

New Testament Greek
6. Noun: Cases, Translation

Date: 071014G

Duration: 0:00:00

1:1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. 2 οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν. 3 πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν, ὃ γέγονεν. 4 ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, 5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

Last week we introduced Greek nouns of the second declension. We first considered how different uses of the noun require different endings, and then how the endings effect the accent of nouns. The assignment for this week was to take each noun in the lesson's vocabulary, write out the full declension of each one, accenting each form at the correct location, with the correct accent. We went through an example of each possibility: accent on ultima, accent on long penult, accent on short penult, or accent on the antepenult, whether the penult is long or short. The examples, and the rules in the book, were enough information to do the same thing with all the nouns in the vocabulary. I trust that a number of you did the assignment and turned it in. After going through the endings as a logical exercise, we then went through the general characteristics of nouns in Greek.

A quick review of those characteristics is in order at this point.

1. What is a declension?

A declension is a breakdown of a substantive into forms used for various purposes, as a conjugation is a breakdown of a verb.

A paradigm is a physical listing of all the forms in tabular form.

A substantive in Greek is a noun, pronoun, adjective, or article.

Any substantive can be used any of the ways a noun is used.

Subject, direct object, indirect object, possessive, and so on.

The ending of a substantive reveals how it's used in the sentence.

The endings follow patterns which make up a declension, so you do not have to memorize all the possible words, but only the patterns, which is a comparatively easy task.

This is what helps make Greek the precise language that it is.

2. The three declensions.

The first declension is characterized by endings using alpha.

They are mostly, but not exclusively, feminine nouns.

The second declension is characterized by omicron endings.

They are usually, but not exclusively, masculine.

The third declension is characterized by . . . well, it's just weird!

3. There is no indefinite article in Greek.

But there is a definite article, equivalent to "the" in English.

Therefore, if the definite article is not present in the Greek, we do not generally add a definite article in the English translation.

There are exceptions to this we will learn as we get to them.

When there is no definite article, then, in translating, an indefinite article should inserted where we would use one in English.

4. Gender: in English, we cannot determine gender from the form of a noun; in Greek, every substantive has an explicit gender of masculine, feminine, or neuter, but they may or may not agree with what seems right to us in English.

Just consider it arbitrary; but it's very important when it comes to matching a pronoun with the noun to which it is referring.

Even plural pronouns are masculine, feminine, or neuter.

It doesn't eliminate all possible problems; but it helps immensely.

For this lesson, we're only dealing with masculine and neuter.

All we have to know is that masculine is "he" and neuter is "it," if the translation requires using one or the other. Matching!

5. Number. Greek, of course, has singular and plural.

Every language has some means to distinguish number.

So, that is how far we got last week.

6. Moveable ν (moveable nu)

Before we go on to the cases of the substantive, I need to tell you about a wonderful little quirk of Greek, the "moveable ν."

This is §40/44. The moveable nu is found almost exclusively on a third person plural, present active indicative verb: "-ουσιν."

The book tells you where it typically might appear, but this quirk really is not consistent at all. It just shows up here and there.

Whether you write it or not, in reverse translating from English to Greek is of no importance; the point is, you'll see it now and then in the Greek, and you need to know what it is.

There is no rule for using or not using it. It just shows up in Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

But, its usage is way too irregular to even try to make a rule.

Since you will find it in reading the New Testament, the exercises of this chapter include it, to give you practice recognizing it.

You'll never be graded on whether you use it or not when you're translating back to the Greek; but, you will need to recognize it when you see it in a Greek text.

So, we are ready to move on to the case of the Greek substantive.

7. Case. Here is where we are mostly going to break new ground. In English, the singular and plural, and perhaps, at times, an idea of gender, are about all we can identify in a noun. Perhaps the possessive, with the “-’s” ending, may be considered a special case spelling, if we stretch the point a little bit. But, to make any other distinctions, we have to add other words. The English pronouns do have different forms, according to use. I, me, my; you, your; he, him, his; she, her, hers; and so on. We will compare those to the Greek when we come to them. But, in all Greek nouns, there is this third element, called case. Every noun you’ll find in a Greek text can be identified precisely, as to gender, number, and specific use, which is called case. The endings of the noun, which are what we’ve just learned, give us the key as to how the word is being used in the sentence. Needless to say, these endings are very important for translation. The endings are added to the stem, which is the part that doesn’t change — it works the same way as with the verb. You can skip over Section 32/33, which just goes through a lot of information we actually don’t need to know to say what I just said: namely, consider the stem the part that doesn’t change. We will go through the cases in the same order as they are found in the declensions. I have no idea why the textbook would do it in any other order, but it does.
- a. Nominative, § 33/34a
When a substantive, which for today’s lesson is a noun, is subject of the sentence, it will have the nominative case ending. Or, to look at it the other way, if you see a Greek noun using the nominative case ending, it must be the subject of the verb. The nominative singular ending is distinct from the plural; so, the number of the substantive is always clearly revealed. This will be true for all the case endings. Matching to verbs!
- b. Genitive, § 35/35
For the purposes of our present lesson, just assume the genitive is a possessive. Again, the singular and plural are different. You can translate it “of a man,” “of a brother,” or whatever is the noun you find in the genitive case; or you can use “-’s,” as is customary in English: “a man’s,” “a brother’s,” and so on. In the plural: “of men,” or “of brothers,” or whatever the word is. And, as the book says, there are other uses, to be covered later
- c. Dative § 36/36
Does everyone understand direct objects and indirect objects? Here is a sentence: “A man teaches a law to a brother.”

