

Greek Grammar (A Whirlwind Tour)

Definitions

Morphology – How word forms are changed (inflected) and how these changes impact the meaning of the word.

Syntax – How words work together in phrases, clauses and propositions to form the meaning of larger ideas.

Morphology

Nouns, Pronouns, Adjectives – all inflect in the same ways. The terminology is that nouns etc. “decline”, and therefore fall into regular “declensions”

Verbs, Participles, Infinitives – all inflect in similar ways. The terminology is that verbs etc. “parse”, and therefore fall into regular patterns of “parsing”

Conjunctions, Adverbs, Prepositions – normally do not inflect

How to find the morphology of the word

1. Take more Greek
2. Analytical Lexicon
3. Computer program/Internet

Syntax

Categories and significance

Each of the grammatical categories described below are based on the morphology and/or function of the word (these two are obviously related). The general categories, the ways in which they inflect, and some general ranges of the possible significance of the inflections will be explained.

General range of possibilities, but must be chosen by context

Grammar studies are similar to word studies in that they can give you a range of possible significances for a particular grammatical feature, but then you need to choose the intended significance of the grammar from the context

General rules with some exceptions

All of the grammatical features described are just an outline of the general possible significances. None of these are exhaustive descriptions of the possibilities. There are plenty of exceptions to all these grammatical rules. But these are the most common, and will give you a starting point to grasp the concepts

Nouns- GNC

Gender

There are three possible genders in Greek: *masculine*, *feminine* and *neuter*. All nouns are marked for gender, even those words that do not refer to something that has natural gender. For instance the Greek word for “son” is masculine, and the Greek word for “daughter” is feminine. In this case, there is an obvious connection between the natural gender and the grammatical gender. However, this is not the case for every word. The interpreter should not find any significance in the fact that the Greek word for “grace” is feminine and the Greek word for “mercy” is neuter. The Greek word for “light” and “darkness” are both feminine, so the difference between them is the word meaning, and has nothing to do with their grammatical gender.

Number

Greek nouns have the same possibilities of number as English nouns: *singular* and *plural*. Every Greek noun is clearly marked for number. A singular noun refers to one entity and a plural noun refers to more than one. The plural inflection signifies more than one, but does not (by itself) give any indication how many more than one is signified (it will have the same form referring to two or twenty million). In word studies, the meaning of the noun is obviously important, but you also need to notice if the author indicates the word is plural. The meaning of “gift” and “gifts” are obviously related, but also different, and misunderstanding takes place unless you catch the difference indicated by the change in inflection.

Case

Inflection for case marks the function of a word in the sentence. All Greek nouns inflect for function, and there are five possible cases. The names of the cases are *nominative*, *genitive*, *dative*, *accusative*, and *vocative*. The functions of the cases are outlined below

Nominative- Subject (and ‘object’ of “to be” verbs)

Accusative- Direct object

Genitive- Marker of relation to another word, makes a noun have the function of an English adjective, describing another noun- use the helping word “of _____” to translate a genitive

Dative- Marker describing relatedness of action, makes a noun have the function of an English adverb or prepositional phrase A dative noun modifies the action of a verb,-
use one of the helping words “in, with, by, to _____” to translate a dative (depending on context)

Vocative- (fairly rare) used when functions as a direct address

Word order doesn’t tell function, but often tells emphasis

Pronouns- same categories as nouns- GNC

Gender and Number match antecedent (noun that it stands for)

Case depends on function in sentence – see above

Also have **Person**

- 1st When the speaker is speaking about themselves “I, We”
- 2nd When the speaker is referring to the hearer “you, you (pl)”
- 3rd When the speaker is referring to a 3rd party “he, she, it, they”

Adjectives- same categories as nouns- GNC

Adjectives describe a noun by specifying or limiting.

For instance “car” refers to many possible vehicles, but “red car” specifies one item or smaller group

Adjectives have the same GNC as the noun they modify

Definite articles

The definite article (translated “the”) is a special type of adjective. It takes the same GNC as the noun it modifies. In Greek the DA can stand alone as a substantive “the (person) ran” would literally be “the ran” but the word needs to be added to show that the DA is substitute for an implied noun in the same GNC. That is why as substantive DA would be translated “the (one)” “the (man)” “the (woman)” “the (women)” depending on the GNC of the DA. There is no indefinite article (translated “a” as in “a book” as opposed to “the book” [definite]) in Greek.

