present, concentrate on mastering the alphabet and breathings. And try not to confuse breathings with accents.

5 Stress

Every English word has at least one syllable where the stress falls. Occasionally the same word can vary its stress depending on its meaning:

They signed a contract.

She did not wish to contract measles.

The farm grew wonderful produce.

This contraption will produce a loud bang.

In practice, it is difficult for English speakers not to emphasise at least one of the syllables in a Greek word, but there is little agreement about how to do this. Some speakers place the stress where it seems most natural to them, others place it on the syllable containing the accent. You should be prepared to encounter both methods.

6 Diphthongs

Greek vowels can be combined to form a new sound. The same phenomenon can be observed in English words like 'pair' or 'shout', where two vowels work together to create a sound distinct from that of the individual vowels.

This combination is called a diphthong, 'double sound', from the Greek prefix di- (δίς, *dis* = twice) and (φθογγή, *phthongē* = sound; recall that double gamma makes an *ng* sound).

The Greek diphthongs are shown below, and spoken out loud, along with an example of a word using each diphthong.

αι καί, *kai* = and

Audio content is not available in this format.



αυ αὐτός, *autos* = self

Audio content is not available in this format.



ει λείπω, *leipō* = I leave

Audio content is not available in this format.



ευ εὕρισκω, *heuriskō* = I find

Audio content is not available in this format.



οι οἶμοι, *oimoi* = alas!

Audio content is not available in this format.



ου ἀκούω, *akouō* = I hear

Audio content is not available in this format.



Other combinations of vowels should be pronounced separately. For example, the iota and epsilon in:

ἱερόν hieron = temple

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Breathings appear above the *second* letter of a diphthong: this explains why the breathing sits above the second letter of αὐτός and εὐρίσκω, but the first letter of ἱερόν.

Activity 4 Speaking aloud (4)

 Allow about 5 minutes

Say the following words, then listen to the pronunciation.

Ἀθηναῖος (= Athenian)

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δεῖπνον (= meal)

Audio content is not available in this format.



οὐ (= not)

Audio content is not available in this format.



φεύγω (= I run away)

Audio content is not available in this format.



πλοῖον (= vessel)

Audio content is not available in this format.



Ἰούλιος Καῖσαρ (= Julius Caesar)

Audio content is not available in this format.



Discussion

The words are as follows:

Ἀθηναῖος (*Athēnaios*)
δεῖπνον (*deipnon*)
οὐ (*ou*)
φεύγω (*pheugō*)
πλοῖον (*plōion*)
Ἰούλιος Καῖσαρ (*Ioulios Kaisar*)

Now, identify the number of syllables in the following words, then pronounce them out loud. You will be able to listen to audios in the discussion afterwards.

1. βίος
- ☐ one
 - ☐ two
 - ☐ three

2. οἰκία
- ☐ one
 - ☐ two
 - ☐ three

3. ποιέω
- ☐ one
 - ☐ two

- three

4. Οἰδίπους

- one
- two
- three

5. ποιεῖ

- one
- two
- three

Discussion

βίος, *bios* = life

Audio content is not available in this format.



οἰκία, *oikia* = house

Audio content is not available in this format.



ποιέω, *poieō* = I make

Audio content is not available in this format.



Οἰδίπους, *Oidipous* = the Theban king Oedipus

Audio content is not available in this format.



ποιεῖ, *poiei* = he, she or it makes

Audio content is not available in this format.



7 Practice

In this section, you get to practise saying some Greek words aloud yourself.

Activity 5 Speaking aloud (5)

 Allow about 5 minutes

Say the names of these places. Then listen to the pronunciation and repeat. Can you recall their English equivalents from Session 1?

Ἀθήναι

Audio content is not available in this format.



Δήλος

Audio content is not available in this format.



Θήβαι

Audio content is not available in this format.



Κόρινθος

Audio content is not available in this format.



Σικελία

Audio content is not available in this format.



Χίος

Audio content is not available in this format.



Discussion

The places mentioned are:

Ἀθῆναι, *Athēnai* = Athens

Δῆλος, *Dēlos* = the island of Delos

Θῆβαι, *Thēbai* = Thebes

Κόρινθος, *Korinthos* = Corinth

Σικελία, *Sikelia* = Sicily

Χίος, *Chios* = the island of Chios

Now, say the names of these peoples. Then listen to the audio and repeat. Can you recall the English equivalents, also mentioned in Session 1?

Αἰγύπτιοι

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Βαβυλώνιοι

Audio content is not available in this format.



Λακεδαιμόνιοι

Audio content is not available in this format.



Πέρσαι

Audio content is not available in this format.



Ῥωμαῖοι

Audio content is not available in this format.



Φοίνικες

Audio content is not available in this format.



Discussion

The peoples mentioned are:

- Αἰγύπτιοι (*Aiguptioi*) Egyptians
- Βαβυλώνιοι (*Babulōnioi*) Babylonians
- Λακεδαιμόνιοι (*Lakedaimonioi*) Lacedaimonians (= the Spartans)
- Πέρσαι (*Persai*) Persians
- Ῥωμαῖοι (*Rhōmaioi*) Romans
- Φοίνικες (*Phoinikes*) Phoenicians

If you have read any of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, you might remember Homer's use of 'epithets', recurring adjectives or phrases that accompany the names of major characters. Try reading the following examples:

- γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη ('bright-eyed Athena')
- κορυθαίολος Ἕκτωρ ('Hector of the flashing helmet')
- λευκώλενος Ἥρη ('white-armed Hera')
- ρόδοδάκτυλος Ἥως ('rosy-fingered Dawn')
- πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς ('swift-footed Achilles')

Discussion

γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη (*glaukōpis Athēnē*)

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κορυθαίολος Ἑκτωρ (*koruthaiolos Hēctōr*)

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λευκώλενος Ἥρη (*leukōlenos Hērē*)

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ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως (*rhododaktulos Ēōs*)

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πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς (*podas ōkus Achilleus*, literally 'feet swift Achilles')

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8 Reconstructing pronunciation

Is it possible to reconstruct the pronunciation of a language without access to native speakers?

Although complete certainty is impossible, we can reconstruct the pronunciation of ancient Greek with some confidence using ancient evidence combined with principles drawn from modern linguistics.

Here are some of the main types of evidence:

- The testimony of Greek writers – one Greek grammarian stated explicitly that 'zeta' was pronounced as a combination of 's' followed by 'd'. Another speaks of the tongue 'beating the air' in the pronunciation of 'rho', implying that it was 'trilled' as in Italian, unlike the 'r' sound of southern England.

- The representation of Greek words in other languages – especially Latin, where, for instance, the letter ϕ is rendered not as 'f' but 'p' or 'ph'.
- Changes in spellings – these can provide valuable evidence for the way pronunciation changed over time and the way in which ancient pronunciation relates to modern. Common spelling mistakes on stone or papyrus can also provide useful clues in the hands of an expert.
- Wordplay, including puns, onomatopoeia (words that match the sounds they describe) and even baby-talk, like μάρμη (*mammē*) and πάππα (*pappa*), which are similar across many languages.

The *ostraka* in Figure 2 contain the name of the Athenian statesman Themistocles, son of Neocles. We know from many *ostraka* that his name was regularly spelled *Themisthocles*, with a second theta instead of the letter tau. The eventual change of spelling from theta to tau is easier to understand if the pronunciation of theta and tau was closer in the fifth century than they are today.



Figure 2 Themistocles ostraka

Sometimes clues to unlocking the pronunciation of Greek in the classical era come from unusual sources, such as attempts by ancient authors to represent in writing the sounds that various animals make. In the following exercise you will encounter some of these 'onomatopoeic' words (a term derived from the Greek words ὄνομα, name, and ποιέω, I make).

Activity 6 Animal sounds

 Allow about 5 minutes

Try to match the sound with the animal.

κόκκυ

βῆ βῆ

αῦ αῦ

κικκαβαῦ

βρεκεκεκέξ κοάξ κοάξ

Match each of the items above to an item below.





Discussion

Here are the sounds spoken aloud:

κόκκυ (*kokku*) – cuckoo.

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βή βή (*bē bē*) – sheep.

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αὖ αὖ (*au au*) – dog.

Audio content is not available in this format.



κικκαβαῦ (*kikkabau*) – owl.

Audio content is not available in this format.



βρεκεκεκέξ κοᾶξ κοᾶξ (*brekekekex koax koax*) – frog. This is the phrase uttered by the frog chorus in Aristophanes' comic play, *The Frogs*.

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9 Listening to Homer

Knowing the sounds of ancient Greek, in addition to helping you pronounce Greek words accurately, also helps you to appreciate the rhythms of Greek poetry. Greek verse, unlike English-language poetry, does not rely on stress patterns and rarely contains rhyme. You will now listen to some examples.

Activity 7 Homeric rhythm

 Allow about 5 minutes

Listen again to the Homeric epithets from Activity 5. Can you detect a rhythmic pattern towards the end of each phrase?

γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη ('bright-eyed Athena')

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κορυθαίολος Ἑκτωρ ('Hector of the flashing helmet')

Audio content is not available in this format.



λευκώλενος Ἥρη ('white-armed Hera')

Audio content is not available in this format.



ρόδοδάκτυλος Ἥως ('rosy-fingered Dawn')

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πόδας ὠκύς Ἀχιλλεύς ('swift-footed Achilles')

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Discussion

Homeric epic follows the rules of Greek poetic metre, a flexible system for combining long and short syllables in standard patterns. You might have been able to detect a repeating rhythm to the last five syllables of each phrase, something like *tum-ti-ti-tum-tum*.

These epithets, which recur throughout the epics, are designed to fit into the end of a Homeric line, where the pattern is at its most regular. The underlying rhythm, called 'dactylic hexameter', would have formed one important dimension of a performance of Homeric poetry.

Now listen to some complete lines from the beginning of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. You are not expected to understand all the details, but perhaps you can pick out a few words, like 'Achilles' or 'Troy'.

μῆνιν αἰεῖδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος

οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρὶ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε

Sing, goddess, of the anger of Achilles son of Peleus,

Destructive anger which brought countless miseries to the Achaeans

(*Iliad*, book 1, lines 1-2)

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ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε'
Speak, muse, of the man of many a turn, who undertook a multitude of
wanderings, when he had sacked the sacred city of Troy
(*Odyssey*, book 1, lines 1-2)

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Look again at the translations of these two passages. Who, in each case, is being addressed?

Discussion

The poet seeks inspiration from the goddess (θεά) or muse (μοῦσα), before embarking upon his lengthy performance. (The *Iliad* is roughly 15,000 lines long, the *Odyssey* about 12,000).

The impression is of a poet acting as a medium through which divine words (ἔννεπε, 'speak!') and song (ᾄδει, 'sing!') can flow. The muse, in effect, underwrites the poem, allowing the poet to describe places and events he has not seen himself, including the actions and conversations of the gods on Mount Olympus.

To experience what a poetic performance might have sounded like, listen to this recreation of the opening of the *Iliad*, sung to the lyre.

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Audio 1 A performance by Stefan Hagel

Study note

You can learn more about the reconstruction of the *Iliad*, and the research behind it, in the course [Introducing Homer's Iliad](#).

10 Summary

This session has introduced you to the sounds of ancient Greek and the important role of the spoken word within Greek society.

You have begun to develop the crucial skill of reading Greek words on sight. The more you practise, the clearer and more confident your pronunciation will become.

You should also have an understanding of:

- the sounds of the individual letters
- the pronunciation of diphthongs
- the role of breathings
- the three accents (you should recognise them, but they can otherwise be ignored)
- methods for reconstructing the pronunciation of an ancient language.

If you would like more practice with spoken Greek, you can review the 'Sounds' option in the [Introducing Ancient Greek website](#).

You can now move on to [Session 3](#).

Session 3: Writing

Introduction

You have been introduced to Greek through reading, in Session 1, and through speaking and listening in Session 2. This session will emphasise a third skill, that of writing.

The earliest surviving examples of the Greek alphabet date from the eighth century BCE. It is possible that the alphabet is older than this, but the majority view is that it is an eighth-century BCE invention. It was based on a pre-existing script used by the ancient Phoenicians (a sea-faring people from the Eastern Mediterranean), but with some changes and simplifications. The major Greek innovation was the use of letters to mark the sound of vowels. In this respect, the Greek alphabet was an advance over its predecessors because it could represent speech precisely, making it easier to read unfamiliar words on sight.

Take a look at Figure 1. On this tablet from the second century CE, a teacher has written two lines of Greek. Underneath, a student has copied the lines twice.



Figure 1 Greek homework book

1 Forming the letters

To get the most out of your practice, you should attempt to form the letters by hand, for instance with pencil and paper. The activities contain links to printable worksheets with spaces you can fill in, although you can use a blank sheet of paper if you wish.

If you prefer to use a keyboard, there are websites available. One site enabling you to enter Greek using a mouse or keystrokes is [Lexilogos](#) (if you take a look, make sure to open the link in a new tab/window so you can easily return to the course).

If this is your first experience of writing Greek, it is best to take a practical approach. Aim for simplicity and write the letters so they can be recognised and understood. As with English, if you look closely at different styles of handwriting, you will see an enormous variety of shapes and styles. In print too, close examination reveals subtle twirls, shifts of angle and changes of thickness that are visually attractive but do not need to be reproduced in handwriting.

You can use the illustration below as a guide to writing the lower-case letters, although there are no hard-and-fast rules for exactly how to go about this.

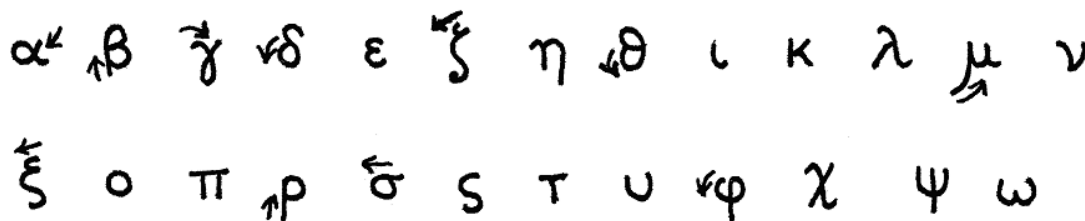


Figure 2 Guide to lower case letters

Activity 1 Letter practice

Allow about 15 minutes

Write the letters of the Greek alphabet, lower case and upper. You can use this worksheet if you wish: [Forming the letters](#).

Discussion

If you used the worksheet, here is a completed version for comparison:
[Forming the letters \[completed\]](#).

2 First words

Now that you have had some practice writing individual letters, let's move on to words. When writing words, there are some additional points to bear in mind:

- If a word begins with a vowel, it needs a breathing.
- Sigma at the end of a word has its own shape (ς instead of σ).

Take your time and refer to the alphabet sheet as necessary (here's the link to the downloadable version again: [Alphabet Guide](#)). Keep a note of any letters that you find difficult to write.

Activity 2 First words

 Allow about 15 minutes

Try writing out the following common Greek words yourself. You can use this worksheet if you wish: [First words](#).

δένδρον (*dendron*) = tree
κακός (*kakos*) = bad
λόγος (*logos*) = word, reason, story
ποταμός (*potamos*) = river
σοφός (*sophos*) = wise
ἄγγελος (*angelos*) = messenger
βίβλος (*biblos*) = book
θεοί (*theoi*) = gods
ξένος (*xenos*) = stranger, foreigner, guest
ψυχή (*psuchē*) = soul, mind

Discussion

Here's a completed version of the worksheet for comparison:
[First words \[completed\]](#).

