

Chapter Five

Adjectives

You must be anxious to learn some verbs so that you can begin to read complete sentences. We'll do that in the next chapter, but first I want to spend a bit more time on nouns. I think that this is a good point to show you how Greek *describes* nouns, i.e., how its adjectives work.

Adjective Case: Concept

Adjectives are words that assert some quality or quantity about nouns. They tell “what kind,” “how big,” “how many,” etc. Examples in English include “tall,” “cruel,” “huge,” and “seven.” You have already encountered the adjectives “the,” “this,” and “that.” As you have already observed from these three adjectives, each Greek adjective must **agree with** (match in gender, number, and case) the noun it describes. In principle then, every Greek adjective must have thirty forms by which it can “agree with” nouns in three different genders and five different cases, each with singular and plural forms.

Since Greek contains hundreds of adjectives, this proliferation of forms could become unmanageable were it not for the fact that virtually all the hundreds of individual adjectives follow a handful of morphological (i.e., form) patterns—just as nouns do. In this chapter I will introduce you to the five main patterns of adjective declension by teaching you one pattern adjective for each type. You will need to memorize the three (masculine, feminine, neuter) nominative singular forms of each of the five pattern adjectives. You should sit down and memorize these fifteen forms in the next five minutes. I'll bet you won't find that a difficult task.

Ready? Here they are:

- 1) καλός, καλή, καλόν (*good, beautiful*)
- 2) ἀθάνατος, ἀθάνατος, ἀθάνατον (*immortal, deathless*)
- 3) ἀληθής, ἀληθής, ἀληθές (*true, real*)
- 4) καλλίων, καλλίων, κάλλιον (*better, more beautiful*)
- 5) ἡδύς, ἡδεῖη, ἡδύ (*pleasant, sweet*)

Note the following:

- The three forms listed for each pattern adjective are the three nominative singular forms: masculine, feminine, neuter.
- For some of these pattern adjectives (#2, 3, 4) exactly the same form is used to describe both masculine and feminine nouns. In the interests of a clear introduction I have shown you all 3 nominative singulars of each adjective even for patterns which actually have only 2 different forms. In the future, though, I will refer to adjectives by their lexical forms, i.e., the form by which they are listed in Greek lexica. (**Lexicon**=dictionary. Plural: *lexica* or *lexicons*.) Lexical entries list only the distinct nominative singular forms of adjectives. So, for example, the lexicon lists our Type 2 paradigm as ἀθάνατος, ἀθάνατον or (in abbreviated form) as ἀθάνατος, ον.

Forming Adjectives: Principles

So, now you'll need to learn how to form the nominative and genitive forms (both singular and plural) of the five pattern adjectives. Are you ready? Butt positioned firmly in chair? ... Well done! That didn't take long at all, did it? The fact is, you already know how to decline all of these adjectives.

1) How to decline καλός, ή, όν (καλός, καλή, καλόν)

- The masculine καλός (καλό/ς) declines just like άνθρωπος (άνθρωπο/ς). It is a 2nd-declension masculine adjective.
- The feminine καλή (καλά/ο) declines just like Ἀθήνη (Ἀθήνα/ο). It is a 1st-declension feminine adjective (long alpha).
- The neuter καλόν (καλό/ν) declines just like δῶρον (δώρο/ν). It is a 2nd-declension neuter adjective.

Take a minute to be sure you get the point. Write out the four forms of άνθρωπος that you know, and beside them, the four forms of καλός. Then do the same with Ἀθήνη and καλή, δῶρον and καλόν.

2) How to decline ἀθάνατος, ον (ἀθάνατος, ἀθάνατον)

- ἀθάνατος (ἀθάνατο/ς) declines just like άνθρωπος (άνθρωπο/ς) and ὁδός (ὁδό/ς). It is 2nd-declension masculine or feminine adjective.
- ἀθάνατον (ἀθάνατο/ν) declines just like δῶρον (δώρο/ν). It is a 2nd-declension neuter adjective.

3) How to decline ἀληθής, ες (ἀληθής, ἀληθές)

- ἀληθής (ἀληθέσ/ς) declines just like Σωκράτης (Σώκρατεσ/ς) and τριήρης (τριήρεσ/ς). It is a 3rd-declension masculine or feminine adjective.
- ἀληθές (ἀληθέσ/ο) declines just like τέλος (τέλεσ/ο) *except* that (as you can see) its nominative singular does not become o-grade. It is a 3rd-declension neuter adjective.