Adverbs- usually do not change form

Adverbs modify the action of the verb typically by telling something about the manner in which the action takes place.

English adverbs often end in “-ly” like “quickly” or “vigorously”

The most common adverbs are the various forms of “not,” which negate the action of the verb

Prepositions-

A preposition is a “relation” word, connecting a describing phrase with the word which is modified. The phrase typically describes the relation in space or time.

For example “over the house,” “before the weekend”

The preposition is the key part of a prepositional phrase, but the entire phrase is one unit of meaning

A prep. phrase modifies a noun, Verb, Ptcp, or Inf.

Greek prepositions often change meaning depending on the case of the object of the prepositional phrase

For instance, μετὰ followed by a genitive noun would be translated “with” and μετὰ followed by an accusative noun would be translated “after”

Prepositions are often more significant in Greek than in English. They will often be very fruitful word studies. There are also entire volumes dedicated to the theological significance of the prepositions used in the New Testament.

Verbs – TVMPN

Tense

Tense in Greek is similar in some ways to English tense but different in others. Like English, Greek tense sometimes (not always) tells the time of the action. For instance, one tense will tell the action took place in the past, and another tense is used to indicate it will take place in the future. Greek tense can also signify the type of action, whether it is an ongoing, continuous action, or not. Greek has five major tenses, *present*, *future*, *imperfect*, *perfect*, and *aorist*. The following are general ranges of tense meanings, there are exceptions to these general rules.

Present – The action is typically continuous action taking place in present time (from the standpoint of the author).

Future – The action is typically continuous action taking place in future time (from the standpoint of the author)

Imperfect – The action is typically continuous action taking place in past time (from the standpoint of the author).

Aorist – the action is typically undefined aspect (not emphasizing continuous action), often, not always in the past. Aorist tense is the most ambiguous tense, just stating that an action happened, being less precise about the time or type of action.

Perfect – the action has taken place and completed in the past, but there are results and implications of this past action that are continuing until the present (from the standpoint of the author). For instance “It is written” is in the perfect tense. This action happened in the past, was completed in the past, but there are writings as a result that continue to exist with abiding significance into the present.

Voice

The voice of a verb tells the relationship of the subject to the action of the verb. In English this is done with helping words, but in Greek a change of inflection indicates voice. There are three voices in Greek, *active*, *passive*, and *middle*.

Active voice – indicates that the subject does the action of the verb.
“Brad hit the ball.”

Passive voice – indicates that the subject receives the action of the verb. “Brad was hit by the ball.”

Middle voice – (no English equivalent) indicates that the subject does the action with relation (somehow) to itself – whether acting on itself or in its own interest etc. “Brad hit himself.”

M/P voice – in some tenses, the form of the Middle and passive voices are exactly the same, so the voice must be figured from context, not morphology.

Deponent – some verb forms have a Middle/Passive form, but active meaning. They will be indicated in the resources as “deponent”.

Consider these verbs to be active voice.

Mood

The mood of a verb tells its relationship to reality/actuality. Mood tells whether the action happens or might happen, or is desired to happen, etc. Greek verbs have four possible moods: *indicative*, *subjunctive*, *imperative* and *optative*.

Indicative mood – indicates that the action is a reality. “The student is studying.”

Subjunctive mood – indicates that the action is a possibility. “The student may study.”

Imperative mood – indicates that the action is a desired/commanded possibility. “Study the inflections!”

Optative mood – (no English equivalent) indicates that the action is a remote possibility or wish. “I wish that I would win the lottery.”

It makes an obvious difference in meaning whether the author is saying that an action takes place, an action might take place, or an action is commanded. Therefore, inflection for mood is an important part of communication, and should be noticed in word studies.

Person

The person of a verb tells the relationship of the subject of the verb (the one doing the action) to the speaker or author. Greek verbs (unlike English) indicate who or what is doing the action as part of the inflection of the verb itself. Therefore, in many cases, the subject is not stated in a separate word, but is inherent in the form of the verb itself. There are three possible categories of person: *1st*, *2nd*, and *3rd* person.

First person – indicates that the author is the one doing the action. “I am running. We are running”

Second person – indicates that the author is speaking to the one doing the action. “You are running.”

Third person – indicates that someone other than the author or reader is doing the action. “He is running. She is running. They are running.”

Number

The number of a verb (in conjunction with person) tells who or what is doing the action of the verb (the subject). Just like with nouns, the two possibilities are *singular* and *plural*.