3 Practice

Now try to convert some transliterated words back into the Greek alphabet. For example:

Themistoklēs → Θεμιστοκλῆς

If you'd like to refresh your memory of transliterated Greek, refer back to Session 1, Section 6. Remember that eta is represented by ē, and omega by ō.

Activity 3 Word practice

 Allow about 20 minutes

Write the following words. You should include breathings where necessary. Accents are, as usual, optional. You can use this worksheet if you wish: [Practice](#)

anthrōpos (= man)
didaskalos (= teacher)
potamos (= river)
stratēgos (= a general)
phōnē (= voice)

Discussion

In Greek the words are:

ἄνθρωπος
διδάσκαλος
ποταμός
στρατηγός
φωνή

Now, convert the names of the Olympian gods into the corresponding Greek form. Start with an initial capital and continue in lower case. Remember to include breathings if needed.

Artemis
Dēmētēr
Dionysos
Zeus
Hēra
Poseidōn

Discussion

The Greek names are:

Ἄρτεμις (goddess of the hunt and childbirth)
Δημήτηρ (goddess of grain and agriculture)
Διόνυσος (god of the grape and wine)
Ζεὺς (father of the gods)
Ἥρα (wife and sister of Zeus)
Ποσειδῶν (god of the sea)

Now try a few more.

Athēnē
Apollōn
Arēs
Aphroditē
Hēphaistos
Hermēs

Discussion

The Greek names are:

Ἀθήνη (goddess of wisdom and war)
Ἀπόλλων (god of the lyre, prophecy, medicine)
Ἄρης (god of war)
Ἀφροδίτη (goddess of love and beauty)
Ἥφαιστος (god of fire and blacksmiths)

Ἑρμῆς (the messenger god)

If you used the worksheet, here is a completed version for comparison:
[Practice \[completed\]](#).

4 Upper and lower case

Now practise your ability to read and write the capital letters.

Activity 4 Case practice

 Allow about 15 minutes

Rewrite the Greek words using capital letters throughout. Note that when Greek words are written in capital letters, accents are not used and breathings are regularly omitted, too. You can use this worksheet if you wish: [Upper and lower case](#).

γῆ (= earth)
δοῦλος (= slave)
ἔγραψα (= I wrote)
θαυμάζω (= I am amazed)
νίκη (= victory)
συμμάχος (= ally)

Discussion

In capital letters the words should read as follows:

ΓΗ (*gē*)
ΔΟΥΛΟΣ (*doulos*)
ΕΓΡΑΨΑ (*egrapsa*)
ΘΑΥΜΑΖΩ (*thaumazō*)
ΝΙΚΗ (*nikē*)
ΣΥΜΜΑΧΟΣ (*summachos*)

Now, rewrite the following words using lower case Greek letters only.

ΑΛΛΑ (= but; apply a smooth breathing)
ΔΗΜΟΣ (= people)
ΕΙΡΗΝΗ (= peace; apply a smooth breathing)
ΛΕΓΩ (= I say, speak)
ΜΑΝΘΑΝΩ (= I learn)
ΣΤΡΑΤΟΠΕΔΟΝ (= a camp)

Discussion

In lower case the words should read as follows:

ἀλλά
δῆμος
εἰρήνη
λέγω
μανθάνω
στρατόπεδον

Look again at the inscription from Priene you saw in Session 1. Rewrite the first line in lower case letters, preserving the initial capital of Alexander's name.



Figure 3 First lines of the Priene block inscription

Discussion

In lower case the first line would read:

βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος

If you used the worksheet for these activities, here is a completed version for comparison: [Upper and lower case \[completed\]](#).

5 Listening

In this activity you will combine your knowledge of Greek sounds and letters, by listening and writing down what you hear. You encountered all of these words a few pages ago. See how much you can remember.

Activity 5 Listening practice

 Allow about 10 minutes

Play the audio and see if you can write down the words in Greek. You have encountered these words before, but you may well need to listen to each one a few times.

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Audio content is not available in this format.



Audio content is not available in this format.



Audio content is not available in this format.



Audio content is not available in this format.



Discussion

The words spoken are:

δένδρον (*dendron*) = tree

κακός (*kakos*) = bad

λόγος (*logos*) = word, reason, story

ποταμός (*potamos*) = river

σοφός (*sophos*) = wise

The following words are a little more challenging. Listen carefully to the pronunciation and write them in Greek. Remember to include breathings where necessary.

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Audio content is not available in this format.



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Audio content is not available in this format.



Discussion

The words spoken are:

ἄγγελος (*angelos*) = messenger

βίβλος (*biblos*) = book

θεοί (*theoi*) = gods

ξένος (*xenos*) = stranger, foreigner, guest

ψυχή (*psuchē*) = soul, mind

6 Ancient writing

You have already studied two examples of Greek writing from the ancient world: a fourth-century BCE inscription set up in the name of Alexander the Great; and some fifth-century BCE Athenian *ostraka*, containing the names of the politicians Cimon and Themistocles.

There are clear differences between the writing on these artefacts and Greek from a printed book, or indeed the letters on this site. Two features immediately stand out:

- the use of capital letters
- the absence of spaces to mark the division between words.

This section takes a closer look at these two features. Later sessions of this course will present examples of two other important aspects of Greek writing before the end of the fifth-century BCE:

- the direction of writing
- the variety of Greek scripts.

6.1 Capital letters

Coins provide another excellent source of Greek writing. This example is roughly contemporary with the inscription from Priene, i.e. it comes from the latter part of the fourth century BCE.

Activity 6 Identify the king

 Allow about 5 minutes

Using your knowledge of Greek capital letters, can you identify the king represented on the coin? His name is on the right-hand side, his title on the left.



Figure 4 King depicted on a coin

Discussion

The king is Alexander. The text reads:

ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ

Or in lower case:

βασιλέως Ἀλεξάνδρου

The coin is one of many surviving examples of a silver 'tetradrachm' (four drachmas). The image is not of Alexander, but Zeus seated on a throne, with a sceptre in his left hand and an eagle on his right.

Compare the letters on the coin with those on the inscription from Priene. The words are similar, but one letter is different near the end of each word. What are the differences?



Figure 5 Alexander coin alongside Priene block inscription

Discussion

On the coin, the penultimate letter of ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ is an omega instead of an upsilon. And the final letter of Alexander's name is an upsilon, which appears to have been turned slightly to fit the space available. Otherwise, the letters are the same and the style of writing is similar.

Coin: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ (βασιλέως Ἀλεξάνδρου)

Inscription: ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΣ (βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος)

The different word ending on the coin indicates that it 'belongs to' or is 'of' 'King Alexander'. This use of word endings is treated in greater depth in Session 5.

6.2 Lower case

Lower case or 'minuscule' letters did not become standard until long after the end of the ancient world. It was only in the ninth century CE that Byzantine scribes began to use them regularly when making copies of books, adapting a system that was already in use for documents.

The image shows one page from a complete manuscript of the Gospel of St. John. Its date is disputed, but 200 CE has been suggested, which would make it unusually old. It was discovered in Egypt, where the dry climate is well suited to the preservation of papyrus. The Nile is the source of the reed, *Cytherus papyrus*, from which papyrus was manufactured.

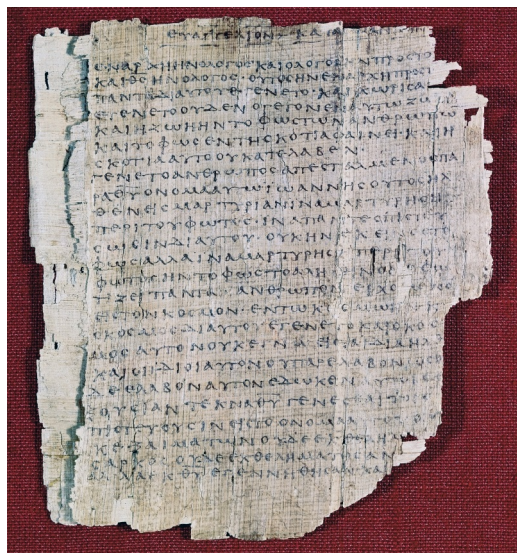


Figure 6 Gospel of St. John papyrus

Activity 7 Reading the papyrus

 Allow about 5 minutes

Reading papyri is a specialist skill which even experienced readers of Greek find tricky. But, based on your knowledge of the alphabet, you might be able to pick out some letters and even words.

Can you find the following?

- (a) καί ('and') at the beginning of lines 5 and 6 (and also line 2)
- (b) the famous opening words in line 1:

ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος

in the beginning (ἐν ἀρχῇ) was (ἦν) the word (ὁ λόγος)

What is your overall impression of the letter forms, in comparison with the Priene inscription? Are there any obvious differences?

Discussion

The curved, flowing strokes typical of handwriting with a reed pen and ink produce a different style of lettering from the straight, chiselled forms on the inscription. On the papyrus you can also see hints of eventual lower case or 'minuscule' shapes, for instance, alpha and omega. See, for example, the second and seventh letters on line 6.

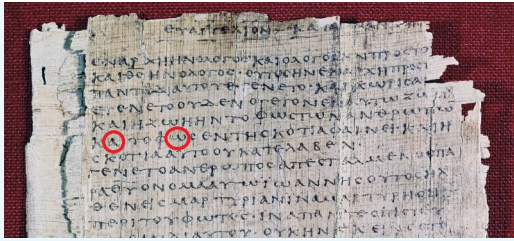


Figure 6 (repeated) Gospel of St. John papyrus

6.3 Word division

In a printed text, the gaps between words are as important for readability as the shapes of the letters themselves. This point is easy to appreciate if the gaps are omitted and the words squeezed together.

Try to read the following text. How easy or difficult do you find it?

THEWORDSAREEASIERTOREADIFYOUALREADYKNOWTHELANGUAGE

Perhaps you succeeded in making out most, or all, of the words at first glance. But you probably found the task a strain and were relieved to return to a conventional layout with spacing between the words.

THE WORDS ARE EASIER TO READ IF YOU ALREADY KNOW THE LANGUAGE

If you understand a language, you can generally puzzle out the word breaks yourself. For instance, English speakers know intuitively that the letters 'rds' cannot start an English word. They might appear in the middle of a word (like 'wordsmith'), but are most likely to occur at the end, not least because 's' is frequently tacked onto the end of nouns ('cats and dogs') or verbs ('walks and talks').

Activity 8 The Callias decree

 Allow about 10 minutes

Look at this inscription from fifth-century BCE Athens. You should be able to pick out a few letters, most of which are still legible. Consider the overall layout. Do you notice anything about the way the letters have been laid out on the stone, especially the horizontal and vertical arrangement?

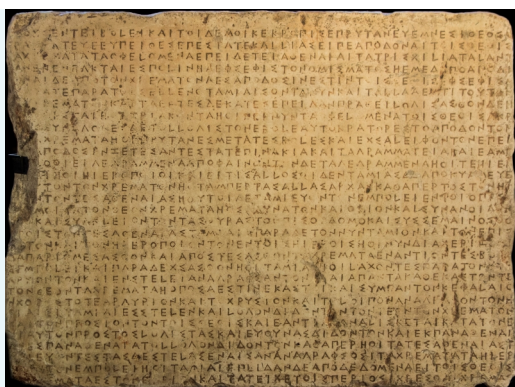


Figure 7 Fifth-century BCE inscription (the Callias decree)

Discussion

The letters have been laid out as if on a grid, in rows and columns, in a style known as *stoichedon* ('row-by-row', from *στοῖχος*, *stoichos* = 'row'). To achieve this effect, the stone-cutter would have needed to plan the text carefully in advance to allow sufficient space. Once inscribed, a *stoichedon* text would be difficult to change, especially through the deletion or addition of letters, a fact which perhaps gave it an aura of reliability. The overall effect is rather imposing, appropriately for an official record of a decision taken by the Athenian state. Athens contained many such inscriptions.

This inscription is part of a decree passed by the Athenian assembly in the 430s BCE relating to Athenian financial administration. It is sometimes known, informally, as the 'Callias [or 'Kallias'] decree' after the name of the man who proposed it.

Try to find the following words:

1. The name of the proposer in the middle of the second line: ΚΑΛΛΙΑΣ ΕΙΠΕ (Καλλίας εἶπε, *Kallias eipe* = 'Kallias said').
2. The reference to a sum of money, '3000 talents', at the end of the third line, running over into the fourth: ΤΡΙΣΧΙΛΙΑ ΤΑΛΑΝΤΑ (τρισχίλια τάλαντα, *trischilia talanta*).

7 Summary

In this session you have practised writing ancient Greek and learned about some of the characteristic features of Greek as it was written in antiquity.

The main skills you should keep practising are:

- forming the correct shapes of all the letters, lower case and capitals
- writing whole words – this might be through the process of:
 - copying
 - converting an English transliteration
 - writing down any words you can remember. You could combine this with the process of learning vocabulary, introduced in the next session.

If you would like additional practice, you could visit the 'Words' section of the [Introducing Ancient Greek website](#).

This concludes your study of the Greek alphabet. However, you will continue to consolidate your knowledge of it through the rest of the course as you study Greek words (Session 4) and are introduced to some basic grammar (Session 5-7).

The end of this session therefore provides a good opportunity to pause and reflect, and to ensure you have a reasonable understanding of:

- the 24 letters of the Greek alphabet, lower and upper case
- breathings (rough and smooth)
- accents (you should be able to recognise an acute, grave and circumflex)
- the pronunciation of the Greek letters, individually and in combination, e.g. as diphthongs or double consonants.

You can now move on to [Session 4](#).

Session 4: Words

Introduction

In this session you will take a closer look at Greek words: their shapes, meanings and the imprint they have left upon the English language. You will also meet some common items of vocabulary. The links between Greek and English can sometimes make the task of learning vocabulary a little easier.

Don't worry if you are still uncertain about the Greek alphabet at this early stage in your studies. This session offers plenty of reading practice, building upon and consolidating your work on the alphabet in Sessions 1-3. You do not need to learn these words by heart to complete the course, but if you take your studies further, you will meet many of them again, some of them repeatedly.

1 Greek and English

The contribution of Greek to English tends to be more evident in specialist or technical vocabulary than in ordinary, everyday English words. This reflects the fact that Greek literature offered a large stock of ideas and technical terms that subsequent readers could draw upon and incorporate into their own languages. It also reflects the historical importance of ancient Greek within European education, until well into the twentieth century.

To take one example: although English uses the word 'tree' where Greek uses the word δένδρον, the Greek form *dendron* is still visible in English, in words such as 'rhododendron' or 'dendrochronology' ('the measurement of time through the study of tree-rings'). These terms, the second of which is rather long and intimidating, can be broken down into some simple Greek elements:

rhododendron	ρόδον (rose) + δένδρον (tree)
dendrochronology	δένδρον (tree) + χρόνος (time) + λόγος (word or account)

As it happens, δένδρον is used as a stand-alone word in English, although characteristically it is used in a technical sense: a *dendron*, or *dendrite*, is a 'short, branched, thread-like extension of a nerve-cell'.

Let us begin with some words that have been incorporated into English almost to the letter.

Activity 1 English derivations from Greek (1)

 Allow about 5 minutes

Identify the English words derived from these Greek terms. Recall that upsilon can become either 'u' or 'y' in English. Kappa is often represented by 'c' rather than 'k'.