4) How to decline καλλίων, ον (καλλίων, κάλλιον)

- καλλίων (κάλλιον/ς) declines just like Ἀμαζών (Ἀμαζών/ς). It is a 3rd-declension masculine or feminine adjective.
- κάλλιον (κάλλιον/ο) declines just as you should expect 3rd-declension neuter nouns of this type to decline if there were any: it adds ο to the base in the nominative singular (leaving the final syllable short) and α in the nominative plural. It is a 3rd-declension neuter adjective.

5) How to decline ἡδύς, εἴη, ύ (ἡδύς, ἡδείη, ἡδυ.)

- ἡδύς (ἡδύς/ς) declines just like πέλεκυς (πέλεκυς/ς). It is a 3rd-declension masculine adjective.
- ἡδείη (ἡδείη/ο) declines just like ἀδικία (ἀδικία/ο). It is a 1st-declension feminine adjective.
- ἡδυ (ἡδύς/ο) declines just like ἄστυ (ἄστυς/ο). It is a 3rd-declension neuter adjective.

Note that the masculines and neuter bases of all -υς, -εἴη, -υ adjectives end in the υ^ε that is *shape-shifting*.

Forming adjectives: Details

I include a chart of the four forms of these adjectives to make clear that they decline (make their forms) virtually identically to their noun counterparts. These charts will do you no good if you ignore them or if (on the other extreme) you simply memorize them as if they were new data. The correct way to use these charts is to consider what each form *should be* and confirm that it is. That is, for each base ask yourself, “For a **base** of this type, what is the proper **case ending** for this gender, case and number? And, should any complications arise from putting that case ending on this base?” You will discover that almost every adjective form is precisely as you would have anticipated based on your knowledge of noun forms. I have boldfaced the few forms that differ from their counterparts in the noun system. I will explain those forms at the end of this section.

Type 1 (-ος, -η, -ον) Adjectives

	Masculine καλό/	Feminine καλά/	Neuter καλό/
Nom. Sing.	καλός [καλό/ς]	καλή [καλά/ο]	καλόν [καλό/ν]
Nom. Pl.	καλοί [καλό/ι]	καλαί [καλά/ι]	καλά [καλό/α]
Gen. Sing.	καλοῦ [καλό/υ]	καλῆς [καλά/ς]	καλοῦ [καλό/υ]
Gen. Pl.	καλῶν [καλό/ων]	καλῶν [καλά ^ε /ων]	καλῶν [καλό/ων]

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Type 2 (-ος, -ον) Adjectives

	Masculine ἀθάνατο/	Feminine ἀθάνατο/	Neuter ἀθάνατο/
Nom. Sing.	ἀθάνατος [ἀθάνατο/ς]		ἀθάνατον [ἀθάνατο/ν]
Nom. Pl.	ἀθάνατοι [ἀθάνατο/ι]		ἀθάνατα [ἀθάνατο/α]
Gen. Sing.	ἀθανάτου [ἀθάνατο/υ]		ἀθανάτου [ἀθάνατο/υ]
Gen. Pl.	ἀθανάτων [ἀθάνατο/ων]		ἀθανάτων [ἀθάνατο/ων]

Type 3 (-ης, -ες) Adjectives

	Masculine ἀληθέσ/	Feminine ἀληθέσ/	Neuter ἀληθέσ/
Nom. Sing.	ἀληθής [ἀληθέσ/ς]		ἀληθές [ἀληθέσ/ς]
Nom. Pl.	ἀληθείες [ἀληθέσ/ες]		ἀληθέα [ἀληθέσ/α]
Gen. Sing.	ἀληθέος [ἀληθέσ/ος]		ἀληθέος [ἀληθέσ/ος]
Gen. Pl.	ἀληθέων [ἀληθέσ/ων]		ἀληθέων [ἀληθέσ/ων]

Type 4 (-ων, -ον) Adjectives

	Masculine κάλλιον/	Feminine κάλλιον/	Neuter κάλλιον/
Nom. Sing.	καλλίων [καλλίον/ς]		κάλλιον [καλλίον/ς]
Nom. Pl.	καλλίονες [καλλίον/ες]		καλλίονα [καλλίον/α]
Gen. Sing.	καλλίονος [καλλίον/ος]		καλλίονος [καλλίον/ος]
Gen. Pl.	καλλιόνων [καλλίον/ων]		καλλιόνων [καλλίον/ων]

Type 5 (-υς, εἶη -υ) Adjectives

	Masculine ἡδύς/	Feminine ἡδεῖα/	Neuter ἡδύς/
Nom. Sing.	ἡδύς [ἡδύς/ς]	ἡδεῖα [ἡδεῖα/ς]	ἡδύς [ἡδύς/ς]
Nom. Pl.	ἡδέες [ἡδύς/ες]	ἡδεῖαι [ἡδεῖα/ι]	ἡδέα [ἡδύς/α]
Gen. Sing.	ἡδέος [ἡδύς/ος]	ἡδείης [ἡδεῖα/ς]	ἡδέος [ἡδύς/ος]
Gen. Pl.	ἡδέων [ἡδύς/ων]	ἡδειῶν [ἡδεῖα/ων]	ἡδέων [ἡδύς/ων]

As you see, few adjective forms vary from their analogous noun forms—and that in minor ways.

