

Ling 127 Final Project : Modern Greek

1 Introduction

Modern Greek, which belongs to the Indo-European language family, specifically the Hellenic branch. It is primarily spoken in Greece and Cyprus, with about 13.4 million speakers worldwide. The language features several dialects, including the standard Demotic, the more formal Katharevousa, and regional variants like Cypriot, Pontic, and Cappadocian.

Information about the sources of data – consultant and books/grammars: I have a mastery of basic Greek grammar and syntax and am capable of doing the research independently. Data came from online sources and papers, such as wikipedia, en.wiktionary.org, altpal.ai, polyglotclub.com, greekboston.com, asteri.ws, linguistmag.com, hinateive.com, Modern Greek Bible, blogs.transparent.com, www.britishcouncil.gr, polyglotclub.com, human.libretexts.org and greekpod101.com. Papers include *A Lexical Functional Grammar approach to Modern Greek Relative Clauses* by Aikaterini Chatsiou, *Relativization in Modern Greek* by B. D. Joseph, and *Word-Raising in Modern Greek* by Brian Joseph.

2 Word Order Properties

Greek generally follows the SVO word order.

Here are two examples for the basic unmarked word order of the subject, object and the verb in Greek.

(1) anthropos graphei biblio
man (S) writes (V) book (O)
“a man writes a book.”

(2) Andriana stelei karta
Adrienne (S) sends (V) card (O)
“Adrienne sends a card.”

However, with its complex morphology, permits considerable flexibility in word order within both main and subordinate clauses, Greek can also follow the VSO, VOS, OVS, SOV and OSV word orders.¹

2.1 Properties Consistent with VO

Here are ten properties in Greek that are consistent with its VO structure:

Property 1: The order of an adposition and a noun phrase of Greek is P-NP.

(1) me tin elpida
with-PREP + ACC the-ACC hope-ACC
“with the hope.”

(2) apo tin karekla
under (P) the (D) chair (N)
“under the chair.”

Property 2: The Genitive can follow the governing Noun.

to kentro tis platonikis

¹ Melissaropoulou, Dimitra. 2010. “*An LFG Approach to Modern Greek Relative Clauses*.” PhD diss., University of Essex. Accessed [May 31, 2024]. https://repository.essex.ac.uk/20558/1/2010_An_LFG_Approach_to_Modern_Greek_Relative.pdf

the center the-DEF-GEN platonic-ADJ-GEN
 filosofías
 philosophy-N-GEN

“the center of platonic philosophy.”

Property 3: Auxiliary Verb Position: Auxiliary verbs come before the main verb.

- (1) échei katatáxei se
 has-Aux-3S classified-V-PFV into+ ACC
 tetralogías
 categories-N-ACC
 “has classified into categories.”
- (2) gunē echei teleiwsei
 woman (P) has (Auxiliary) finished (V)
 “woman has finished.”

Property 4: With well more than chance frequency, question particles or affixes are initial.

Póte páte stin Angliá?
 when-Q are you going to England?
 “When are you going to England?”

Property 5: The order of comparison is Adjective - Mark - Standard.

O Kostas einai psiloteros
 the Kostas is taller
 apo ton Gianni
 than-PREP + ACC the-ACC Giannis-ACC
 “Kostas is taller than Giannis.”

Property 6: Modals precede the main verb.

Pithanón tha vréxei
 may-V-Modal will-FUT-Particl it rain V-FUT-3S

Property 7: Adverbs comes after the verb.

ávrío
 tomorrow-ADV

“it will probably rain tomorrow.”

Property 8: The order of a noun and an adjective can be A-N.

kokkino aftokinito
 red (A) car (N)
 “red car.”

Property 9: Negation Particles precede the verb, usually immediately before the verb.

den eínai dódeka
 not is 12
 the-NOM-PL times-NOM-PL
 oí óres tēs ēméras;
 the hours the-GEN-SG day-GEN-SG
 “Are there not twelve hours in the day?”

Property 10: In Prepositional languages, it is exclusively prefixing

amphi- amphitheatron
 “on both sides” “place for viewing”
 peri- perimetros
 “around” “measure”

2.2 Properties Inconsistent with VO

Here are two properties in Greek that are inconsistent with its VO structure:

Property 1: Greek also has suffixes that are inflected to display grammatical relations other than the main form.

-iátikos denoting sense of time
 “Christoúgenna-iátikos” Christmassy
 -gráphos denoting “writer”

“gê-gráphos” geographer

Property 2: OV languages tend to place modifiers before nouns while VO languages tend to place modifiers after nouns.

Mía gáta
One-Numeral cat-Noun

“One cat.”

2.3 Oblique Nominals in Greek

The oblique nominals placed in Greek with respect to the verb and the object is SV + Oblique. The oblique nominals in your example sentences are underlined.

(1) Egó meletó eliniká sto spít
I study Greek at home.
“I study greek at home.”