γένεσις
ἰδέα

δῶμα
κάθαρσις
καταστροφή
κόσμος
μανία
νέμεσις
πάθος
ὑβρις
ὑπόθεσις
χάρισμα

Discussion

The Greek words, with translations, are given below.

genesis	γένεσις (birth, origin)
idea	ἰδέα (the look or form of a thing)
drama	δῶμα (a deed, act)
catharsis	κάθαρσις (purification)
catastrophe	καταστροφή (overturning, subjugation)
cosmos	κόσμος (good order; also, the world or universe)
mania	μανία (madness)
nemesis	νέμεσις (justifiable anger, divine retribution)
pathos	πάθος (suffering)
hubris	ὑβρις (insult, an act of violence against a person)
hypothesis	ὑπόθεσις (a supposition)
charisma	χάρισμα (a divine gift)

Usually a Greek word enters English with a slight change of form. Changes typically occur at the end of the word, for example 'cataclysm', from κατακλυσμός ('deluge') or 'poet', which is related to the Greek ποιητής ('poet', or 'maker').

Activity 2 English derivations from Greek (2)

 Allow about 5 minutes

Can you think of English words derived from these Greek terms?

ἅθλον (prize)
ἀκούω (I hear)
βίος (life)
γράφω (I write)
μικρός (small)
ναυτικόν (fleet)
στρατηγός (a general)

Discussion

Perhaps you suggested some of the following words:

athlete, triathlon
acoustic
biology, and many other words like bioscience, biosphere, biotechnology
graph, graphic
microbe, microscope, omicron ('little o')
nautical
strategic, strategy

The path leading from Greek to English is sometimes unclear. You might need to pause for a moment to detect the connection between the meaning of an English word and its Greek ancestor. It helps to know that γράφω, for instance, has a wider range of meanings than 'write'. It also covers 'paint' and 'draw', which helps explain its appearance in 'graph' and 'graphic'.

2 Suffixes

Some Greek words survive in English as suffixes – fixed patterns of letters at the end of English words. The word κράτος, for instance, means 'strength' or 'power', and lies behind the ending '-cracy' in the word 'democracy', 'rule by the people' (δῆμος). Suffixes can be used to generate new English words, almost indefinitely.

Activity 3 Greek roots (1)

 Allow about 5 minutes

Try to relate the English words to their Greek roots. If you are unsure of the meaning, use the translations of the Greek words underneath to help you.

aristocracy
democracy
gerontocracy
kakistocracy
kleptocracy
ochlocracy
plutocracy
theocracy

ἄριστος	the best
γέρων	old man
δῆμος	people
θεός	god
κάκιστος	worst
κλέπτης	thief
ὄχλος	crowd, mob

πλούτος wealth

Discussion

aristocracy, rule by the best (ἄριστος)
democracy, rule by the people (δῆμος)
gerontocracy, rule by old men, or the elderly (γέρων)
kakistocracy, rule by the worst people (κάκιστος, from κακός, bad)
kleptocracy, rule by thieves (κλέπτης)
ochlocracy, rule by the mob (ὄχλος)
plutocracy, rule by wealth or the rich (πλούτος)
theocracy, rule by god (θεός)

The suffix -cracy has also been combined with non-Greek words, creating terms such as 'bureaucracy' (from French) and 'meritocracy' (from English, ultimately deriving from Latin).

Here are three more suffixes with Greek roots:

ἀρχή power, sovereignty. Suffix -archy
λόγος word, thought, reason. The suffix -ology is used to indicate a field of study.
φόβος fear. Suffix -phobia.

Activity 4 Greek roots (2)

 Allow about 5 minutes

Relate the following words with their Greek roots. Do the Greek words provide a clue to their English meaning?

arachnophobia
agoraphobia
geology
haematology
hierarchy
monarchy
oligarchy
xenophobia
zoology

ἀγορά	marketplace
αἷμα	blood
ἀράχνη	spider
γῆ	earth, land
ζῷον	animal
ἱερεὺς	priest
μόνος	alone, only

ξένος	stranger, foreigner
ὅλῖγοι	a few

Discussion

arachnophobia, fear of spiders (ἀράχνη)
agoraphobia, fear of open spaces (ἀγορά)
geology, the study of the earth (γῆ)
haematology, the branch of medicine concerned with diseases of the blood (αἷμα)
hierarchy, a system or classification for ordering groups or individuals (ιερεύς)
monarchy, rule by a single person (μόνος)
oligarchy, rule by a few (ὀλίγοι)
xenophobia, fear of foreigners (ξένος)
zoology, the study of animals (ζῶον)

In most of these cases, there is a clear relationship between the English and Greek. But the derivation sometimes needs supplementing to explain the full sense of the English word.

The word 'hierarchy', for instance, unlike ἱερεύς, generally has no religious connotations. It does, however, imply a series of ranks (such as priest, bishop, archbishop), rising like a pyramid from a wide base to a narrow peak. For agoraphobia it helps to know that an ἀγορά (marketplace) was an outdoor, public space inside a city where Greeks met and interacted, socially as well as commercially. It would, we can assume, have been crowded and noisy.

3 Prefixes

Greek words can also appear at the start of English words, as prefixes. You have already encountered bio- from βίος ('life'). Here are three more examples, each of which can still be used to produce new words:

poly- (πολύ, much, many): polygamy, polymath, polyphony
pan- (πᾶν, all): pandemic, pandemonium, panorama, pan-European
pseudo- (ψευδής, false): pseudonym, pseudo-science

One rich source of prefixes are prepositions – words like 'up', 'down', 'through', or 'to' that accompany a noun to form a phrase:

up the mountain
down the river
through the forest
on the road

English prepositions, like Greek, can be found as prefixes at the beginning of words:

Activity 5 Prepositions

 Allow about 15 minutes

Identify the English prepositions at the start of these words.

1. uptake
2. downbeat
3. afterthought
4. throughput
5. onset
6. byproduct

Discussion

1. up-take
2. down-beat
3. after-thought
4. through-put
5. on-set
6. by-product

Now, familiarise yourself with some Greek prepositions, all of which can be found at the start of English words. Read them aloud and, for this exercise, focus as much on the shape and the sound as the meanings.

ἀνά	up, upon
ἀπό	from
διὰ	on account of, through
ἐκ	out of
ἐπί	on, at, to
κατά	down, along, over
παρά	beside, against
περί	about
σύν	with
ὑπέρ	over, above
ὑπό	under

Using the list of prepositions, identify the two parts of the following English words.

Example

analysis = ana + lysis (literally, 'a breaking up')

1. apocalypse
2. catastrophe
3. diaspora
4. ecstatic

5. epidemic
6. hyperbole
7. hypothesis
8. paradox
9. periphrasis
10. synthesis

Discussion

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 1. apocalypse | apo + calypse ('unveiling') |
| 2. catastrophe | cata + strophe ('overturning') |
| 3. diaspora | dia + spora ('scattering about') |
| 4. ecstatic | ec + stasis ('standing outside [oneself]') |
| 5. epidemic | epi + demic ('among, or in, the people') |
| 6. hyperbole | hyper + bole ('overshooting') |
| 7. hypothesis | hypo + thesis ('an underlying assumption') |
| 8. paradox | para + dox ('against expectation') |
| 9. periphrasis | peri + phrasis ('a roundabout way of saying something') |
| 10. synthesis | syn + thesis ('putting together', 'combining') |

Once again, there are instances here where the roots of a word are not a reliable guide to its current meaning. An 'apocalypse' is literally an 'unveiling' or 'uncovering', from καλύπτω, 'I cover'. In the New Testament book of Revelation – whose original title is 'The Apocalypse of John' (Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου) – what is 'unveiled' is a series of divine revelations concerning the end of the earth. These certainly include the catastrophes with which the word 'apocalypse' is now associated, although for Christian readers these are signs of the impending arrival of the Kingdom of God.

4 Eponyms

Now let us look at some eponyms. These are words derived from names, usually of a person, but sometimes of a place, or a geographical feature such as a river or mountain. A familiar example is 'narcissist', derived from the mythical figure of Narcissus, the beautiful youth who fell in love with his own reflection. The word 'eponym' comes from the adjective ἐπώνυμο, which describes something that lends its name to something else. ἐπώνυμο is formed from the Greek preposition ἐπὶ ('upon') and the noun ὄνομα (name).

Activity 6 Greek proper names

 Allow about 5 minutes

Can you work out the English words derived from the following Greek proper names?

1. Μέντωρ, an old friend entrusted by Odysseus to look after his household when he left for Troy.

2. Δράκων, an Athenian lawgiver of the 7th century BCE whose laws were reputed to have specified the death penalty for most crimes.
3. Μαίανδρος, the Menderes river which winds through southwestern Turkey, mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*.
4. Μαύσωλος, a fourth-century BCE king of Caria in western Turkey. His tomb was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world.
5. Ἀφροδίτη, goddess of love and beauty.

Discussion

1. mentor
2. draconian
3. meander
4. mausoleum
5. aphrodisiac

Incidentally, the Maeander river runs close to the city of Priene, the source of the inscription discussed in Section 10 of Session 1.

Here is another selection. Can you identify the English eponyms?

1. Τάνταλος, legendary king, punished by the gods with food and drink that was always just out of reach.
2. Θέσπις, believed in antiquity to be the inventor of tragic drama.
3. Μορφεύς, god of dreams.
4. Πάν, shepherd god who acquired a reputation for sowing sudden bouts of fear.
5. Πρωτεύς, a shape-shifting sea-god whose fight with Menelaus is described in the *Odyssey*.

Discussion

1. tantalise
2. thespian
3. morphine
4. panic
5. protean ('variable', 'able to take on different shapes')

5 Vocabulary

Now you will look at a few items of Greek vocabulary, starting with nouns, which can be defined as the names of people, places and things.

Review the following Greek nouns. You might find it helpful to read the words aloud. Can you think of any English words that could help you commit these to memory?

ἄγγελος	messenger
γῆ	land
θεός	god

ἵππος	horse
λόγος	word, reason, story
νίκη	victory
ποταμός	river

If you find derivations useful, perhaps 'theology' would help with θεός and λόγος, or 'geology' γῆ and λόγος. ἄγγελος is not an angel, although an 'angel' is a divine messenger. It may, or may not, help to connect νίκη with a well-known sporting brand (spelled identically but pronounced differently). ἵππος and ποταμός combine to produce hippopotamus, 'river-horse'.

Activity 7 Match the nouns

 Allow about 5 minutes

Without looking back at the list, try matching the nouns with their English equivalents.

god

messenger

river

word, reason, story

victory

land

Match each of the items above to an item below.

θεός

ἄγγελος

ποταμός

λόγος

νίκη

γῆ

Here are six common verbs to review. Verbs can be defined as words that describe actions ('eats', 'runs') or, less frequently, states ('is', 'seems'). Links with English are less obvious here, so you might need to find other techniques for recalling them.

Note that the English translations include the personal pronoun 'I', although no word for 'I' is supplied in Greek. It is embodied in the ending -ω. Greek personal pronouns like ἐγώ ('I') exist, but are retained for special occasions, such as emphasis.

ἄγω	I lead
βαίνω	I go
ἔχω	I have
λέγω	I say
παύω	I stop
φέρω	I carry, I bring

παύω is connected to the English word 'pause'. λέγω, 'I say', and λόγος, 'word, story', are related to each other, so it might help to learn them together.

But the connections are harder to make than with the first group. Different memorisation techniques might therefore be needed – some suggestions will be made later in Session 8.

Activity 8 Match the verbs

 Allow about 5 minutes

Match the Greek verbs with their English equivalents.

I have

I say

I carry, bring

I lead

I go

I stop

Match each of the items above to an item below.

ἔχω

λέγω

φέρω

ἄγω

βαίνω

παύω

6 The definite article

A noun in a Greek dictionary will appear with its meaning, naturally, and some additional information. One extra item is the definite article, i.e. the word 'the'. This will be shown in one of three forms: *ὁ*, *ἡ* or *τό*.

The form of the article depends on the noun's gender: masculine, feminine or neuter. English nouns do not have gender in this grammatical sense, although many European languages do, including French, German, Spanish and Italian. Gender is important because it influences the endings of any adjectives accompanying the noun.

Masculine nouns are accompanied by *ὁ*:

<i>ὁ θεός</i>	the god
<i>ὁ λόγος</i>	the word

or, in their dictionary form:

<i>θεός, ὁ</i>	god
<i>λόγος, ὁ</i>	word

Feminine nouns are accompanied by *ἡ*:

<i>ἡ γῆ</i>	the land
<i>ἡ νίκη</i>	the victory

These words would be presented in a dictionary as:

<i>γῆ, ἡ</i>	land
<i>νίκη, ἡ</i>	victory

Neuter nouns are accompanied by *τό*:

<i>τὸ πλοῖον</i>	the boat
<i>τὸ ρόδον</i>	the rose

The dictionary forms would be:

<i>πλοῖον, τό</i>	boat
<i>ρόδον, τό</i>	rose

Nouns denoting male and female individuals will be masculine or feminine – 'priest' will be masculine, 'priestess' feminine. But in most cases the grammatical gender of nouns needs to be learned. The article *ὁ*, *ἡ* or *τό* will identify the gender for you.

Greek proper names, unlike English, usually occur with an article:

<i>ὁ Σωκράτης</i>	Socrates
<i>ἡ Ἀθήνη</i>	Athena

Activity 9 Test your learning – noun gender

 Allow about 5 minutes

What is the gender of these nouns?

τιμή, ἡ honour

- ☐ masculine
- ☐ feminine
- ☐ neuter

ἔργον, τό work

- ☐ masculine
- ☐ feminine
- ☐ neuter

νῆσος, ἡ island

- ☐ masculine
- ☐ feminine
- ☐ neuter

νόμος, ὁ law, custom

- ☐ masculine
- ☐ feminine
- ☐ neuter

πόλεμος, ὁ war

- ☐ masculine
- ☐ feminine
- ☐ neuter

7 Counting

Another type of Greek word that occurs frequently in English are numbers. You may recognise them from English words like 'pentagon' ('five corners'), 'heptathlon' ('seven contests') or 'octopus' ('eight feet').

Read through the numbers from 1 to 10. Some numbers, like the definite article, have more than one form.

Some Greek numbers:

one	εἷς, μία, ἓν
two	δύο
three	τρεις, τρία
four	τέσσαρες, τέσσερα
five	πέντε
six	ἕξ
seven	ἐπτά
eight	ὀκτώ
nine	ἐννέα
ten	δέκα

one hundred	ἐκατόν
one thousand	χίλιοι
ten thousand	μυριοί

In English, words related to 'one' are usually derived from μόνος ('only') and πρῶτος ('first') rather than from εἷς. For example:

- monarchy – rule by a single individual
- monogamy – marriage to one person
- proton – literally, 'first thing'; a primary substance
- prototype – a first sketch or model

Activity 10 Test your learning – numbers

 Allow about 10 minutes

Part 1

Use the list of numbers to answer the following questions:

In the early Christian church, how many patriarchs ruled the pentarchy?

- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6

How many kingdoms formed the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy?

- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9

How many sides are there in a tessera (a piece of glass or stone used in a mosaic)?

- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5

How many fluorine atoms are there in hexafluoride?

- ☐ 3
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 9

How many sides does an enneahedron have?

- ☐ 6
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9

Part 2

If καί means 'and', what are the following numbers?

ΠΕΝΤΕΚΑΪΔΕΚΑ

- ☐ 13
- ☐ 15
- ☐ 17

ΟΚΤΩΚΑΪΔΕΚΑ

- ☐ 17
- ☐ 18
- ☐ 19

ΕΠΤΑΚΑΪΔΕΚΑ

- ☐ 14
- ☐ 17
- ☐ 18

Part 3

Some final number-based questions:

What is triskaidekaphobia?

From which Greek number does the English word 'myriad' ('innumerable') derive?

Using the English word 'hemisphere', can you work out what ἡμισυς means?
(σφαῖρα is a 'ball' or 'globe')

Answer

Triskaidekaphobia is the fear of the number 13.

