# 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 Language

**Null-Subject Language ⁃ a language that can omit the subject (particularly pronouns).**

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

       **Example:**

    [ɛɣɔ   vlɛp-ɔ]          →       Ø  [vlɛp-ɔ]
     **1.SG**  see-**1.SG**.PRS                  see-**1.SG**.PRS
    'I see'                            'I see'

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 [ɛɣɔ  vlɛpɔ] is redundant, because both [ɛɣɔ] and the [ɔ] in [vlɛpɔ] 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.

# Greek is a Fusional Language

A **fusional language** is a synthetic language, where morphemes like inflections have many specific meanings.

Example:            [vlɛp-ɔ]
                         see-1.SG.PRS

    The [ɔ] in [vlɛpɔ] indicates: **first person, singular, present tense**. It's a single morpheme fused with many grammatical functions.

Opposite: Agglutinative language.

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 [vlɛpɔ] 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 [vlɛpɔ], the remaining morpheme [vlɛp] doesn't mean anything, as verb stems cannot stand on their own.

# Allomorphy and Alternation in 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: |
|---|---|---|
| [ðinis] | [trɔs] | *[trɔis] |
| [ðinumɛ] | [trɔmɛ] | *[trɔumɛ] |
| [ðinɛtɛ] | [trɔtɛ] | *[trɔɛtɛ] |
| [ðinun] | [trɔnɛ] | *[trɔun] |

**Traditional schema for phonological alternation:**

$$A \rightarrow B \mathbin{/} C \underline{\quad} D$$

Applied to Greek verb inflections:

[is] → [s] / V __ #

[umɛ] → [mɛ] / V __ #

[ɛtɛ] → [tɛ] / V __ #

[un] → [nɛ] / V __ #

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 [ðinun] versus the [nɛ] in [trɔnɛ]), both morphemes mean the same thing (3rd person plural). Forms such as these are said to be allomorphs.

One way to describe this pattern is phonological alternation: this first form (seen in stems with consonant endings) becomes this second form when there is a vowel in the preceding environment (the vowel in the stem ending).