

Outline of Greek Accidence

Grammar may be defined as the study of language in general, or of a specific language. It is divided into two major fields of study: accidence and syntax. *Accidence* deals with the mechanical structures of a language; *syntax* deals with the ways these structures may be combined to produce correct expressions in the specified language.

This booklet deals with *accidence*, specifically, the accidence of the Greek of the New Testament (κοινή Greek). My purpose is to provide a concise outline, while conveying complete and accurate information concerning the terms used, and their relationships to one another.

Accidence is the branch of grammar concerned with *structure* (forms of words). It includes *orthography*, which deals with *mechanical* forms and rules governing the structures of words, and *inflection*, which deals with the *organizational* forms and rules applied to those structures.

- I. **Orthography**: the branch of accidence concerned with the *mechanical* forms and rules governing word structure and formation; that is, *spelling*.
 - A. **Alphabet**: The characters used to represent the sounds and form the words of the Greek language. The Greek alphabet is listed on the first page of Lesson I in Machen.
 - B. **Pronunciation**: the relationship of audible sounds to the written Greek alphabet. Machen follows the *Erasmic* system (developed in the 1500s by the scholar Erasmus) which assigns each letter, diphthong, and digraph a distinct and separate sound, enabling students more quickly to learn the correct spelling of words. It bears only a remote relationship to Greek pronunciation in New Testament or modern times.
 - C. **Vowel**: a character representing a distinct vocalized sound. The vocal chords must vibrate to produce the sound, and the sounds may vary (“long” or “short”, etc.), depending on various factors.

Greek: α, ε, η, ι, ο, υ, ω

1. **Diphthong**: a combination of two vowels, one after another, in which the resulting sound is a liquid combination of the two sounds.

Greek: αι, ει, οι, υι, αυ, ευ, ηυ, ου, ωυ

- D. **Consonant**: a character representing a distinct, unvarying sound made, in most cases, without the use of the vocal chords (exceptions: the *liquid* consonants, λ, μ, ν, and ρ, require use of the vocal chords).
 1. **Digraph**: a combination of two consonants, one after another, *only* when the pronunciation of the combination is different from the pronunciation of either consonant alone (*ph* is a digraph because *ph* sounds like neither a *p* nor an *h*).

English: ch, gh, ph, th, etc., not br, cr, dr, fr, etc.
Greek: only γγ, γκ, γξ

2. **Blend**: a combination of two consonants, one after another, when the combined sound is clearly a blend, in the same order, of the separate sounds.

English: br, bl, cr, cl, dr, fr, etc.
Greek: βρ, βλ, γρ, γλ, δρ, θρ, κρ, πρ, etc.

- E. **Syllable**: a rhythmic unit of a word, similar to a beat in music.
 1. **Ultima**: the final syllable of a word.
 2. **Penult**: the syllable preceding the final syllable of a word; the next to last syllable.
 3. **Antepenult**: the syllable preceding the penult in a word; the second to last syllable.

Note: the following graphical symbols were not used in Greek at the time when the New Testament was written. They were added later to solidify content by reducing the possibility of double-meanings or varied interpretations.

- F. **Accent**: additional vocal stress (raised pitch or volume) placed upon a syllable, indicated in Greek by means of a graphical symbol.
 1. **Acute**: accent symbol ´, which may appear in any of the last three syllables of a Greek word.
 2. **Circumflex**: accent symbol ˘ or ˆ, which may appear in either of the last two syllables of a Greek word.
 3. **Grave**: accent symbol ` , which replaces the acute on the last syllable of a Greek word, if that word is followed by another word without intervening punctuation (there are some special exceptions).
- G. **Breathing**: audible or inaudible breathing at the beginning of a word, indicated by a graphical symbol (used only when the word begins with the letter “ρ” or a vowel). If the syllable is accented, the breathing mark is placed immediately to the left of an acute or grave, or directly beneath a circumflex.
 1. **Smooth breathing**: no audible breathing. Indicated graphically by placing the symbol ˊ over an initial vowel or the second vowel of an initial diphthong. Initial “ρ” never uses a smooth breathing.
 2. **Rough breathing**: audible breathing; an initial “H” sound. Indicated graphically by placing the symbol ˋ over the initial “ρ” or vowel, or over the second vowel of an initial diphthong. Greek has no “H” sound after the beginning of a word, except possibly the rasping “ch” sound, represented by the letter “χ”).
- H. **Punctuation**: Symbols used to indicate the flow of a sentence.
 1. **Period**: [.] = full stop; completion of sentence.
 2. **Comma**: [,] = pause; between clauses, to separate words or phrases in a series, or to set off parenthetical ideas.
 3. **Raised period**: [·] = pause, used to indicate *logical* flow in a sentence (replaces both colon and semi-colon of English).
 4. **Question mark**: [;] = indicates that the sentence asks a question.
- I. **Vocabulary**: Words of a language as they are listed in a dictionary or lexicon. Vocabulary includes all words whose forms remain the same in all uses, but only one basic form for words whose forms are modified depending on usage (which are called *inflected* words).