Myriad derives from μυρίοι, meaning 10,000 or, simply, 'countless'.

ἡμισυς means half (a Greek hero or demi-god is a ἡμίθεος).

8 Plato's *Timaeus*

Knowledge of Greek numbers equips you to understand the opening words of Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*, which gives an account of the structure and origins of the cosmos (κόσμος, which means, among other things, 'the universe'). It is also one of the sources for the myth of Atlantis.

Activity 11 Plato's *Timaeus*

 Allow about 5 minutes

Plato's dialogues are usually laid out like plays, starting with the names of the speakers. Here are the participants in *Timaeus*. What are their names?

ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ

TIMAIOS
'EPMOKPATHΣ
KPITIAS

.....

Discussion

The participants are Socrates, Timaios (often spelled 'Timaeus'), Hermocrates and Critias. Socrates is the central figure in most Platonic dialogues, although he is unusually quiet in *Timaeus*. Hermocrates was a general from Syracuse in Sicily, who played a prominent part in defeating the Athenian attempt to gain control of the island between 415 and 413 BCE during the Peloponnesian War. Critias is probably an older relative of Plato's. Timaios, the main speaker, is not well attested outside this dialogue and may be Plato's invention.

After the list of characters, the dialogue begins. The speaker is identified by a two-letter abbreviation in capital letters. Can you translate the opening words?

ΣΩ: εἶς, δύο, τρεῖς ...

.....

Discussion

SO[CRATES]: 'one, two, three ...'

Here Socrates notes the arrival of the three participants in the dialogue. He goes on to wonder what has happened to a fourth, unnamed companion. This scene-setting is a reminder that philosophy in the works of Plato is not a solitary activity, but a shared enterprise to be undertaken in conversation with others.

9 Summary

This session has examined the links between Greek and English, and looked at some common items of Greek vocabulary. It has also introduced the Greek definite article and shown how the article varies its form depending on the gender of a word. You have seen how to determine a word's gender from its dictionary entry.

You are not expected to remember all the words you have encountered. But if you would like to review some of the most common items of Greek vocabulary, you could look again at the activities in Section 5 of this session.

You can now move on to [Session 5](#).

Session 5: Word endings

Introduction

This session shifts the spotlight from Greek words to their endings. It does so by focusing on nouns, whose endings can vary according to their role in a sentence and their relationship with the words around them. These different endings identify what is known as the grammatical case of the noun in a particular sentence. There are five cases in total. This session will introduce you to one of them: the genitive case.

Study note

Learning to use word endings is a central part of learning to read Greek. This involves learning to recognise them and to tease out all of their implications. A Greek word ending may be small – usually no more than a letter or two – but it needs close attention because it shows how words fit together into larger units, such as phrases or sentences.

In this session, you will also continue your study of examples of Greek writing from the ancient world.

1 English noun endings

A language that relies upon word endings is called an inflected language. Greek is an inflected language whereas English is, for the most part, uninflected. English nouns do, however, change their endings in certain situations. The most common change is the addition of a final 's' to indicate that a noun is plural rather than singular, i.e. that the noun refers to more than one item.

boy → boys

house → houses

elephant → elephants

Rarely, an English noun might undergo a more radical change:

goose → geese

mouse → mice

woman → women

In grammatical terms, we say that the ending of an English noun changes according to its number (singular or plural). Greek nouns do the same. Number is treated in more detail in Sessions 6 and 7.

Another change that English nouns can undergo is to acquire an apostrophe + 's' to indicate ownership or possession:

Fred's shop
Jane's car
the pilot's licence

If the noun is plural, the 's' and the apostrophe are reversed:

the god's anger (singular: one god)
the gods' anger (plural: many gods)

Greek nouns change their ending in similar circumstances. The ending that denotes ownership or possession, the 'genitive case' ending, will be the focus of this session.

2 A Greek example

You can contrast two different endings of the same Greek noun by comparing Alexander's name on the inscription from Priene with his name on the coin.

Activity 1 Two forms of Alexander

 Allow about 5 minutes

Review the two forms of 'Alexander' and remind yourself of any differences:

Coin: Ἀλεξάνδρου

Inscription: Ἀλέξανδρος



Figure 1 Alexander coin alongside Priene block inscription

Discussion

The letters are the same, except for the final one, which is sigma (ς) on the inscription and upsilon (υ) on the coin.

The difference in spelling is small, but the effect is significant. Ἀλέξανδρος is the basic form of Alexander's name, the one that you would find in a dictionary. To indicate that the coin 'belongs to' or is 'of' Alexander, the ending has been modified from -ος to -ου.

Ἀλέξανδρος Alexander

Ἀλεξάνδρου **of** Alexander *or* Alexander's

Grammatically, 'Alexander's coin' is no different to 'Fred's shop' or 'the pilot's licence'. The modified ending indicates that one noun ('Alexander' or 'Fred') is related grammatically to another ('coin' or 'shop'). The relationship is one of ownership or possession.

The word 'king' has also undergone a change, with -εὺς (βασιλεὺς) becoming -έως (βασιλέως). There's no need to dwell upon that particular change here, other than to point out that it has been made for a similar reason: to express the fact that this coin is the possession 'of King Alexander'.

3 The genitive case

The genitive case has a range of uses, but to begin with, think of it as the 'of' case. Here are more examples, with the genitive ending highlighted:

ἄγγελος θεοῦ	a messenger of god (or god's messenger)
φόβος θανάτου	fear of death
βουλή Ἀφροδίτης	a plan of Aphrodite (or Aphrodite's plan)

Note that although Greek possesses a definite article ('the'), it has no indefinite article ('a' or 'an'). This often needs to be supplied in an English translation.

Vocabulary

θάνατος, ὁ	death
φόβος, ὁ	fear

Note that it is the word ending, not the order of the words, that affects the meaning. φόβος θανάτου and θάνατος φόβος mean the same thing: 'fear of death'.

You saw earlier that in English, if the noun is plural the apostrophe and the 's' swap places.

god's messenger (singular: one god)
the gods' messenger (plural: many gods)

Greek noun endings also vary according to whether they are singular or plural. The genitive plural ending of a noun always ends in -ων.

φόβος θεῶν	fear of gods
------------	--------------

Activity 2 Test your learning – genitive case

 Allow about 5 minutes

In Greek, which noun could be expressed using a genitive case?

1. The mother of Achilles

- ☐ mother
- ☐ Achilles

2. The daughter of Zeus

- ☐ daughter
- ☐ Zeus

3. The defeat of Athens

- ☐ defeat
- ☐ Athens

4. Sparta's victory

- ☐ Sparta
- ☐ victory

5. The gods' quarrel

- ☐ gods
- ☐ quarrel

4 Case endings

Greek nouns must have one of five case endings – you have now met two of these.

Firstly, you met the nominative case.

This is the dictionary form of a noun, the one to learn when studying vocabulary. You have encountered many examples, but the term 'nominative' has not been employed until now. The purpose and uses of the nominative case are discussed in Sessions 6 and 7.

Here are two examples of nominative case endings, plural as well as singular:

Table 1
Nominative case
endings

singular	plural
τιμή	τιμαί
λόγος	λόγοι

Secondly, you've met the form just introduced, the genitive case. Here are two examples of genitive case endings:

Table 2 Genitive case endings

singular	plural
τιμῆς	τιμῶν
λόγου	λόγων

In a Greek dictionary, the genitive singular ending will be included along with the definition of the noun. This important piece of information enables the reader to predict all of the noun's endings – this is a point you will return to shortly. For the moment though, concentrate on the dictionary entry and what can be deduced from it.

Example

τιμή, -ῆς, ἡ honour

The dictionary entry can be broken down as follows:

- τιμή: the noun in the nominative case
- ῆς: the genitive singular ending. In full, the word would read τιμῆς
- ἡ: the definite article, showing the word's gender (feminine in this instance)
- 'honour': the meaning

Activity 3 Test your learning – case and gender

 Allow about 5 minutes

Read the dictionary entries provided and select all statements that are true. (If you need to refresh your memory of grammatical gender, you can refer back to Section 6 of Session 4.)

ποταμός, -οῦ, ὁ river

- ☐ The genitive singular is ποταμοῦ
- ☐ The gender is feminine
- ☐ The genitive singular is ποταμός
- ☐ The nominative singular is ποταμός
- ☐ The gender is masculine

πυλή, -ῆς, ἡ gate

- ☐ The genitive singular is πυλή
- ☐ The gender is masculine

- ☐ The gender is feminine
- ☐ The genitive singular is πυχῆς
- ☐ The nominative singular is πυχή

5 Patronymics

Let us now look at the use of the genitive case on some *ostraka*. The *ostrakon* bearing the name of Cimon, reads:

Κίμων Μιλτιάδο
Cimon [son] of Miltiades



Figure 2 An ostrakon

The name of Cimon's father is Μιλτιάδης, written here as Μιλτιάδο, with the final omicron (o) representing a sound which later writers would spell as -ου (Μιλτιάδου). Once again, a small change of spelling carries a significant implication. Greeks would understand this to mean 'Cimon, [son] of Miltiades'. In this context, the word 'son' is not necessary and would have been understood.

The use of the father's name to refer to Greek males, distinguishing them from others with the same name, was common in public settings. The additional name was known as a 'patronymic' (from πατήρ, father and ὄνομα, name). Very occasionally, the mother's name was used to form a 'metronymic' (from μήτηρ, mother).

Patronymics exist in many languages. English examples include: Johnson, Richardson and Robertson. Mc and Mac have a similar force in Scots, as does O' in Irish.

Activity 4 The grammar of ancestry

 Allow about 5 minutes

Who is the father here: Alexander or Philip?

Ἀλέξανδρος Φιλίππου

- ☐ Alexander
- ☐ Philip

Discussion

Φιλίππου has a genitive case ending, which makes Philip the father:

Alexander, [son] **of** Philip

If Ἀλέξανδρος Φιλίππου means 'Alexander, son of Philip', what would be the meaning of this?

Ἀλέξανδρος Ἀλεξάνδρου Φιλίππου

Discussion

This means:

Alexander [son] of Alexander [son] of Philip

This example shows how genitives can be linked in a chain to represent the ancestral line of an individual. Alexander the Great did have a posthumous and short-lived son called Alexander. The figures in this family tree are:

Ἀλέξανδρος: Alexander IV (323-?310 BCE), son of
Ἀλεξάνδρου: Alexander the Great (strictly speaking, Alexander III, 356-323 BCE), son of
Φιλίππου: Philip II (382-336 BCE)

6 The genealogy of Leonidas

Names in the genitive case can be linked to form a genealogy. One impressive example is that of King Leonidas, who led the 300 Spartans at the battle of Thermopylae against the Persians in 480 BCE. Herodotus records it in chapter 204 of the seventh book of his *Histories*. The list contains 21 names in total. It starts like this:

Λεωνίδης ὁ Ἀναξανδρίδew τοῦ Λέοντος τοῦ ...

Leonidas, the [son of] Anaxandridas, the [son of] Leon, the [son of] ...

The name Leonidas is in the nominative case, the names of his ancestors are in the genitive case. The shape of the definite article also changes according to the case of the name it accompanies: ὁ is nominative, referring back to Λεωνίδης, the first instance of τοῦ is genitive, referring back to Ἀναξανδρίδew, the second τοῦ is genitive, referring back to Λέοντος, and so on. The word 'son' does not need to be spelled out in this context.

Activity 5 Genitive genealogy

 Allow about 5 minutes

Here is the full genealogy of 21 names. All names are in the genitive case, except for Leonidas. The final name has been left untranslated. From whom did Leonidas claim ultimate descent?

Λεωνίδης ὁ	Leonidas, the [son of]
Ἀναξανδρίδew τοῦ	Anaxandrides, the [son of]
Λέοντος τοῦ	Leon, the [son of]
Εὐρυκρατίδew τοῦ	Eurykratides, the [son of]
Ἀναξάνδρου τοῦ	Anaxandros, the [son of]
Εὐρυκράτεος τοῦ	Eurykrates, the [son of]
Πολυδώρου τοῦ	Polydoros, the [son of]
Ἀλκαμένεος τοῦ	Alkamenes, the [son of]
Τηλέκλου τοῦ	Teleklos, the [son of]
Ἀρχέλεω τοῦ	Archelaos, the [son of]
Ἡγησίλεω τοῦ	Hegesilaos, the [son of]
Δορύσσου τοῦ	Doryssos, the [son of]
Λεωβώτεω τοῦ	Leobotas, the [son of]
Ἐχεστράτου τοῦ	Echestratos, the [son of]
Ἦγιος τοῦ	Agis, the [son of]
Εὐρυσθένεος τοῦ	Eurysthenes, the [son of]
Ἀριστοδήμου τοῦ	Aristodemos, the [son of]
Ἀριστομάχου τοῦ	Aristomachos, the [son of]
Κλεοδαίου τοῦ	Kleodaios, the [son of]
Ὕλλου τοῦ	Hyllos, the [son of]
Ἡρακλέος	?

Discussion

Leonidas claimed descent from Heracles (i.e. Hercules). The genealogy's main purpose was to ground the king's authority in the distant and heroic past. Since Leonidas became king after the mysterious death of his half-brother Cleomenes, advertising his heroic ancestry was perhaps especially valuable. Only the more recent names are likely to be historically accurate.

Sparta had two royal houses and therefore two kings simultaneously. The other king at this time, Leotychidas, had a similar pedigree, also presented by Herodotus (*Histories*, book 8, chapter 131).

You might have noticed that the genitive case endings in the genealogy vary. As you will see later, each noun follows one of a small number of patterns. The name Πολύδωρος, for instance, follows the same pattern as λόγος. Its genitive case is therefore Πολυδώρου (like λόγου). Other names follow different patterns. You will learn more about these noun patterns, known as 'declensions', in Session 6.

7 The direction of Greek writing

Session 3 introduced two features of ancient Greek writing that differ from later practice: the exclusive use of capitals and the absence of spaces. Another difference is the direction of the writing, which was initially quite flexible. The Phoenician script on which Greek was based was written from right to left. Many languages follow the same direction today, including Hebrew, a close relative of Phoenician. In the earliest examples of Greek writing, right-to-left and left-to-right are both found, sometimes within the same piece of

writing. It was during the fifth century BCE that the direction of left-to-right began to dominate.

These two boundary stones from Athens contain the same text written in different directions. The text on the left-hand stone begins at the *top right* and runs from right to left, then top to bottom. The words on the right-hand stone begin at the *top left*, run from left to right, and continue from top to bottom. You will return to the meaning of the stones in Session 7. For the moment, focus on the way the letters are written.



Figure 3 Athenian boundary stones

Activity 6 Reading the stones

 Allow about 5 minutes

Can you match any of the letters on the two stones?

Discussion

The inscriptions match letter for letter, although damage to the first stone makes comparison difficult along the top. Damage, whether deliberate or accidental, is a perennial problem in the field of Greek epigraphy (the study of Greek inscriptions). Missing letters can sometimes be restored with reasonable certainty. In this instance the damage is minor and surviving boundary stones can be used as guides. But severely damaged texts are usually beyond recovery.

7.1 A Greek vase

Let's now look at some examples of writing from a piece of painted pottery from the early to mid-sixth century BCE. Words painted onto pots like this are known by the Italian word 'dipinti', i.e. 'painted things' (compare the word 'graffiti', which is the Italian for 'written things').

Activity 7 A Greek vase handle

 Allow about 10 minutes

Look at this detail from the handle of a Greek vase. The names of one of the two figures has been written 'backwards'. Can you identify which one? Which letters help you to decide?



