

Intro to Greek Noun/Adjective Endings

After orthography, learning the Greek letters, the next challenge is to dig into morphology, the study of word-form changes. This affects nouns, adjectives and verbal forms. These changes in word endings, or the addition of prefixes and infixes, are signals which change the meaning and usage of the word in the sentence. The easiest, and most logical place to begin is in the area of nouns and adjectives.

The Greeks employed different endings, that were added to the basic word root, to signify the function of the word in the sentence. These endings do not change the meaning of the word itself. They are meant to be **structure signals that help us to see how words are meant to fit together in the sentence.** Grammarians have identified and categorized these into “cases”. A “**case**” is simply a term that has come to be used to describe **a recognized instance of word function.** For example, you could say, “In the case where a noun functions like the subject, we call this ‘nominative’ or ‘**the nominative case**’.” This contrasts, for example with the case, or “observed instance”, where a word functions as a possessive, or implies a relationship of dependence of some kind. This noticed pattern of usage came to be called the “**genitive case**”. Usually genitives are usually translated with an “of”. A third observed pattern of use describes what is the function of an indirect object in English. Grammarians have called this the “**dative case**”. These are words that generally describe how or where an action occurs (an instrumental or locative dative). Translation of these usually requires a helping word like “to, in, with, by, for, etc.” A fourth recognized pattern of function is when a noun is the recipient of the action of the verb, or the direct object. This has come to be called the “**accusative case**”. Finally, there is a separate pattern of use that affects morphology somewhat. This is when a speaker or writer refers to someone using direct address. Usually this is when the speaker/writer calls the person they are addressing by name or title to get their attention. This is called the “**vocative case**”. Usually, the word-form endings of the vocative are identical to that of the nominative, though in some cases the vocative endings tend to abbreviate the word. It is not worth focusing on vocatives, since they are relatively rare.

The important thing to understand is that, in NT Greek, **morphological changes (word endings) signal the different functional uses described by the various “cases”.** You could classify the cases by function (as is done in English grammar) or by word form. **In learning Greek, it is easier (and most obvious) to learn the noun/adjective word form endings in order to classify word usage.** This is an essential step toward the goal of being able to translate effectively. If we know the vocabulary, but don’t recognize the functional clues at the end of the words, we can get things all turned around. This is especially true since Greek does not always follow the same word order as English does. Because they have these word endings to indicate the function of the word in the sentence, they can move words around for emphasis (e.g., put the direct object at the beginning of the sentence) and still be perfectly clear.

| <i>Case</i> | <i>Basic Ending</i> | (1 st Declension Pattern) | | (2 nd Declension Pattern) | |
|-------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| | | <i>Fem. Def. Art.</i> | : | <i>Masc. Def. Art.</i> | <i>Neut. Def. Art.</i> |
| Nominative | --/-ς/-ν | ἡ | : | ὁ | τὸ |
| Genitive | -ς/-υ | τῆς | : | τοῦ | τοῦ |
| Dative | -ι | τῇ | : | τῷ | τῷ |
| Accusative | -ν | τήν | : | τόν | τό |
| | | | : | | |
| Nominative | -ι/-α | αἱ | : | οἱ | τὰ |
| Genitive | -ων | τῶν | : | τῶν | τῶν |
| Dative | -ις | ταῖς | : | τοῖς | τοῖς |
| Accusative | -ς/-υς/-α | τάς | : | τούς | τὰ |

First Declension nouns have roots that end in either -α or -η. Second Declension nouns have roots that end in ο.