II. **Inflection**: The branch of accidence dealing with the *organization* of the words of a language, and their various forms, generally according to the parts of speech. Inflection refers to the changing of word forms so as to indicate precise usage. Changes may include reduplication of characters, lengthening of vowels, or the use of characteristic prefixes or suffixes.

In Greek, some parts of speech are never inflected, while those that are inflected follow defined patterns specific to each part of speech.

A. **Uninflected**: words that do not change in form.

1. **Adverb**: a word that modifies a verb, describing it in terms of time, place, reason or manner (when, where, why, or how).

English: soon, here, inside, away, *etc.*, and the “-ly” words

2. **Preposition**: a word that indicates relationship between a substantive (noun or pronoun) and a verb, or between two substantives.

English: in, on, over, before, of, to, *etc.*

3. **Conjunction**: a word used to connect words, phrases or clauses in various relationships for various purposes.

English: and, but, or, *etc.*

4. **Interjection**: a word of exclamation or drawing attention, which has no other connection to the sentence.

English: oh, behold, lo, wow, *etc.*

B. **Inflected**: words that change in form to indicate precise usage.

1. **Verb**: a word describing an *action* or a *state of existence*.

a. Classes of verbs:

- 1) **Transitive**: action affecting a recipient other than the one to whom the action is attributed.

English: He ate the pie.

- a) **Direct object**: the recipient of the action of a transitive verb, expressed in Greek using a substantive in the accusative case (see below).

English: He ate the pie.

- b) **Indirect object**: the beneficiary, but not the recipient, of the action of a transitive verb (often implying *to*), expressed in Greek using a substantive in the dative case (see below)

English: He gave the child some food.
(He gave *to* the child some food.)

- 2) **Intransitive**: action or state *not* affecting a recipient other than the one to whom the action or state is attributed. Intransitivity is often expressed in Greek by the middle voice (see below).

English: He slept.

- b. **Conjugation**: an orderly list of the inflectional forms of the verb, organized according to person, number, tense, voice, and mood, as follows:

- 1) **Person**: the relation of the one performing the action of the verb to the one giving the account (the “teller”).

- a) **First Person**: the subject of the verb is the teller, or includes the teller (I or we).

- b) **Second Person**: the subject of the verb is the individual or group being told (you as an individual or as a group).

- c) **Third Person**: subject of the verb is neither the teller nor the one being told (he, she, it, they, or any substantive to replace these pronoun ideas).

- 2) **Number**: the quantity of the subject of the verb.

- a) **Singular**: action of a single individual.

- b) **Plural**: action of two or more individuals.

- 3) **Tense**: the relation of the action or existence expressed by the verb to a presumed neutral state of expression (NOT the same as the *time* of the verb, which is only one aspect of *tense*).

- a) **Time**: the aspect of *tense* which has to do with the time of the action or existence relative to the time of the telling.

- (1) **Past**: action or existence occurring *before* the telling.

English: was, had, ran, said, ate, *etc.*

- (2) **Present**: action or existence occurring *at the same time* as the telling.

English: is, has, runs, says, eats, *etc.*

- (3) **Future**: action or existence occurring *after* the telling.

English: *no inflection*, but uses the helper *will*:
will be, will have, will run, will say, will eat, *etc.*

- b) **Continuity**: that aspect of *tense* having to do with the duration or completion of the action.

- (1) **Perfect**: action *complete* in the past, present or future.

English: uses a form of the helper *have*: have been, have had, have run, have said, have eaten, *etc.*

- (2) **Imperfect**: action *continuing* in the past, present or future, with no indication as to completion.

English: uses a form of the helper *be*: was being, is having, was running, is saying, was eating, etc.