Figure 4 Greek vase

Discussion

The name on the left is written 'backwards', although we must remember that it is 'backwards' only from our perspective. It would not have been thought of as unusual in the sixth century BCE when the vase was manufactured. The direction of the writing is clearest from the 'epsilon', the fifth letter from the top, which is inverted as it would be in a mirror. The final sigmas of each name also face different directions. Other letters, such as the initial alphas, look similar in either direction.

Now, can you read either of the names? Familiarity with Greek mythology and events from the Trojan War would help.

(Tip: the fourth letter down on the left-hand name is a lambda, looking rather more like English 'L' than the Λ which eventually became standard.)

Discussion

The names read $\text{AXI}\Lambda\text{EY}\Sigma$ (*Achileus* = Achilles) and $\text{AIA}\Sigma$ (*Aias* is the Greek name for the hero Ajax). In both cases, a reader would read the names from the centre outwards, from alpha to sigma. Ajax is carrying the body of Achilles from the battlefield at Troy, a scene depicted frequently on Greek vases and recounted in a lost epic poem attributed to Homer, called *Aethiopis*.

This detail is from a handle of the 'François Vase', named after the Italian archaeologist who discovered it in the nineteenth century. The vase stands more than two feet high and contains many other mythological scenes. Among its interesting features are the signatures of the potter, Ergotimos, and the painter, Kleitias.

7.2 The Gortyn code

One style of writing combined both directions, running from right to left and then left to right on alternate lines. In Greek this was called *boustrophedon*, literally ‘ox turning’ (from βούς, ox and στρέφω, I turn), recalling the furrows inscribed into the earth by a plough.

Activity 8 Reading *boustrophedon*

 Allow about 5 minutes

Look at the following example of *boustrophedon* from the city of Gortyn on the southern coast of Crete. Try to identify which lines go from right to left and which from left to right. Which letters help most in determining the direction of the writing?



Figure 5 The Gortyn code

Discussion

The top line in the photograph runs from left to right, with the direction alternating after that. The direction is especially clear in the shape of letters such as epsilon (E), kappa (K) and rho (P). These are the first letters at the top left of the image (KPE),

although the epsilon is damaged and not easy to read. Some letters look the same in either direction, for instance alpha (Α), delta (Δ), omicron (Ο) and tau (Τ).

You should note, however, that this photograph starts with the *second* line. There was a damaged line above running from right to left. The inscription therefore began at the *top right*.

This inscription, known as the Gortyn code, is thought to date to around the middle of the fifth century BCE. It consists of twelve columns of text inscribed on the curved wall of a building. Each column consists of approximately 55 lines, except for the twelfth (displayed in the photograph), which is 19 lines long. The code contains laws regulating society at Gortyn, related to such matters as rape and other sexual offences, divorce, marriage, rights over children, inheritance, property and adoption. It is a fine illustration not just of *boustrophedon* but of how an inscription can shed light upon places, periods and practices that are not well known from Greek literature.

8 Summary

In this session you have been introduced to noun endings, specifically the genitive case. You have seen examples of the use of the Greek genitive where English would deploy the word 'of', or an apostrophe and an 's'.

You have continued to explore written Greek, focusing on the direction of writing and the use of *boustrophedon*.

You should now understand the following terms:

- inflected language
- the genitive case.

You should be familiar with:

- the genitive case endings τιμῆς and λόγου (singular) and τιμῶν and λόγων (plural)
- the use of the genitive case in a phrase such as φόβος θανάτου ('fear of death')
- the different parts of a dictionary entry for a Greek noun.

You can now move on to [Session 6](#).

Session 6: Subjects and objects

Introduction

Session 5 introduced two case endings, the nominative and the genitive. This session presents a third, the accusative case, and explains how to use nouns in the nominative and accusative case to form a complete sentence with a subject, a verb and an object:

ὁ ἵππος διώκει τὸν ἄνθρωπον

The horse chases the man.

Understanding the nominative and accusative case will enable you to read more of Alexander's inscription from Priene. You will also examine the variety of scripts in which Greek was written before the end of the fifth century BCE.

1 Subjects and objects

Before turning to Greek, let us start with English. Imagine a reader who understood the meaning of every English word, having read a dictionary from cover to cover and digested all of its definitions. Although the reader's knowledge of English would be formidable, it would nevertheless fall short in important respects. This can be illustrated through the following examples:

The dog chases the cat.

The cat chases the dog.

These two sentences contain the same words. Yet their meanings are different, indeed diametrically opposed. The dictionary cannot explain the difference because it deals with the meaning of the words in isolation. A reader needs to understand the words within the context of the sentence as a whole, to identify their roles, and to ask who is doing what to whom.

Activity 1 Finding the meaning

 Allow about 5 minutes

How do you know which animal is doing the chasing? How do you know which animal is being chased?

Discussion

In English, the order of the words shows who is doing what to whom. The noun before the verb is responsible for the chasing. The noun after the verb is being chased. If the nouns exchange positions, the meaning of the sentence is reversed.

The extra ingredient, beyond the meaning of the individual words, is grammar, or to be exact, syntax. Syntax covers the rules for combining words into sentences. It explains why 'the dog' (or 'the cat') is doing the chasing. It also explains why some arrangements of words are meaningful, while others are gibberish. The word 'syntax' derives from Greek: σύν means 'with' or 'together', τάξις is an 'ordering' or 'arrangement', including the arrangement of soldiers in battle formation.

2 Sentence patterns

Behind a sentence like 'the dog chases the cat' lies a simple pattern:

Subject + Verb + Object

The dog (Subject) chases (Verb) the cat (Object)

The **verb** describes an action ('chases', 'eats', 'speaks') or a state ('is', 'seems', 'rests').

The **subject** is in charge of the verb. If the verb is 'chases', the subject is doing the chasing.

The **object** is on the receiving end of the verb. If the verb is 'chases', the object is the person or thing being chased.

The sentence might contain other words, but at its heart lies a simple pattern:

(Every morning) **the** (yapping) **dog** (angrily) **chases the** (startled) **cat** (out of the garden and across the road).

The dog chases the cat.

In English, subject, verb and object are expected in that order. Languages that adopt this order are sometimes referred to as 'Subject Verb Object (SVO)' languages. Knowing the pattern allows predictions to be made about the way a sentence might unfold. Some continuations can be ruled in and others excluded.

Activity 2 Complete the sentence

 Allow about 5 minutes

Choose the items that could fill the gap and complete the following sentence:

The dog chases _____ .

- ☐ the elephant
- ☐ [a subject]
- ☐ the kangaroo

- an object

Discussion

An object would complete this sentence. 'The elephant' or 'the kangaroo' could play this role. The sentence already has a subject, and, anyway, with the arrival of the verb the moment for a subject has now passed, at least in English.

3 Noun endings in English

A small number of English words carry traces of a grammatical system in which subjects and objects are marked not by their position in the sentence but by a change of word ending, or even of the entire shape of the word.

He likes her.

As usual in English, the word before the verb ('likes') is the subject ('he') and the word after is the object ('her'). But in this instance, reversing the meaning of the sentence requires more than swapping the positions of 'he' and 'her'. The words must also change their shape:

He likes her —> **she likes him**.

These changes are characteristic of the English personal pronouns: 'I', 'you', 'he', 'she', 'we' and 'they'. The shape of the word is related to the role that it plays in the sentence. 'He' and 'she' are sometimes referred to as 'subject pronouns', 'her' and 'him' as 'object pronouns'. 'Who' and 'whom' also work in the same way.

Activity 3 Swapping subject and object

 Allow about 5 minutes

What changes would need to take place in these sentences to convert the subject into an object and object into subject?

1. I like her.
2. We like them.
3. She likes you.

Discussion

In English the pronouns would swap positions and, in most cases, change their shape.

1. I like her —> **she likes me**.
2. We like them —> **they like us**.
3. She likes you —> **you like her**.

Note that in some instances, such as 'you' (and 'it'), the same shape is used to indicate both subjects and objects.

Activity 4 Flexible word order

 Allow about 5 minutes

The use of word shape enables languages to adopt a flexible rather than a fixed word order. This is more frequent in Greek, but also possible in English, as the following extract from the New Testament demonstrates:

These things write I unto you
(1 John 2.1, King James Version)

1. What is the order of 'These things write I'?

- ☐ Subject Verb Object
- ☐ Verb Subject Object
- ☐ Object Verb Subject

Discussion

The order is Object Verb Subject, i.e. the inverse of standard English word order.

2. Why, in this instance, can English invert the word order without creating confusion?

Discussion

'I' is the form of the pronoun used to indicate a subject. Using the form 'I' instead of 'me' makes it clear who is doing what to whom, overriding any expectations raised by the order of the words.

There are other factors at work too. Knowledge of the world tells us that it is people who write letters, not letters that write people. Grammar and meaning work together to make the sense clear.

3. Look at the original Greek words of 1 John. Why do you think this word order was chosen by the translators?

ταῦτα [*these things*] γράφω [*write I*] ὑμῖν [*unto you*]

Discussion

The English retains the word order of the Greek. The translators have preserved as much as possible of a text considered to be divinely inspired. The King James Version of 1611 drew from the sixteenth-century translation of William Tyndale, which adopted the same order: 'these thynges write I unto you'.

4 Nominative and accusative

Greek indicates subjects and objects using word endings, rather like the system used by English pronouns. The nominative case, which you have met, marks the subject. The accusative case, introduced here for the first time, marks the object. The definite article also has a set of case endings – an important point you'll return to soon.

ὁ ἵππος διώκει τὸν ἄνθρωπον

The horse chases the man

For horse and man to swap roles, the case endings must change.

τὸν ἵππον διώκει ὁ ἄνθρωπος

The man chases the horse

Unlike English, the word order does not determine the subject or object. In the above examples, ὁ ἵππος (the horse, nominative case) in any position will be the subject, τὸν ἄνθρωπον (the man, accusative case) in any position will be the object. Their position in relation to the verb, διώκει (he, she, or it chases) does not affect their meaning.

Activity 5 Test your learning – case endings

 Allow about 5 minutes

Bearing in mind that subjects and objects in Greek are determined by word ending and not word order, select all the sentences in which the horse is chasing the man:

- ☐ διώκει ὁ ἵππος τὸν ἄνθρωπον
- ☐ τὸν ἵππον διώκει ὁ ἄνθρωπος
- ☐ τὸν ἄνθρωπον διώκει ὁ ἵππος
- ☐ τὸν ἵππον ὁ ἄνθρωπος διώκει

Now, select the sentences in which the man is chasing the horse:

- ☐ ὁ ἄνθρωπος διώκει τὸν ἵππον
- ☐ διώκει τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὁ ἵππος
- ☐ διώκει ὁ ἵππος τὸν ἄνθρωπον
- ☐ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸν ἵππον διώκει

Is there a difference in meaning between these two sentences?

ὁ ἵππος διώκει τὸν ἄνθρωπον

τὸν ἄνθρωπον διώκει ὁ ἵππος

Discussion

Both sentences are the equivalent of 'the horse chases the man'. There is no difference of meaning. However, the order of words in the first sentence is, in fact,

more typical of Greek. The second order might be chosen to place the emphasis on the man. Greek can exploit its flexible word order to direct attention to certain words or phrases, by placing them in non-standard positions.

5 Declensions

Greek noun endings fall into patterns, called 'declensions'. There are three declensions in total, with some variations inside each. The standard method for learning case endings is to learn the declension of one representative noun for each pattern. Two such nouns are τιμή and λόγος.

The case endings you have met so far are:

Table 1 Two case endings

τιμή, honour (1st declension)		
	singular	plural
nominative	τιμή	τιμαί
accusative	τιμήν	τιμάς
genitive	τιμῆς	τιμῶν

λόγος, word (2nd declension)		
	singular	plural
nominative	λόγος	λόγοι
accusative	λόγον	λόγους
genitive	λόγου	λόγων

The declension of a noun can be determined from its dictionary entry. Remember that the dictionary entry shows the nominative form of a noun (e.g. τιμή) and its genitive singular ending (-ῆς). A noun with the same nominative and genitive singular as τιμή will follow the same pattern of endings. In grammatical terms, it belongs to the same declension as τιμή, or 'declines like' it.

First declension:

τιμή, -ῆς, ἡ	honour
βουλή, -ῆς, ἡ	plan, council
κόρη, -ης, ἡ	girl
νίκη, -ης, ἡ	victory

Here are some nouns that belong to the same declension as λόγος:

Second declension:

λόγος, -ου, ό	word
ἄγγελος, -ου, ό	messenger
δοῦλος, -ου, ό	slave
ποταμός, -οῦ, ό	river

Activity 6 Identify the declension

 Allow about 5 minutes

Using the dictionary entries, decide whether each of these nouns belongs to the first declension, like τιμή, or the second, like λόγος.

στρατηγός, -οῦ, ό general

- ☐ first declension (like τιμή)
- ☐ second declension (like λόγος)

πύλη, -ης, ή gate

- ☐ first declension (like τιμή)
- ☐ second declension (like λόγος)

φωνή, -ῆς, ή voice

- ☐ first declension (like τιμή)
- ☐ second declension (like λόγος)

διδάσκαλος, -ου, ό teacher

- ☐ first declension (like τιμή)
- ☐ second declension (like λόγος)

ἐπιστολή, -ῆς, ή letter

- ☐ first declension (like τιμή)
- ☐ second declension (like λόγος)

κώμη, -ης, ή village

- ☐ first declension (like τιμή)
- ☐ second declension (like λόγος)

Activity 7 Case endings – first declension

 Allow about 5 minutes

These nouns decline like τιμή. Identify their case endings.

Vocabulary

νίκη, -ης, ἡ	victory
φωνή, -ῆς, ἡ	sound, voice
πύλη, -ης, ἡ	gate

νίκης

- ☐ nominative
- ☐ accusative
- ☐ genitive

φωνήν

- ☐ nominative
- ☐ accusative
- ☐ genitive

πύλη

- ☐ nominative
- ☐ accusative
- ☐ genitive

Activity 8 Case endings – second declension

 Allow about 5 minutes

These nouns decline like λόγος. Identify their case endings.

Vocabulary

ξένος, -ου, ὁ	foreigner
σύμμαχος, -ου, ὁ	ally
ποταμός, -οῦ, ὁ	river

ξένον

- ☐ nominative
- ☐ accusative
- ☐ genitive

συμμάχου

- ☐ nominative
- ☐ accusative
- ☐ genitive

ποταμός

- ☐ nominative
- ☐ accusative
- ☐ genitive

6 Using case endings

The ending of a word is like a sign displaying information about the word's role in a sentence and how it relates to the words around it. Noticing and responding to these signs is central to reading Greek.

How, then, can the endings be used? If you encounter a sentence beginning with a noun-article pair in the nominative case:

ὁ ἵππος ...

Then you might be tempted to say:

'The horse'

That would be an excellent start. But you can go further, using knowledge of word endings and the basic elements of a sentence. As the noun is in the nominative case, you could think of the word and its ending as raising the following expectations:

The horse *verbs* [*object*]

This can be expressed as 'the horse *somethings* [*something*]'. The object is in square brackets because the sentence may or may not contain an object. That depends on the nature of the verb. But you can certainly expect a verb.

Alternatively, perhaps the sentence starts:

τὸν ἵππον

Now the sentence begins with a noun in the accusative case, i.e. a noun that appears to be an object. Instead of simply saying 'the horse', you could represent the information in the ending like this:

subject verbs the horse, or, *something somethings* the horse

You must read on to discover the subject and the verb, i.e. who is doing what to the horse.

Activity 9 Subject or object?