Singular – indicates that the subject is only one person or thing “I” as opposed to “we,” “he” as opposed to “they”

Plural – indicates that the subject is more than one person or thing

Greek verbs do not inflect for gender. Therefore, in Greek “he is speaking” and “she is speaking” would have the exact same form. The gender of the subject can be found in the noun functioning as the subject or in the wider context, but is not indicated by the verb inflection.

Participle- (Verbal Adjective) TVptcpGNC

Participles have some characteristics of a verb and some characteristics of an adjective. Likewise, they can be considered a verbal action used to describe/modify something else in the sentence. Participles are typically translated into English with a verbal idea ending in “-ing” for example, “running” “thinking” etc. Because they function as a modifying action, they always occur in some sort of dependent/subordinate function, elaborating and describing the main action of a sentence.

Tense

Like verbs, participles inflect for tense. Participles only occur in three tenses, *Present*, *Aorist* and *Perfect*. The tense of participles do not indicate the time, except (sometimes) in relation to the main verbal idea. Some participles tell no time information at all. The tense of participles mainly tells the type (aspect) of the action. Each tense tells the same aspect as the aspect of the same tense in a regular verb.

Voice

Like verbs, participles inflect for voice. Participles have the same possible voices as verbs: *Active*, *Passive*, and *Middle*, with the same significance as the voice in verbs.

Gender, Number and Case

Like adjectives, participles inflect for GNC. The GN reflects the gender and number of the person or thing doing the action of the participle. The case reflects the function of the participle in the sentence. Participles have the same possible GNC as nouns and adjectives:

Gender – *Masculine*, *Feminine*, and *Neuter*

Number – *Singular* and *Plural*

Case – *Nominative*, *Accusative*, *Genitive*, *Dative*, and *Vocative*.

Uses

There are three general categories of usages for participles:

1. **Adjectival** – the participle modifies a noun describing the noun in a similar manner to an adjective for example: “the *running* dog”
2. **Substantival** – the participle stands in place of an implied noun, in translation, it is helpful necessary to supply the implied noun based on the GNC of the participle, for example: “the *running* (one)” “the *jumping* (women)” etc.
3. **Adverbial** - the action of the participles modifies the action of the main verb in a variety of possible ways. There are a number of possible relationships (beyond the scope of this outline). But these are often key exegetical issues and are helpful for further research.

There are many specialized functions of participles in Greek. All fall within the previous three categories. These will be learned in your further study of Greek, but are beyond the scope of this introductory outline. At this point, checking the ways that a participle is handled in the various translations is a very helpful exercise for exegesis.

Infinitive- (Verbal Noun) TVInf.

Infinitives have some characteristics of a verb and some characteristics of a noun. Likewise, they can be considered a verbal action used to stand in place of a noun. Participles are typically translated into English with a verbal idea preceded by “to –” for example, “to run” “to think” etc.

Tense and Voice

Infinitives inflect for tense and voice just like verbs and participles.

Tense – Infinitives occur in only three tenses: *Present*, *Aorist*, and *Perfect*.

Like Participles, the tense of infinitives does not tell the time of the action, but only the type (aspect) of the action, with the same aspect significance as the same tenses in regular verbs.

Voice – Infinitive have the same possible voices as verbs and participles, with the same significance: *Active*, *Passive*, and Middle

Uses

Helping verb – Like English, after certain verbs (e.g. “I am about...” “I want...” “I began...”) an infinitive idea occurs to complete the thought. For example, “I am about *to run*” “I want *to fly*” “I began *to fall*.” Infinitives always occur after these particular verbs.

Subject or object – As a Verbal Noun, an infinitive can function as the subject or object of a proposition. For example “*To study* [subject] should be your highest priority” or “I hate *to wait* [object]”

Special constructions – there are many specialized functions of infinitives in Greek. Some have counterparts in English and some do not. These will be learned in your further study of Greek, but are beyond the scope of this introductory outline. At this point, checking the ways that an infinitive is handled in the various translations is a very helpful exercise for exegesis.

Conjunctions and particles

Conjunctions and particles are those small words that have big functions. They connect sentences and ideas. They often don't function as much in individual propositions as they function to connect propositions into larger ideas. They are the key to larger discourse (such exercises as arcing and storyboarding). As such, they are often the key in understanding a passage and exegesis should pay careful attention to these words which are often overlooked. Greek conjunctions have a precision that is not easy to convey in English translations. Therefore, these words usually are fruitful ground for words studies.