- (3) **Aorist**: action as simple entity or fact, *without reference to time or continuation* (since the existence or action is spoken of as established fact, it is usually translated as past time; but, actually the time is not necessarily in the past).

English: was, had, ran, said, ate, etc.

- 4) **Voice**: the relationship between the verb and its own subject, as expressed by the inflection of the verb.

- a) **Active**: indicates that the subject performs the action toward another.

English example: He washed the car.

- b) **Middle**: indicates that the action has an effect upon the subject performing the action.

English: He washed before he sat down to eat (meaning he washed himself, but does not use the reflexive form "himself").

- c) **Passive**: indicates that the subject receives the action of the verb from someone or something else.

English: The child was washed by his mother.

- 5) **Mood**: indication of the actuality, probability, or possibility of action or existence expressed by the verb.

- a) **Indicative**: action or existence expressed as *actual*

English: He runs.

- b) **Imperative**: action or existence expressed as a *command*.

English: Run for your lives!

- c) **Subjunctive**: action or existence expressed as *subject* to other considerations.

English: ...so that he might run, (*purpose*)
...if we should go or not. (*IF*)

- d) **Optative**: action or existence expressed as *conceived* or *imagined*, with *no indication of expectation*.

English: How nice if he could run! (*doubt* or *wish*)

Note: the following two forms are a bridge between verbs (words of action or existence) and substantives (words of identification or description).

2. **Infinitive**: the verb itself standing as an entity; the "to" form of a verb. It is the dictionary form for the English language; Greek, however, uses the present, active, indicative, "I" form as the lexicon form.

English: to be, to have, to run, to see, to eat, etc.

3. **Participle**: a substantive form of verb which can be used either as the subject of a sentence, or to modify other substantives (has the same inflectional forms as any other substantive: see below). The proper understanding of the use and translation of the Greek participle is the crux of correctly applying New Testament Greek to Biblical studies.

English: "*Regular*" forms are "*-ing*" and "*-ed*": filling/filled; most common words are regular in the "*-ing*" form, but *irregular* in the "*-ed*" form: being/been, running/run, saying/said, etc.

4. **Substantive**: a word that *identifies* objects, places or other entities.

- a. Classes of substantives:

- 1) **Noun**: a word that identifies an object, place, individual, or other entity by *naming* it.

English: house, tree, book, John, love, farm, etc.

- 2) **Pronoun**: a word that identifies an object, place, individual, or other entity by *classifying* it as to *person*, *number* and *gender*.

English: I, we, you (singular or plural), he, she, it, they, that, who, which, etc.

- 3) **Article**: a word that identifies an object, place, individual, or other entity only by *specifying*, without naming, classifying or describing it. Greek has *no indefinite article*, and the article alone may denote an entity, with or without another substantive.

English: the

- 4) **Adjective**: a word that identifies an object, place, individual, or other entity by *describing* it.

English: loud, brown, soft, sour, tall, etc.

- b. **Declension**: an orderly list of inflectional forms of a substantive, organized according to gender, number, and case, as follows:

- 1) **Gender**: classification as masculine, feminine or neuter (not to be confused with *sex*. Animals classified as masculine are expressed in the masculine, whether male or female, and so also with the feminine and the neuter. Inanimate objects, inherently asexual, are also placed in one of these three classifications).

- 2) **Number**: singular or plural; one, or more than one.
- 3) **Case**: the relation of the substantive to other words, with five distinct case endings each in the singular and plural.
- (a) Two major systems used to categorize the Greek substantive:
- (1) The five case system, with one case for each distinct case ending
 - (2) An eight case system, classifying case according to usage, but defining more than one case for some of the endings. In this outline, we cover the five case system. The eight case system will be illustrated later in the course, as it relates to the translation of one specific passage.
- (b) Cases and usage
- (1) **Nominative**: substantive used as *subject* of a verb.

English: Birds fly.
 - (2) **Genitive**: substantive used for *attribution* (as an attribute of another substantive), commonly, but not exclusively, used to express *possession*.

English: bird's nest; but also bird nest
 - (3) **Dative**: substantive used as an *indirect object*, among other uses.

English: He gave the bird some seed.
 - (4) **Accusative**: substantive used as a *direct object*, among other uses.

English: He caught the bird.
 - (5) **Vocative**: the *direct address* of a substantive.

English: Lord, I believe.

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