Allow about 5 minutes

What role would you expect the following words to play in these sentence fragments? (You can find a vocabulary list underneath.)

1. τὴν ἐπιστολήν _____
○ subject

- object

2. ὁ ξένος _____

- subject
- object

3. ἡ γῆ _____

- subject
- object

4. τὸν θεόν _____

- subject
- object

Vocabulary

ἐπιστολή, -ῆς, ἡ	letter
ξένος, -ου, ὁ	stranger, foreigner
γῆ, -ῆς, ἡ	land
θεός, -οῦ, ὁ	god

Discussion

Nouns in the nominative case will be subjects. Nouns in the accusative case are likely to be objects. You could express the information embodied in the word endings as follows:

1. *a subject verbs* the letter
2. the guest *verbs* [an object]
3. the land *verbs* [an object]
4. *a subject verbs* the god

Activity 10 Complete the sentence

 Allow about 5 minutes

Select the words or phrases that could complete the following sentence fragment:

ὁ στρατηγὸς _____

- ☐ τὸν στρατὸν ἄγει
- ☐ ἄγει τὸν στρατὸν
- ☐ [an object and a verb]
- ☐ [a subject and a verb]

Vocabulary

ἄγει	leads (from ἄγω, I lead)
στρατηγός, -οῦ, ὁ	general
στρατός, -οῦ, ὁ	army

Discussion

ὁ στρατηγός is in the nominative case, i.e. it is the subject. As a subject it raises the expectations of a verb and, potentially, an object. All continuations are possible except the last. The first two continuations would yield the same meaning:

ὁ στρατηγὸς τὸν στρατὸν ἄγει
ὁ στρατηγὸς ἄγει τὸν στρατὸν
The general leads the army.

7 Forms of the article

Like Greek nouns, the shape of the Greek definite article (i.e. the word ‘the’) varies according to its case (e.g. nominative, accusative and genitive) and number (singular or plural). Unlike nouns its shape also varies according to gender (masculine, feminine or neuter; this course covers the first two).

The nominative singular forms ὁ (masculine) and ἡ (feminine) should be familiar from your study of dictionary forms.

ἡ τιμή
ὁ λόγος

The accusative singular forms are τὸν (masculine) and τήν (feminine).

τήν τιμήν
τὸν λόγον

Study note

The article is a valuable tool for reading Greek. If you are unsure of the case of a noun, the shape of the article might tip the balance in favour of one case over another. This can be invaluable in the early stages of learning Greek as a shortcut to identifying a noun’s ending. For this reason, students of Greek are advised to memorise the forms of the article as soon as possible, to observe its shape carefully when reading, and to extract every drop of information from it.

Activity 11 Identify the case

 Allow about 5 minutes

Identify the case of the following pairs of articles and names. Although some of the nouns belong to unfamiliar declensions, the article provides enough information to answer the question.

τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον
☐ nominative

○ accusative

ὁ Μιλτιάδης

○ nominative

○ accusative

τὴν Κλεοπάτραν

○ nominative

○ accusative

τὸν Σωκράτη

○ nominative

○ accusative

ἡ Σαπφώ

○ nominative

○ accusative

Discussion

The names are:

Alexander, accusative case

Miltiades, nominative case

Cleopatra, accusative case

Socrates, accusative case

Sappho (seventh-century BCE lyric poet from the island of Lesbos), nominative case

Ἀλέξανδρος is the only name on the list that follows a pattern which you have met. It is second declension, like λόγος.

8 Alexander's dedication

An understanding of subjects, objects and the definite article will help you to read the second line of Alexander's inscription from Priene.

Activity 12 Continuing to read the inscription (1)

 Allow about 5 minutes

First, remind yourself of the initial line:

βασιλεύς Ἀλέξανδρος

King Alexander ...

Both words are in the nominative case. What role, therefore, would you expect 'King Alexander' to play in the sentence?

- subject
- object

Discussion

'King Alexander' in the nominative case is likely to be the subject of the sentence.

What else would you expect the sentence to contain?

Discussion

At a minimum, the sentence is likely to contain a verb telling us what Alexander is doing (or perhaps has done, or will do). Depending on the nature of the verb, there might be an object as well.

The next word is the verb you would be expecting. ANEΘΗΚΕ means 'dedicated'.

βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος

King Alexander

ἀνέθηκε

dedicated ...

Activity 13 Continuing to read the inscription (2)

 Allow about 10 minutes

Try to find ANEΘΗΚΕ at the start of line 2.



Figure 1 First lines of the Priene block inscription

Does the verb raise expectations of an object?

Discussion

Very much so. The word 'dedicated' would typically be followed by an object, answering the question 'What was it that Alexander dedicated?' ἀνέθηκε is a common word on statue bases and monuments, indicating that somebody has dedicated something, usually to a god or goddess.

Examine the remaining part of the line:

TONNAON

This series of letters is actually two words. Using your knowledge of the definite article and case endings, where do you think the word break falls?

Discussion

The break falls between two instances of the letter nu, i.e τὸν ναόν. The letters represent a definite article and its noun.

What role do you think τὸν ναόν plays in the sentence?

- ☐ subject
- ☐ object

Discussion

The endings of τὸν ναόν indicate that the noun is in the accusative case. It would help to know that ναός comes from ναός, but the definite article (τόν) is enough to show that the case is accusative. τὸν ναόν is the object that was expected after ἀνέθηκε.

Using the dictionary entry provided, translate the first two lines of the inscription:

βασιλεύς Ἀλέξανδρος
ἀνέθηκε τὸν ναόν

Vocabulary

ναός, -οῦ, ὁ temple

Discussion

The first two lines can be translated:

King Alexander dedicated the temple

The temple in question is the temple of Athena Polias at Priene. These words were inscribed on one of the pillars at the temple's entrance.

Greek gods were worshipped in a number of guises, Athena 'Polias' being the guardian of cities (πόλις = city-state). Other guises include Athena Nike (Victory) and Athena Parthenos (the Virgin), both of whom had temples on the Athenian Acropolis. The Temple of Athena Parthenos is better known as the Parthenon.

9 Local scripts

In the first centuries of the Greek alphabet, from the eighth to the fifth centuries BCE, there was a great diversity of scripts, reflecting a world of independent regions and city-states, under no overall central direction or control. This diversity affected the shapes of individual letters and also the number of letters used in different, local alphabets. The familiar 24-letter alphabet did not emerge fully formed in the eighth century BCE, but was the result of a long process of development, refinement and, eventually, standardisation.

9.1 Athens

Some minor variations of letter forms can be observed on the Themistocles *ostraka*, seen earlier in the course. Themistocles was ostracised from Athens at the end of the 470s. Over 2,000 *ostraka* with his name have been found, including a group of 190 discovered in a well on the north slope of the Acropolis. This group appears to have been written by a small number of individual hands, which suggests that the *ostraka* were prepared in advance for distribution to voters who were unable to write.

ΘΕΜΙΣΘΟΚΛΕΣ ΝΕΟΚΛΕΟΣ



Figure 2 Themistocles ostraka

Activity 14 Different letter forms

 Allow about 5 minutes

Do you detect any differences between these letter forms and the capitals you have learned? Look especially at theta, lambda and sigma.

Discussion

Theta is written in two forms. Two *ostraka* (the ones at the top centre and bottom left) place a dot inside the circle. The rest are written with a cross, a form sometimes referred to as a 'hot cross bun'! The 'bun' gave way to the dotted form in Athens during the course of the fifth century.

Lambda, which consists of two strokes of unequal length, looks less like the standard Λ and more like English L. The 'François Vase' (seen earlier in Session 5, Section 7.1) contains an example in the name of Achilles. There were many Greek settlements in Italy and it was this L-shaped lambda that influenced the Roman alphabet, which is why it looks familiar.

Sigma consists of three lines rather than the four which became standard later (Σ).

You have observed the use of a second theta instead of a tau in Themistocles' name. There is one other difference between Themistocles' name on the *ostrakon* and the standard, dictionary form Θεμιστοκλῆς. Can you find it? (Hint: it relates to one of the vowels.)

Discussion

The *ostrakon* uses E (epsilon) as the penultimate letter instead of H (eta). At this time, the Athenian alphabet did not contain either eta or omega, using epsilon and omicron instead for both the short and long forms of 'e' and 'o' throughout much of the fifth century BCE.

9.2 Crete

A much greater divergence from the standard Greek alphabet can be observed on the Gortyn code, with some letters looking surprisingly different from the standard forms they assumed later. The code contains just 18 letters in total, which was perhaps the full extent of the Cretan alphabet at the time.



Figure 3 The Gortyn code

The reduced number of letters in the code can partly be explained by the use of some letters to represent more than one sound:

- E (epsilon) was used for both short and long 'e', as at Athens.
- O (omicron) was used for both short and long 'o', as at Athens.
- Π (pi) was used for Π (pi) and Φ (phi).
- K was used for K (kappa) and X (chi).

Activity 15 Examining the Gortyn code

 Allow about 10 minutes

The letter Ξ (xi) was not used, but its sound was represented by two letters. If you recall the sound of a 'xi', can you work out which two?

.....

Discussion

Kappa and sigma. ξένος (stranger, guest) would become κένος.

The letter Ψ (psi) was also represented by two letters. Which ones?

Discussion

Pi and sigma. ἔγραψε (he / she / it wrote) would become ἔγραπσε.

Now let us look for some unusual letter forms. Try to find:

on line 2, a letter that looks like 'C'

on line 3, letters that look like 'W', 'S' and 'M'

Recall that the top line in the photograph is written from left to right, and that the direction of writing changes on alternate lines.

Discussion

In the Cretan script:

- 'C' is the letter pi.
- 'W' is mu. It looks like 'M' but with an extra upstroke at the end, i.e. five strokes in total.
- 'S' is iota.
- 'M' is sigma (perhaps you can see why if you tilt your head to the right).

Look at the last complete line, i.e. ignoring the final short line. Can you find a letter that looks like 'F'?

Discussion

This is 'digamma', a letter representing a 'w' sound. This sound plays an important role in early Greek poetry, with numerous instances in Homer, although they are not usually represented in printed texts.

The name 'digamma' was chosen because F looks like two gammas (Γ), one on top of another. Its original name seems to have been 'wau'. A corresponding letter 'waw' existed in the Phoenician alphabet and still exists in Hebrew.

10 Summary

This session has introduced you to the accusative case. You have learned how to use nominative and accusative case endings to create a sentence of the form: Subject + Verb + Object. You have also compared the different approaches of English and Greek to signposting subjects and objects, through word order and word ending respectively.

You have continued to explore the way Greek was written, by looking at examples of the range of scripts in existence across the Greek world before the end of the fifth-century BCE.

You should understand the following terms:

- subject

- object
- accusative case
- declension.

You should understand how the following sentences work:

ὁ ἵππος διώκει τὸν ἄνθρωπον ('the horse chases the man')
τὸν ἵππον διώκει ὁ ἄνθρωπος ('the man chases the horse')

If you would like more practice with subjects and objects in Greek, you can use the 'Sentences' section of the OU's [Introducing Ancient Greek website](#).

You can now move on to [Session 7](#).

Session 7: Subjects and complements

Introduction

After reviewing the Subject + Verb + Object pattern, this session introduces a second pattern: Subject + Verb + Complement. This pattern lies behind sentences such as:

The grass is green.

Socrates is a philosopher.

The book is on the table.

You will also be introduced to one of the most useful and important of Greek verbs, εἰμί, 'I am'.

Finally, you will conclude your study of Greek writing by examining how the variety of scripts and letter forms across the Greek world were eventually standardised into the form recognisable today.

1 Subject and object: recap

Before introducing complements, let us review subjects and objects.

Activity 1 Complete the sentence

 Allow about 5 minutes

Which word or phrase could complete the following sentence?

ἡ Ἀφροδίτη φιλεῖ _____

Vocabulary

Ἀφροδίτη, -ης, ἡ	Aphrodite
φιλεῖ	loves (from φιλέω, I love)
κόρη, -ης, ἡ	girl
Ξάνθιππος, -ου, ὁ	Xanthippos

- ☐ τὴν κόρην
- ☐ ἡ κόρη
- ☐ τὸν Ξανθίππον
- ☐ [a noun in the accusative case]
- ☐ [a noun in the nominative case]

Discussion

The sentence starts with a noun in the nominative case, ἡ Ἀφροδίτη. The nominative case ending shows that Aphrodite is the subject. The sentence continues with a verb (φιλεῖ), showing what Aphrodite is doing. The meaning of the verb prompts a question: 'who or what does Aphrodite love?', which raises the expectation of an object. A noun in the accusative case would satisfy this expectation and complete the sentence.

2 Subject and complement

The following sentences illustrate a second pattern: Subject + Verb + Complement.

Aphrodite is beautiful
Themistocles is a general
The grass is green
The citizens are unhappy

These sentences consist of three parts:

- a subject (e.g. 'Aphrodite' or 'the citizens')
- a 'linking' verb like 'is', or 'are'
- a 'complement', describing the subject. The complement is usually an adjective (e.g. 'green') or a noun ('a general'), but phrases are also possible, such as 'the book is **on the table**'.

Just a handful of verbs are able to 'link' subjects and complements. Note that verbs that take objects, for instance 'chases', 'eats' or 'loves', do not have this capability.

Activity 2 Linking verbs

 Allow about 5 minutes

In the sentence 'The grass is green', can you think of other 'linking' verbs that could replace 'is'?

Discussion

The list of verbs that can link subjects and complements is short. It would include:

seems
looks
appears
becomes
remains

A 'linking' verb is the main clue to a Subject + Verb + Complement sentence, in Greek as well as English. A form of the verb 'to be', such as 'is', 'are' or 'was' is the most common. This is the verb that will be concentrated on here.

A second clue is that a complement, unlike an object, provides a description of the subject. The relationship between subject and complement is often close, as between 'Aphrodite' and 'beautiful' or 'Themistocles' and 'a general'.

Activity 3 Objects or complements?

 Allow about 5 minutes

Are the highlighted words or phrases objects or complements?

The sky is **blue**.

- ☐ object
- ☐ complement

The girl opened **the door**.

- ☐ object
- ☐ complement

The horse appears **contented**.

- ☐ object
- ☐ complement

Hera is **the wife of Zeus**.

- ☐ object
- ☐ complement

The horse chases **the man**.

- ☐ object
- ☐ complement

The gods are **angry**.

- ☐ object
- ☐ complement

Discussion

The verbs 'is', 'appears' and 'are' are linking verbs that raise the prospect of a complement. The complement, when it appears, describes the subject. This is not true of objects like 'the door' or 'the man'.

Which options could complete these sentences?

The soldiers are _____.

- ☐ brave
- ☐ cowards

- [a subject]
 - [an object]
 - [a complement]
-

Discussion

The verb 'are' is a linking verb, raising the expectation of a complement. The sentence already has a subject. An object is not possible after the verb 'to be'.

3 εἰμί, I am

The verb 'to be', along with its forms such as 'am', 'is', 'are' or 'was', is the most common linking verb in Greek. Here are three forms of the present tense, which indicates a state of affairs in the present ('is/are') rather than the past ('was') or the future ('will be'). The complete list of all the forms of a verb is called its 'conjugation'.

εἰμί	I am
ἐστί(ν)	he/she/it is
εἰσί(ν)	they are

Recall that Greek does not need to state the personal pronoun explicitly. Personal pronouns such as ἐγώ ('I') are supplied only for emphasis. The letter nu in brackets following ἐστί and εἰσί (so-called 'movable nu') is used when the next word begins with a vowel, or at the end of a sentence.