(2) eisa ton phelo andra
I saw the tall man
sto parti.
at the party.
“I saw the tall man at the party.”

3 Case and Agreement system

First, the case marking system of Greek is Nominative-Accusative. Second, Greek has agreement between the subject and the verb in person and number. There is no agreement between verbs and objects.

3.1 Case System

Justification $A = S \neq P$ In sentence (3), “O ántas” functions as A. In sentence (2) “O Giórgos” functions as S and is in the same nominative form as the A in the second example, which can be told from using the same definite article “O.” The object P “ton orízonta” is different from its nominative form “O orizontas” indicating an accusative case.

(1) Intransitive Sentences with Active Verbs

H maria
The-DEF Maria-Noun-NOM-3S-F
feugei
leaves-V-PRES-3S
“Maria leaves.”

(2) Intransitive Sentences with Non-Active Verbs

O Giórgos faínetai
The-NOM-3S-M George seems V-PRES-3S
árrostos símera.
ill-A-NOM-SG-M today-ADV
“George seems ill today.”

(3) Transitive Sentences:

O ántas koitázei
The-NOM-3S-M man is watching-V-PRES-3S
ton orízonta²
the-DEF-ACC-SG-M horizon
“The man is watching the horizon.”

3.2 Agreement System

(1) Intransitive Sentences with Active Verb:

To potámi

² The lexical form (Nominative case) for the word “orízonta” is “orizontas.”

The-NOM-3S-NEUT river-NOM-3S-NEUT

tréchei

flows-V-PRES-3S

“The river flows.”

(2) Intransitive Sentences with Non-Active Verb:

To skáki apotéleitai

The chess-N-NOM-3S-N consists-V-PRES-3S

apó 32 píonia

of/from + ACC Num pawns-N-ACC³-3P

“Chess constitutes of 32 pawns.”

(3) Transitive Sentence

H mitera diábazei

The-NOM-3S-F mother reads-V-PRES-3S

pollá biblia

many-A-ACC-3P-N books-N-ACC-3P-N

“The mother reads a lot of books.”

4 Relative Clauses

“Pu” is the most common relative pronoun in Greek, used for both defining and non-defining clauses. It can refer to people, animals, things, or ideas. According to B. D. Joseph, Modern Greek features three types of relative clauses.⁴ Each type utilizes a specific relative marker that appears after the head noun.

4.1 Pu & Gap

An invariant relative marker **pu**, which leads the relative clause and has a gap that corresponds to the position of the target of relativization. For example:

kséro ton ánthropo pu

I know the-man-ACC REL. MRK

menei stin Athína

live-3SG in Athens

“I know the man who lives in Athens.”

4.2 Pu & Pronominal

An invariant relative marker **pu**, which also leads the relative clause but includes a pronominal (clitic, except as subject and after prepositions) copy of the target of relativization. For example:

kséro ton ándropoi pu móno

I know the-ACC man-ACC who only-ADV

aftós menei stin Athína

he-NOM live-3SG in Athens

(Literally “I know the man that only he lives in Athens.”)

“I know the man that is the only one that lives in Athens.”

4.3 O Poios

A variable (i.e., inflected) relative pronoun **o poios** (literally “the which”), used with its case, number, and gender dependent on the target of relativization. For example:

³ Here, the preposition “apó” requires the following noun in the accusative case.

⁴ Joseph, Brian D. 1983. “*The Synchrony and Diachrony of the Balkan Infinitive: A Study in Areal, General, and Historical Linguistics*.” Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Accessed [May 31, 2024]. <https://www.asc.ohio-state.edu/joseph.1/publications/1983relativization.pdf>

kséro ton ándropoi
 I know the-ACC man-ACC
 o opios menei stin Athína
 the-which/NOM. MASC.SG live-3SG in Athens
 “I know the man who lives in Athens.”

5 Wh-Questions

5.1 Polar Questions

Here are two glossed examples exemplifying how polar questions are formed. The strategy of polar question formation of Greek is interrogative intonation only.

- (1) Ypárchei Theós;
 exists God
 “Is there a God?”
- (2) den éinai dódeka
 not is 12
 the-NOM-PL times-NOM-PL
 oi óres tēs ēméras;
 the hours the-GEN-SG day-GEN-SG
 “Are there not twelve hours in the day?”

5.2 Simple Wh-questions

Here are three glossed examples of non-embedded (simple) clauses exemplifying how wh-questions are formed. Greek has wh-movement:

(1) Subject question

Poios éinai autós o ántas;
 who is this the man
 “Who is this man?”

(2) Object Question

ti tha kanei o kurios;
 what FUL-particle do-V-FUL the owner
 “what will the owner do?”

(3) Indirect Question

Xéreis ti na káneis;
 V-2S INTER subj.particle V-Subj-2S
 you know what to do
 “Do you know what to do?”