- We must learn to instantly recognize that the subject is “A man.” We must learn to instantly recognize that the verb is “teaches.” We must learn to recognize that the direct object is “a law.” We must learn to recognize that the indirect object is “a brother.” The indirect object is not the thing acted upon by the verb, but it is the recipient of the effect of the action. In English, the indirect object, strictly speaking, is expressed with no other words added. Correctly, we’d have to say, “A man teaches a brother a law.” If you add a word, such as “to,” then you’ve used a prepositional phrase to express the same thing; but strictly speaking, it’s no longer an indirect object, but a prepositional phrase. Let me illustrate with another sentence. It doesn’t use words from our Greek vocabulary, but I think it might help. “The man gives the cat some food.” The subject is “The man.” The verb is “gives.” Now, clearly, what he is giving is not “the cat,” but “some food.” The cat is the recipient of the food, but the cat is not acted upon. You could substitute the prepositional phrase, “to the cat,” and it would be, “The man gives some food to the cat.” They both mean the same thing, but the prepositional phrase, to be technically correct, is not an indirect object. However, in translating Greek, we can use a prepositional phrase to express an indirect object: “to a man,” “to a brother,” and so on. If you can get by without the preposition, that’s better; but, in many cases, you will need a “to,” for sake of clarity. Now, assuming we are clear about the indirect object, we can go on and say that the indirect object is dative case in Greek. And, in today’s lesson, Greek dative cases are to be translated as English indirect objects, and an English indirect object will be expressed as a dative case, going from English to Greek. Besides this, the dative has other uses which we will cover later. We can’t say every dative case in Greek is an indirect object; but, we can say every indirect object will be in the dative case.
- d. Accusative §34/34b
In, “The man gives the cat some food,” he gives “some food.” He is acting upon “some food,” and the cat benefits. But what he directly acts upon, “some food,” is the direct object. The accusative case is the case of the direct object. There are other uses of the accusative case, so we will run across accusatives that are not direct objects. But a direct object will always be in the accusative case.

e. Vocative §30¹/37

Vocative is the case of direct address. “Lord, I believe,” would be a use of the vocative form for “Lord.”

This is only mentioned in a footnote in the 2nd Ed., so we are not going to spend a lot of time on it.

We skipped it in learning the declensions, but, the case ending of the vocative singular is an epsilon in the singular; the plural is the same as the nominative plural.

None of the exercises use the vocative, so that’s all we will say.

That’s all we need to know about the significance of the cases to be able to do the translations in the exercises. But, there are a few more things we need to go over before get into the exercises.

8. Order of words § 39/43

Essentially, you should do English to Greek using the same word order in the Greek as is used in the English.

But, you may see different word order in the Greek.

This is the whole point and importance of the case endings.

Regardless of word order in the Greek, the case endings are used to determine which word is the subject, direct object, indirect object, and so on.

9. Expressed or unexpressed subjects.

Keep in mind that some verbs do not have an expressed subject, because the subject is I or we, or you, singular or plural.

In those situations, you must supply the pronoun.

In fact, only a third person singular or plural verb generally has a subject expressed as a noun in the nominative case.

Okay. I think we have all the information we need to be able to do our exercises. May I suggest how to approach them?

I have made sheets available for translation. I will show you how to use them, but it is entirely up to you. The idea is to give you an orderly system to apply for all translation work.

The first exercise of each section of exercises is worked out for you on one side of each sheet, but the other side is left blank, which allows you to copy it if you find it useful. You can copy it off as many times as you like.

[Go through some examples to show how the sheets work.]

I am assigning all the exercises, but if you don’t have the time, then

I suggest you do them alternately: do the first Greek to English, then the first English to Greek, then a Greek to English, so you get about an equal number of each kind done by next week.

We will take the time to make sure we are all together at this point.