The complement takes the same case as the subject, i.e. the nominative case:

ὁ Θεμιστοκλῆς ἐστί στρατηγός
Themistocles is a general

If the complement is an adjective, it also 'agrees with' its subject in gender and number as well as case. This is the grammatical concept of 'agreement'. This course won't go into adjectives in detail here, but the endings of some adjectives, like καλός ('beautiful') are almost identical to the endings of the definite article:

Aphrodite is beautiful
ἡ Ἀφροδίτη ἐστί καλή

The teachers are wise
οἱ διδάσκαλοι εἰσι σοφοί

The plans are foolish
αἱ βουλαί εἰσι μῶραι

As usual, Greek word order can be flexible:

ὁ Θεμιστοκλῆς στρατηγός ἐστιν
καλή ἐστι ἡ Ἀφροδίτη

Activity 4 Forms of εἰμί

 Allow about 5 minutes

Which form of εἰμί would be needed to translate the verb in these sentences?

Aphrodite is wise.

- ☐ εἰμί
- ☐ ἐστί
- ☐ εἰσί

Socrates is wise.

- ☐ εἰμί
- ☐ ἐστί
- ☐ εἰσί

The gods are wise.

- ☐ εἰμί
- ☐ ἐστί
- ☐ εἰσί

I am wise.

- ☐ εἰμί
- ☐ ἐστί
- ☐ εἰσί

Which word could complete this sentence?

ὁ Ξάνθιππος ἐστί _____.

Vocabulary

Ξάνθιππος, -ου, ὁ

Xanthippos

δοῦλος, -ου, ὁ

slave

- ☐ δοῦλος
- ☐ δοῦλον

Discussion

A complement is expected after ἐστί. The sentence means 'Xanthippos is a slave'. (You may recall from Session 5 that Greek does not have a word equivalent to 'a' or 'an'.)

4 Boundary stones

Boundary stones were an important feature of ancient Greece, marking the ownership of land and the transition from one type of space to another, e.g. from public to private. Two inscribed marble stones have been found on the west side of the Athenian *agora* ('marketplace'), the civic and commercial hub of Athens. It was important to define the boundaries of the *agora*, as it was both public land and sacred space. Some individuals were not allowed to enter, including certain convicted criminals and young men who had not yet carried out their military service.



Figure 1 Athenian boundary stones

Activity 5 Reading the boundary stones



Allow about 10 minutes

Remember that the inscriptions on the two stones are identical, although the words have been inscribed in different directions. The text begins:

HOPOΣEIMI

This is two words. Using your knowledge of the Greek verb 'I am', try to identify the position of the word break.

.....

Discussion

The last four letters are EIMI. In standardised, lower-case Greek the words would read:

ὅρος εἰμί

Next, using the vocabulary provided, try to translate the first two words:

ὅρος εἰμί

Vocabulary

ὅρος, -ου, ὁ limit, boundary

.....
Discussion

The words mean 'I am a boundary'. The word ὄρος is related to 'horizon', the boundary-line of the visible surface of the earth. It was also used to refer to the 'definition' of a word, i.e. where its meaning begins and ends.

Now, examine the whole inscription:

ὄρος εἰμι τῆς ἀγορᾶς

Using the definite article, identify the case of τῆς ἀγορᾶς.

- nominative
- accusative
- genitive

Finally, observing that τῆς ἀγορᾶς is in the genitive case, can you translate the inscription?

.....

Discussion

The translation is:

I am a boundary of the agora.

There must have been many boundary stones throughout Athens and the surrounding countryside. In the early sixth century BCE, the Athenian lawgiver Solon claimed to have freed the earth by removing 'the boundary stones (ὄρους) fixed in many places'. This somewhat obscure claim hints at a programme of radical social reform involving changes to the ownership of land. It was certainly controversial, as we can tell from Solon's surviving poetry. Indeed, Solon even portrayed his own role in the controversy as that of a ὄρος, standing as an impartial mediator between two opposing parties, one of whom thought he had gone too far and the other, not far enough.

5 καλός inscriptions

The verb 'is' or 'are' can be omitted in Greek if the meaning is clear.

ὁ παῖς καλός

The boy is beautiful

Here the verb is implied and must be assumed by the reader. The Subject + Verb + Complement pattern can clarify how this works:

ὁ παῖς: noun in the nominative case, i.e. subject

<ἐστί>: linking verb, omitted

καλός: masculine, singular, nominative adjective, i.e. complement

The construction is perhaps more natural in Greek because of the use of case endings. Even without the verb ἐστί, the nominative cases imply a grammatical link between ‘the boy’ and ‘beautiful’. English, by contrast, needs to make the verb explicit. The non-standard English phrase ‘he beautiful’, while just about intelligible, would draw attention to itself in a way that ὁ παῖς καλός does not.

The inscription ὁ παῖς καλός is taken from a Greek vase. A number of these so-called ‘καλός inscriptions’ praising youthful beauty survive from the sixth and fifth centuries, with more than 300 found on Athenian vases. The subject of a καλός inscription is usually named and generally male, although a few female names are found. The named individual is not usually the figure depicted on the vase, which means the inscription is not a label but probably refers to a contemporary youth. Some names, such as Miltiades, are familiar from historical events, although it is difficult to prove a connection between a historical figure and a καλός inscription.

Activity 6 καλός inscriptions

 Allow about 5 minutes

Part 1

Here are a few examples of καλός inscriptions. The adjective, as usual, agrees with its noun in gender, number and case. Identify each individual as male or female.

Ἱππάρχος καλός

- ☐ male
- ☐ female

Κορώνη καλή

- ☐ male
- ☐ female

Λεάγρος καλός

- ☐ male
- ☐ female

Μέμνων καλός

- ☐ male
- ☐ female

Ῥοδῶπις καλή

- ☐ male
- ☐ female

Discussion

The gender is clear from the adjective. The men are Hipparchos, Leagros and Memnon (Leagros is named as καλός on as many as 80 surviving vases). The women are Korone and Rhodopis.

Part 2

Which form of the adjective would complete the following καλός inscriptions?

ἡ κόρη _____

- ☐ καλός
- ☐ καλή

Μιλτιάδης _____

- ☐ καλός
- ☐ καλή

Discussion

The masculine singular nominative καλός is needed for a boy or man, the feminine singular nominative καλή for a girl or woman.

6 Beatitudes

Our final example of Greek subjects and complements is from the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. Knowledge of Greek can help to illuminate an otherwise puzzling feature of some translations. If you turn to the King James Version, you will find:

Blessed *are* the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Blessed *are* they that mourn: for they shall be comforted

Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth

...

Matthew 5:3-5

Modern printing conventions imply that the words in italics should be spoken with emphasis, even though 'are' does not appear to be an especially significant word. To understand the purpose of the italics, it is necessary to check the translation against the Greek text.

The first half of the first line reads:

μακάριοι (*blessed*) οἱ πτωχοὶ (*the poor*) τῷ πνεύματι (*in spirit*)

Vocabulary

μακάριος	blessed, happy, fortunate
πνεῦμα, -ατος, τό	wind, breath, spirit
πτωχός, -οῦ, ὁ	beggar

Activity 7 Examining the translation

 Allow about 5 minutes

In the translation 'Blessed are the poor in spirit', which English word has no counterpart in the Greek text?

Discussion

The verb 'are'.

If the word 'are' had been present in the Greek text, what form would it have taken?

- ☐ ἐστίν
- ☐ εἰσίν

Discussion

As the subject is plural, the 3rd person plural form is required.

With the verb εἰσίν supplied, what kind of sentence pattern is this?

- ☐ Subject Verb Object
- ☐ Subject Verb Complement

Discussion

With two nominative cases and a linking verb, this is a Subject + Verb + Complement sentence. To be exact, it is a Complement + Verb + Subject pattern, as the complement appears first, creating a repetitive, almost hypnotic arrangement of eight consecutive lines, each starting 'Blessed are the [or they who] ...'.

Italicisation has been used to mark words in the English translation that are not present in the Greek. This is a good example of the difficulties of translating from one language into another. As you saw with καλός inscriptions, the omission of 'is' or 'are' comes naturally and idiomatically to Greek. It does not work at all in English, which is why the translation needs an additional word. In the King James Bible the translators have scrupulously marked these additions with italics. Italicisation does, therefore, mark emphasis, but of a rather unusual kind.

Perhaps you know the opening lines of the Sermon on the Mount as 'the Beatitudes'. The term comes from the Latin 'beatus' ('happy' or 'blessed') and describes a statement that begins 'Blessed is the one who ...'. 'Beatus' was a translation into Latin of the Greek word μακάριος. Another word for a 'beatitude', derived from Greek, is a 'macarism'.

7 The standardisation of the alphabet

The version of the Greek alphabet in use today is the East Ionic, which possesses, among other features, the letters eta and omega that other versions lacked. It could therefore offer, in some respects, a more exact representation of spoken Greek.

Ionia refers to an area on the west coast of Turkey, with strong links to Athens. The adoption of the Ionic alphabet by the Athenians for official documents in 403/2 BCE was a

decisive step towards a standard alphabet for all Greeks. We know the date of this change because it is recorded as having taken place in the archonship of Euclides. (The archonship was an annual office at Athens which ran from one summer to the next, in the case of Euclides from mid-403 to mid-402. This is why dates in Greek history sometimes straddle two years.) The change seems to have been part of a wider reorganisation of Athenian public life following defeat in the Peloponnesian War and a bloody, short-lived experiment with oligarchic rule under a group known as 'The Thirty Tyrants'.

The conquests of Alexander (d. 323 BCE) consolidated and spread the use of the Ionic alphabet, reaching areas previously little influenced by Greek culture. It was this world that the Romans encountered when Roman and Greek history became entangled from the third century BCE onwards. The spread of the alphabet can be seen in the maps from the [course introduction](#).

Some of the differences between the Ionic and Athenian alphabets can be illustrated by the boundary stones.



Figure 1 (repeated) Athenian boundary stones

Activity 8 Reading the boundary stones

 Allow about 10 minutes

Look for the letter gamma on the boundary stone, using the text below as a guide:

ὄρος εἰμὶ τῆς ἀγορᾶς

I am a boundary of the agora

How does the shape of gamma on the stone differ from the standard form?

Discussion

Gamma (Γ) on the boundary stone looks like capital lambda (Λ). This would not have been as confusing as it sounds, because Athenian lambda looked more like the English letter 'L'. You might recall examples on the Themistocles *ostraka* from Session 6.

On the right-hand boundary stone, how many of the following features of the Athenian alphabet and letter forms can you detect?

1. the use of a symbol 'H' to represent an 'h' sound
2. the use of epsilon to represent both short and long 'e'
3. sigma written with 3 lines instead of 4.

Discussion

1. The symbol H begins the inscription in the word ὅρος. In lower case, this sound is now represented by a rough breathing.
2. The use of E for both epsilon and eta can be found in the words εἰμί and τῆς.
3. There are three instances of the so-called 'three-bar' sigma, in the words ὅρος, τῆς and ἀγορᾶς.

You might also have noticed a small extra stroke on the letter rho, which makes it resemble an English 'R'.

Finally, look again at the inscription from Priene, from the latter part of the fourth century when the Ionic alphabet had become standard.



Figure 2 First lines of the Priene block inscription

Find an example of eta and epsilon. Use the text below as a guide:

βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος ἀνέθηκε τὸν ναόν

Discussion

Unlike the boundary stones, the inscription from Priene uses separate letters for short and long 'e', namely epsilon and eta. There are examples of each in the word ἀνέθηκε. Other standard features include:

- a standard-shaped lambda
- the letter 'xi' (the Athenian alphabet used chi followed by sigma)
- a sigma with four strokes instead of three.

8 Summary

This session has presented a new clause pattern: Subject + Verb + Complement. It has also introduced you to the linking verb εἰμί and the concept of agreement between nouns and adjectives.

In addition, you have looked briefly at how the original diversity of Greek scripts gave way to a standardised form of the alphabet.

You should understand the following terms:

- complement
- agreement

You should understand how the following sentences work in Greek:

ὁ Θεμιστοκλῆς ἐστὶ στρατηγός

Themistocles is a general

ἡ Ἀφροδίτη ἐστὶ καλή

Aphrodite is beautiful

You can now move on to [Session 8](#).

Session 8: Reading Greek

Introduction

Session 8 offers an opportunity to take stock, to review what you have learned and to consider your next steps.

It begins with a final look at Alexander's dedication of the temple of Athena Polias, introducing a new case and recapitulating some points from earlier in the course. The rest of the session then provides a summary and overview of the process of reading Greek. It outlines the relevant areas of language and the skills needed to understand a Greek text. Some, such as reading the alphabet, should be reasonably familiar by now. Others will take more time and practice. All of these skills have been touched upon in the course, even if only briefly. This final section will be of particular interest to those intending to study ancient Greek in greater depth.

1 Alexander's dedication

Let us conclude the study of Alexander's dedication by examining the third line:

βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος	King Alexander
ἀνέθηκε τὸν ναόν	dedicated the temple
Ἀθηναίῃ Πολιάδι	



Figure 1 First lines of the Priene block inscription

Understanding the phrase Ἀθηναίῃ Πολιάδι requires an understanding of the dative case. An example of a dative from the New Testament was presented in Session 6 in the discussion of word order:

ταῦτα [*these things*] γράφω [*write I*] ὑμῖν [*unto you*]

The personal pronoun *σοῖν* is in the dative case. It is the equivalent of 'unto you', or, in contemporary English, 'to you'. In the early stages of learning Greek you can think of the dative as the 'to' or 'for' case, although further study would reveal a wider range of uses.

Activity 1 Replace the verb

 Allow about 5 minutes

In the following sentence, can you think of English verbs that could replace 'write' without making the sentence ungrammatical? One example would be 'donate'.

I write these things to you.

Discussion

Potential substitutes for 'write' include 'give', 'dedicate', 'say', 'speak', 'teach', 'offer', 'show', 'hand'.

Verbs of 'giving', 'saying' or 'showing' frequently imply a dative case because they describe an act involving a recipient, i.e. someone to whom a thing is given, said or shown. Indeed, the term 'dative' derives from the Latin word 'to give' ('do', which rhymes with 'oh'). The noun in the dative case is called the indirect object. It answers the question, 'To whom did she give/show/tell it?' The thing given, which so far has been referred to simply as 'the object' is, strictly speaking, the direct object.

Activity 2 Direct object case

 Allow about 5 minutes

The case of the indirect object is the dative. What is the case of the direct object?

- ☐ nominative
- ☐ accusative
- ☐ genitive
- ☐ dative

Discussion

To refresh your memory of objects, refer to Session 6. Remember that 'objects' in Session 6 are properly described as direct objects to distinguish them from indirect objects.

The dative case endings for *τιμή* and *λόγος* are:

Table 1 Dative case endings

τιμή, honour (1st declension)		
	singular	plural
dative	τιμῇ	τιμαῖς

λόγος, word (2nd declension)		
	singular	plural
dative	λόγῳ	λόγοις

Activity 3 Recall the mark

 Allow about 5 minutes

Do you recall (from Session 1) the name of the mark underneath the final vowels of τιμῇ and λόγῳ?

.....

Discussion

This mark is an iota subscript, 'subscript' being derived from the Latin for 'written underneath'. You are most likely to encounter it in the dative singular of first and second declension nouns, and in a few verb endings not covered in this course. Iota subscript is a post-classical innovation from the Byzantine period. Originally the iota would have been written after the alpha, eta or omega. You can observe this on the third line of the inscription, which has Ἀθηναίῃ for Ἀθηναίη.

Using the notes provided and your knowledge of the dative case, complete the translation of the dedication.

βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος	King Alexander
ἀνέθηκε τὸν ναόν	dedicated the temple
Ἀθηναίῃ Πολιάδι	

Notes

Ἀθηναίῃ Πολιάδι is the dative form of Ἀθηναία Πολιάς, the goddess 'Athena Polias' or 'Athena Guardian of the City'. Ἀθηναία is an alternative form of Ἀθήνη.

.....

Discussion

Here is the completed translation:

βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξανδρος	King Alexander
ἀνέθηκε τὸν ναὸν	dedicated the temple
Ἀθηναίῃ Πολιάδι	to Athena Polias

Note that the dedication contains:

1. a verb ἀνέθηκε ('dedicated') that prompts the expectation of both a direct and an indirect object
2. three of the four cases introduced in this course (nominative, accusative and dative).

2 Reading skills

A central aim of learning Greek is to be able to read Greek texts with accuracy, fluency, understanding and enjoyment. This involves bringing together skills across a range of different areas of language. An experienced reader will apply these skills intuitively, without thinking much about them. You might like to compare your own experiences of reading in your native language. Explicit thoughts about grammar and vocabulary tend to arise only in case of problems – an unfamiliar word, for instance, or a mistake in a text.

A learner, on the other hand, needs to take a slower, step-by-step approach, mixing reading with the study of grammar and vocabulary. The areas of language most relevant to the study of Greek are laid out below:

- the alphabet
- sounds
- word shape
- syntax
- meaning
- context.

Further study of the first two will mostly be a matter of consolidation and refining details. It is the other four areas that tend to occupy students of Greek. A good course will help you to broaden and deepen your understanding of all of them, helping you to read independently and to make your own explorations within the vast world of Greek writing. This course had discussed these areas briefly and separately, but the key is to bring them all together. It is only through reading (and rereading) Greek that you can really begin to absorb everything.

2.1 The alphabet

The alphabet was introduced in Session 1, and reinforced in Sessions 2 and 3 through speaking and writing. These should provide you with a good working knowledge. Going forward, the experience of reading Greek, and perhaps writing it, will help your knowledge to become second nature.

Activity 4 Problematic letters

 Allow about 5 minutes

Think back to the beginning of the course, and to any letters that were difficult to remember or confusing. Are there any letters that still cause problems?

.....

Discussion

There is, of course, no single answer to this question. The important point is to find ways to familiarise yourself with any tricky letters, for example by writing them down or by finding examples of words that use them.

Hints and tips

Two areas that usually need additional work are:

- Capital letters: these can cause problems because they appear less frequently than their lower-case counterparts. It is worth keeping capitals under review, especially those that differ significantly from lower case. Delta (Δ) and lambda (Λ), for instance, are often confused.
- Breathings: when reading, the main difficulty is remembering to pronounce the rough breathing. When writing, the main difficulty is to remember to include a breathing at all, and to place it on the second letter of a word that starts with a diphthong, like εἰμι, 'I am'.

Finally, can you recite the alphabet yet? If asked to look up the words ζωή, θύρα and ξίφος in a dictionary, would you be able to find them?

2.2 Sounds

The sounds of Greek were covered in Session 2, which presented a reconstruction of fifth-century BCE pronunciation, but also emphasised the need to be pragmatic, and the importance of speaking clearly and with confidence.

Hints and tips

Areas that might need further practice once you have grasped the basics of pronunciation include:

1. breathings, in particular spotting the rough breathing (Section 2 of Session 2)
2. diphthongs (Section 6 of Session 2)
3. gamma in combination with gamma, kappa, xi or chi (Section 6 of Session 2)

Activity 5 Test your listening

 Allow about 5 minutes

Can you hear the difference between these?
τὸ ὄρος the mountain

Audio content is not available in this format.



ὁ ὄρος the boundary stone

Audio content is not available in this format.



Can you pronounce diphthongs, as in these words?

Ἀθηναῖος Athenian

Audio content is not available in this format.



δεῖπνον meal

Audio content is not available in this format.



πλοῖον vessel

Audio content is not available in this format.



Can you pronounce the gamma correctly in these words?

ἐγγύς near

Audio content is not available in this format.



ὄγκος burden

Audio content is not available in this format.



The main advice for readers of Greek is to spend a little time reading aloud, familiarising yourself with the sound and rhythms of the language. That is especially important with poetry, including Greek drama, but Greek prose has rhythmic patterns of its own and was also intended to be heard as much as read.

2.3 Word shape

Word endings play a central role in inflected languages like Greek. The following endings were introduced in Sessions 4-7:

- the definite article, ὁ, ἡ, τό
- the nouns τιμή and λόγος
- some forms of the adjective καλός, ἡ, ὄν
- -ω and -ει endings of verbs, e.g. διώκω, 'I chase' and διώκει, 'he/she/it chases'
- some forms of the verb εἰμί, 'I am'.

The technical term for the study of word endings is morphology, from μορφή (shape) and λόγος (word). 'Shape' is the correct term, because words sometimes change in the middle (like English 'goose/geese', or 'run/ran') or at the beginning (Greek verbs do this to mark a change of tense).

Hints and tips

- Word endings are a means to an end, the end being to read Greek. For a reader, spotting the endings is a crucial first step, but drawing out their implications is the goal. This is why morphology needs to be studied alongside other areas of language and observed in practice through the reading of Greek.
- The definite article deserves special attention as it shows the gender, number and case of the noun with which it agrees. It can therefore provide clues about nouns, even if their endings are unfamiliar. There is also a substantial overlap between its endings and those of certain nouns and adjectives, notably τιμή, λόγος, and καλός.

Activity 6 Unfamiliar endings

 Allow about 5 minutes

These activities contain nouns with unfamiliar endings. Use the article to answer the following questions.

Vocabulary

βασιλεύς, -έως, ὁ

king

γέρων, -οντος, ὁ

old man

Λητώ, -οῦς, ἡ

Leto (the mother of Apollo and Artemis)

ναύτης, -ου, ό
νύξ, νυκτός, ή

sailor
night

Part 1

What is the case of these nouns?

τοῦ βασιλέως

- ☐ nominative
- ☐ accusative
- ☐ genitive

ή Λητώ

- ☐ nominative
- ☐ accusative
- ☐ genitive

τήν νύκτα

- ☐ nominative
- ☐ accusative
- ☐ genitive

Part 2

What is the number of these nouns? Singular or plural?

οί γέροντες

- ☐ singular
- ☐ plural

ό ναύτης

- ☐ singular
- ☐ plural

ή νύξ

- ☐ singular
- ☐ plural

Part 3

What is the gender of these nouns?

ή νύξ

- ☐ masculine
- ☐ feminine
- ☐ neuter

τόν ναύτην

- ☐ masculine
- ☐ feminine

- neuter

2.4 Syntax

Syntax covers the rules for combining individual words into larger units such as phrases, clauses or sentences. An understanding of syntax helps you to recognise which combinations of words are allowed and which can be ruled out. The study of syntax and morphology is what is traditionally understood by the term 'grammar'.

Three combinations have been introduced:

A phrase consisting of two nouns, one in the genitive case:

ἄγγελος θεοῦ	a messenger of god (or god's messenger)
Ἀλέξανδρος Φιλίππου	Alexander [son] of Philip

Two basic sentence patterns:

Subject + Verb + Direct Object:

ὁ ἄνθρωπος διώκει τὸν ἵππον	the man chases the horse
-----------------------------	--------------------------

Subject + Verb + Complement:

ἡ Ἀφροδίτη ἐστὶ καλή	Aphrodite is beautiful
----------------------	------------------------

The beginning of this session also showed how certain verbs, such as 'dedicate', raise the prospect of an indirect object as well as a direct object.

Hints and tips

A feel for syntax can help you understand how a sentence might unfold, to make predictions about what could come next and to know when a sentence is complete.

Activity 7 Test your knowledge of syntax

 Allow about 5 minutes

What is the basic minimum you can expect a sentence to contain?

- Subject + Verb + Direct Object
- Subject + Verb
- Subject + Verb + Complement

Discussion

The basic minimum is a Subject and a Verb. There might be other components, but that will depend on the nature of the verb. Remember that in Greek, the subject doesn't need to be spelled out if it's a personal pronoun like 'I' or 'she'. It is implied by the ending or shape of the verb, for example: εἰμί, 'I am'; φιλεῖ, 'he/she/it loves'.

Look at the short list of verbs below and imagine coming across them in a sentence. Which of these verbs raises the expectation that the sentence contains a direct object?

sleeps
happens
eats
is

Discussion

The verbs 'happens' and 'is' cannot appear with a direct object, but 'eats' and 'sleeps' contain some subtleties. It is reasonable to expect a direct object after 'eats', as in 'she eats fish and chips'. But that expectation might not be fulfilled, for example in the sentence: 'She sits down and eats'. With the verb 'sleeps', an object would not be expected, though even here an exception can be devised: 'He sleeps the sleep of the blessed'. These observations remind us that reading cannot be reduced to a set of rules, although knowing the rules is still of great importance; judgement, sensitivity and a 'feel' for what is likely or plausible are equally valuable.

Which of these verbs raises the expectation of a complement?

- ☐ sleeps
- ☐ happens
- ☐ eats
- ☐ is

Discussion

The answer here is more clear-cut than in the previous question. Only the linking verb 'is' raises the expectation of a complement.

What could complete the following sentence?

ὁ Περικλῆς ἄγει _____

Vocabulary

Περικλῆς, -έους, ὁ	Pericles
ἄγει	leads (from ἄγω, I lead)
στρατός, -οῦ, ὁ	army
οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι	the Athenians (nominative plural)
τοὺς Ἀθηναίους	the accusative plural of οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι

- ☐ [a noun in the nominative case]
- ☐ [a noun in the accusative case]
- ☐ τὸν στρατόν
- ☐ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι
- ☐ τοὺς Ἀθηναίους

Discussion

The sentence starts with a noun in the nominative case, ὁ Περικλῆς. The nominative case ending indicates that Pericles is the subject. The sentence continues with a verb (ἄγει), showing what Pericles is doing. The meaning of the verb prompts a question: 'who or what is Pericles leading?' raising the expectation of a direct object. A noun in the accusative case would satisfy this expectation and complete the sentence.

2.5 Meaning

Syntax and morphology describe the internal workings of language and the rules for putting words together into larger units. To reach beyond words to the world outside requires something extra. The following utterances are syntactically the same, consisting as they do of a subject, a verb and a complement. But thanks to the meaning of the words, the consequences of saying them are different:

The book is on the table.

The house is on fire!

The difference here is one of meaning. It is meaning that allows speakers to do things with words: to describe, question, teach, persuade, amuse, frighten, annoy, to warn someone to flee a burning building ... almost anything in fact.

The study of meaning is the field of 'semantics', from the Greek verb σημαίνω, 'I show' or 'I point'. For students of language, studying meaning usually takes the form of learning vocabulary. That is reasonable, especially in the early stages when vocabulary is limited. It is worth recalling, however, that larger units such as sentences have meanings that cannot be reduced to the meanings of their individual words (this was covered in Session 6).

Some examples of vocabulary have been provided throughout the course. Can you remember the meanings of these words, presented in [Section 5 of Session 4](#)?

ἄγγελος

γῆ

θεός

ἵππος

λόγος

νίκη

ποταμός

You were also introduced to the dictionary forms of nouns in Sessions 5 and 6.

Hints and tips

If you already have experience of learning a second language, you have probably developed some preferred techniques for learning vocabulary. If an idea has worked well for you in the past, consider whether it could be applied to ancient Greek.

Here are a few suggestions, but the list is certainly not exhaustive:

1. Use flash cards to test your recall. These could be of the traditional, paper-based variety, or you could search online for electronic versions.
2. Use English derivations as a prompt.
3. Experiment with a combination of reading, writing and speaking. If a word will not stick, try writing it down. Or repeat it aloud a number of times.
4. As you start to read longer chunks of Greek, look for little phrases or sentences containing the word you wish to learn. Seeing a word in use, within a larger context, might be more memorable than seeing it in isolation.
5. Review words in groups. There are many possible types of arrangement, including:
 - a. grammatical type: e.g. nouns, verbs and adjectives
 - b. words with similar roots (e.g. ναῦς, ship; ναύτης, sailor; ναυτικόν, fleet)
 - c. words with related meanings, like 'speech' (e.g. λέγω, I say; ἀγγέλλω, I announce; φωνή, voice) or 'warfare' (στρατηγός, general; στρατός, army)
 - d. words from particular authors or works.

2.6 Context

Meaning also depends upon context, which tends to be implicit rather than explicit. The statement, 'The house is on fire!' is, on the surface, a description of a state of affairs. Yet it is clearly more than a description. It is an urgent warning and much the same as an instruction to 'Get out!' or 'Call the fire brigade!'. The context here is a general, background understanding of the way the world works – that burning buildings are to be avoided and fires to be extinguished.

Other contexts are more culturally specific. A wide range of background information can be used to interpret a Greek text: mythology, history, literature, philosophy, religion, archaeology, architecture, art, geography and so on. Some contexts are quite detailed. This course has hinted at a few of them: the representation of Ajax and Achilles on vase paintings, the use of coins to project the image of Greek rulers, the layout of ancient Athens, the nature of writing in the ancient world, and the practice of ostracism. All aspects of Greek life are potentially relevant for a rounded, three-dimensional understanding of a piece of Greek. The study of Greek language and Greek culture are mutually reinforcing, with each potentially shedding light upon the other.

Contexts fall under the area of language study called 'pragmatics', a term derived from the Greek word πράγμα, 'thing' or 'deed'. Pragmatics focuses on how language is used in practice rather than in the abstract.

Hints and tips

The study of context and background provides an opportunity to draw from your own interests and areas of expertise. These might be related to previous study of ancient Greece, but they could come from other disciplines and experiences. This kind of cross-fertilisation of ideas can be productive and is to be encouraged.

2.7 Putting it all together

This final session has discussed six areas of language study:

- the alphabet
- sounds

- word shape
- syntax
- meaning
- context.

For convenience, they have been treated separately, but in reality they all work together to create a piece of meaningful Greek. Two letters could form a word ending; the ending could indicate the case of a noun; the case affects the way in which the word fits into a sentence; that in turn affects the meaning of the sentence as a whole. All these aspects of language need to be brought together when reading.

Session 6 contained walkthroughs of short texts, demonstrating one approach and suggesting some questions that might help a reader to work their way through a text. Ultimately, the aim is simply to read, but a slower, more deliberative approach may be helpful in the early stages of learning.

3 Closing thoughts

Congratulations, you have now completed this course!

Whatever your plans for future study, hopefully this course has provided a helpful and enjoyable introduction to ancient Greek and its place within ancient Greek life and society.

You should now be able to:

- read the letters of the ancient Greek alphabet
- recall a small set of ancient Greek words and their meanings in English
- read and understand simple sentences in ancient Greek
- understand some of the historical and geographical context of ancient Greek
- feel more confident about embarking on independent study of ancient Greek.

Further study

If you would like to continue your studies, you can do this with the Open University, including formal study options:

[Learning Ancient Greek](#)

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Acknowledgements

This free course was written by Jeremy Taylor, with contributions from Christine Plastow and James Robson.

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Introduction

Activity 1: Maps illustrating the spread of the Greek language: 700 BCE–end of the classical era. (Adapted from Taplin, O. (ed.) (2000) *Literature in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 7–11.)

Session 1

Figure 1: CM Dixon/Heritage Images

Figure 2: © The Trustees of the British Museum; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Session 2

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Session 3

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Session 5

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Figure 4: Alinari Archives, Florence

Figure 5: Josephine Powell, Rome; Encyclopædia Britannica

Session 6

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Session 7

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Session 8

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