5.3 Long Distance Wh-questions

Here are two examples of long distance wh-questions in Greek. The formation of long distance questions in the examples is wh-movement. In both examples, the wh-words (Ti, Poion) are fronted from their in-situ positions to the left edges of the matrix clauses.

(1) corresponding to: What do you think Mary bought?

Ti nomízete ē
 what-INTER-ACC you think-V-PRES-2S the
 María agórase
 Maria bought-V-PAST-3S

“What do you think Mary bought?”

(2) corresponding to: Who do you think likes this book?

Poion nomízeis
 Who-INTER-ACC you think-V-PRES-2S
 arései autó to biblío;
 likes this-ACC the-ACC book-ACC

“Who do you think likes this book?”

6 Passives and Causatives

6.1 Passives

In Modern Greek, the distinction between active and passive voices involves a transformation in the syntactic structure and verb morphology of sentences. Active voice sentences present the subject as the agent performing the action directly, with the verb typically in an active form. In contrast, passive voice sentences shift the focus from the agent to the patient (the receiver of the action). The verb form changes to indicate that the subject is the recipient rather than the doer of the action. The formation of the passive in Modern Greek is achieved by specific morphological changes in the verb.

Here are two fully glossed examples of passive sentences of transitive base sentences from Greek. The base active sentences and the passive counterparts of these sentences are provided.

(1a) Active Transitive sentence

O	mageiras	etoimazei
the	cook	is preparing-PRES-ACT-3S
to		gragēto
the-ACC-SG-NEUT	food-ACC-SG-NEUT	

“The cook is preparing the food.”

(1b) Passive counterpart of (1a)

to	gragēto
the-ACC-SG-NEUT	food-ACC-SG-NEUT
etoimazetai	
is prepared-PRES-PASS-3S	

“The food is being prepared.”

(2a) Active Transitive sentence

ē	maria	chtevizei
the	Maria	is combing-PRES-ACT-3S
ta	mallia	tēs
the-ACC-PL-FEM	hair-ACC-PL-FEM	her-GEN-SG

“Maria is combing her hair.”

(2b) Passive counterpart of 2a

ē	maria	chtenizetai
the	maria	is combing (herself)-PRES-PASS-3S

“Maria is combing (herself).”

6.2 Causatives

Causatives in Modern Greek are used to express a situation where one entity causes another to perform or undergo an action. The causative construction typically involves altering the verb form or employing specific auxiliary verbs to indicate that the subject is causing the action rather than performing it directly.

A causative construction is characterized by an increase in valency of the original verb, due to the introduction of the causer (valency). I looked at examples in Modern Greek for morphological causatives formed on intransitive, transitive, and ditransitive verbs.

(1) Intransitive Verb

Here, an auxiliary verb “ékane” (made) is placed sentence-initially, altering the original sentence to its causative counterpart.

Original Sentence:

févoun	oi	filoi
leave-3PL	the-NOM-PL	friends-NOM-PL

“Friends leave.”

Causative Sentence:

ékane O Pétros na
made the-NOM-SG Peter-NOM-SG to
tous filous fýgoun
the-ACC-PL friends-NOM-PL leave-3PL

“Peter made friends leave.”

(2) Transitive Verb

Here, an auxiliary verb “épisa” (persuade) is placed sentence-initially, altering the original sentence to its causative counterpart. The examples of the verbs in the sentence is in the passive voices.

Original Sentence:

na exetasteí apó o
to examined-PASS-3S by the-NOM
giatró ton Giánni
John-NOM-SG the-ACC doctor-ACC

“John is to be examined by the doctor.”

Causative Sentence:

épisa na exetasteí apó
persuade-1S to examined-PASS-3S by
o giatró ton Giánni
the-NOM John-NOM the-ACC doctor-ACC

“I persuade John to be examined by the doctor.”

(3) Ditransitive Verb

Here, an auxiliary verb “ékane” is placed sentence-initially, altering the original sentence to its causative counterpart.

Original Sentence:

fai ta mila
eat the-ACC-F apples-ACC-F

apo ton Pétros
from the-ACC Peter-ACC

“(Someone) eat the apples which were from Peter.”

Causative Sentence:

ékane na fai ta mila
made-1S to eat the-ACC-F apples-ACC-F
apo ton Pétros
from the-ACC Peter-ACC

“I made (someone) eat the apples which were from Peter.”

7 Conclusion

In summary, the analysis began with an examination of the word order properties, illustrating the primary SVO structure. I also examined the characteristics of VO alignment, presenting properties that align with and deviate from typical VO configurations. Additionally, the study highlighted the role of case and agreement systems in Modern Greek, demonstrating nominative-accusative alignment and subject-verb agreement. The examination of relative clauses revealed three distinct types employed in Modern Greek. The project also dissected question formation strategies, including polar and wh-questions. Finally, my exploration of passives and causatives illuminated how syntactic transformations and verb morphology adapt to express active voice and passive voice and causative actions.