Greek Verb Morphology

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Present Tense Verb Conjugation

Note: Greek seems to lack as infinitive forms

Example: 'to see'

stem = [vlɛp-]

Present Tense Verb Inflections		Number	
		Singular	Plural
Person	First	[ɔ]	[umɛ]
	Second	[is]	[ɛtɛ]
	Third	[i]	[un]

English:	Greek:
I see	[vlɛpɔ]
you see (singular)	[vlɛpis]
he/she/it sees	[vlɛpi]
we see	[vlɛpumɛ]
you see (plural)	[vlɛpɛtɛ]
they see	[vlɛpun]

We asked our consultant how to say a few simple phrases with verbs in the present tense. We started by asking how to say the verb in the infinitive form (ex: How do you say 'to see'?)
But Sunday responded "Do you mean 'I see'?"
Our class was not able to obtain any infinitives. It seems if the the first person singular form of the verb is the way that she identifies the verb in question.

Once we started pairing different pronouns with verbs, we quickly saw that for each verb, there is a stem, followed by an inflectional suffix.
The inflectional suffix of the verb depends on the subject - different subjects result in different conjugations (see chart).

Greek is a Null-Subject, Fusional Language

1) Null-Subject

Since Greek verb endings conjugate depending on the subject, the subject itself is redundant, and therefore not needed.

[εɣɔ	vlεp-ɔ]	→	Ø	[vlεp-ɔ]
1.SG	see-**1.SG**.PRS			see-**1.SG**.PRS

2) Fusional

The end of each conjugated verb is a morpheme with several meanings (person, number, tense). Removing such morphemes makes the word meaningless (*[vlεp]).

Based on the data we collected concerning Greek verbs, there are a few things we can say about the Greek language in general.

First of all, Greek is a null-subject language. This means that subject pronouns are often dropped.
This is because the inflectional affix of the conjugated verb already contains the information that the subject would express.
For example, saying [εɣɔ vlεpɔ] is redundant, because both [εɣɔ] and the [ɔ] in [vlεpɔ] contain the same meaning (first person singular).
Therefore, the subject can be dropped, and the relevant information regarding the subject (person, number) is retained by the verb.

Second of all, Greek seems to be a fusional language. This is a synthetic language with morphemes which often have many, specific meanings.
For example, the morpheme [ɔ] in [vlεpɔ] tells us information concerning person (first), number (singular), and tense (present).
If we wish to change any of these features, we must use a completely different morpheme.
The opposite of this would be an agglutinative language, which instead of relaying all of this information fused in a single morpheme, would add many different morphemes.
Also note that If we remove the [ɔ] in [vlεpɔ], the remaining morpheme [vlεp] doesn't mean anything, as verb stems cannot stand on their own.

Allomorphy in Present Tense Verb Inflections

Among the present tense verbs in Greek, the endings seem to change slightly depending on whether or not the verb stem ends with a consonant or a vowel.

Example:

Stem ends with consonant: 'to give' (stem = [ðin-])	Stem ends with vowel: 'to eat' (stem =[trɔ-])	Unattested:
[ðinɔ]	[trɔɔ]	
[ðini**s**]	[trɔ**s**]	*[trɔ**is**]
[ðini]	[trɔi]	
[ðin**um**ɛ]	[trɔ**m**ɛ]	*[trɔ**um**ɛ]
[ðinɛ**t**ɛ]	[trɔ**t**ɛ]	*[trɔɛ**t**ɛ]
[ðin**un**]	[trɔ**n**ɛ]	*[trɔ**un**]

Greek seems to display a pattern, consistent with all of the verb data we collected.
If the verb stem ends with a consonant, the inflectional suffix will start with a vowel.
If the verb stem ends with a vowel, the inflection suffix with start with a consonant (unless it does not contain any consonants in the other form) by dropping a vowel.
For example, a verb with the stem [ðin] adds [is] with an [i] to make "you give" (singular), whereas a verb with the stem [tro] adds [s] without the [i] to make "you eat" (singular).
As a result of this pattern, the following forms are unattested (see unattested section of chart).

This is an example of allomorphy, because even though there are sometimes two different forms (the [un] in [ðin**un**] versus the [**n**ɛ] in [trɔ**n**ɛ]), both morphemes mean the same thing (3rd person plural). Forms such as these are said to be allomorphs.

Explanation: Phonological Alternation (Elision)

Traditional schema for phonological alternation:

$$A \rightarrow B / C \_\_ D$$

Applied to Greek verb inflections:

[is] → [s] / V __ #

[umɛ] → [mɛ] / V __#

[ɛtɛ] → [tɛ] / V __ #

[un] → [nɛ] / V __ #

But why do these two different forms exist?

One way to understand this is through phonological alternation. Specifically, it is a case of elision, since some forms delete the vowel in the suffix.
The traditional schema for showing alternation is to say that: phonological form A changes to phonological form B when the preceding environment C and/or the following environment D is present.
When we apply this to the Greek verb inflections, it seems that the verb inflections drop their initial vowel whenever there is a vowel in the preceding environment.