- The genitive plurals of feminine adjectives of the 1st declension, almost always *contract* (run together) from ἔων to ὦν. That does not occur in nouns. So, although you might anticipate the feminine genitive καλέων [καλα^ε/ων], the form actually appears as καλῶν [καλα^ε/ων]. Similarly, adjectives like [ῥδεια^ε/ων] almost always *contract* to forms like ῥδειῶν [ῥδεια^ε/ων]. Nouns don't.
- The neuter nominative singular of adjectives with bases like ἀληθέσ/ differs from neuter nominative singular nouns with similar bases in that the adjectives do not experience vowel gradation. The noun form is τέλος (τέλε^ο/ο). The adjective form is ἀληθές (ἀληθέσ/ο).

How to translate Greek adjectives: Principles

1) Adjectives are often used simply *to describe nouns*. Grammarians speak of this as the **attributive use** of the adjective. If the noun is specified by a definite article, *the definite article must immediately precede the adjective*.

σοφός βασιληῦς	=	a wise king
βασιληῦς σοφός	=	a wise king
ὁ σοφός βασιληῦς	=	the wise king
ὁ βασιληῦς ὁ σοφός	=	the wise king (literally: the king, the wise one)

2) An adjective can be used *to make a predication (an assertion)*—even without using a verb. *The assertion is implied when the definite article does not immediately precede the adjective*. Grammarians speak of this use as the **predicative use** of the adjective.

σοφός ὁ βασιληῦς	=	The king is wise (literally: Wise ... the king!)
ὁ βασιληῦς σοφός	=	The king is wise (literally: The king ... wise!)

3) Often adjectives accompanied by definite articles do not describe any noun actually present in the context. When you find an adjective accompanied by a definite article, but you cannot find any noun that the adjective agrees with and describes, pay close attention to the gender and number of the definite article. Then supply the appropriate notion in English—usually as follows:

If the *article* is *masculine*, infer “man” (*singular*), “men” or “people” (*plural*).

If the *article* is *feminine*, infer “woman” (*singular*), “women” (*plural*).

If the *article* is *neuter*, infer “thing” (*singular*), “things” (*plural*).

Grammarians call this the **nominal** (noun-ish) **use** of the adjective: The adjective essentially functions as a noun. We can do the same thing in English: “Only *the good* <people> die young.”

Here are some examples of nominal adjectives. Make sure you understand them.

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πλούσιος, η, ον	<i>rich</i>	νέος, η, ον	<i>new, young</i>
ὁ πλούσιος	<i>the rich man</i>	ὁ νέος	<i>the young man</i>
οἱ πλούσιοι	<i>the rich men or people</i>	οἱ νέοι	<i>the young men (the youths)</i>
ἡ πλουσίη	<i>the rich woman</i>	ἡ νέη	<i>the young woman</i>
αἱ πλούσιαι	<i>the rich women</i>	αἱ νέαι	<i>the young women</i>
τὸ πλούσιον	<i>the rich thing</i>	τὸ νέον	<i>the new thing</i>
τὰ πλούσια	<i>the rich things (riches)</i>	τὰ νέα	<i>the new things (recent events, the news)</i>

Semantic range

Words seldom refer to a single unambiguous notion. In English, for example, the word *bank* can refer either to a place where money is kept or to the side of a river. The word *good* can mean *tasty* (as in “a *good* meal”) or *well-built* (as in “a *good* car”). The range of notions to which any given word can refer is called its **semantic range**. Some words (like *nitrogen*) have very narrow semantic ranges. Others (like *get*, *cool*, *good*, etc.) have very broad semantic ranges.

Similarly, the semantic range of some Greek words is narrow; that of others is broad. You will need to accustom yourself to the fact that translation of Greek is not mere mechanical replacement of a Greek word with a single English equivalent. When you begin to use a Greek lexicon, you will usually find various possible English renderings of the Greek word. These English words are intended to suggest the semantic range of the word to you rather than to give you the English translation of the word. As a translator, you must ultimately rely on your own trained intellect to understand specific semantic notions in specific contexts.

For example, Greeks speak of both kings and cups as καλός, καλή, καλόν (good, beautiful). If they speak of ἡ καλὴ κύλιξ τοῦ καλοῦ βασιλῆος, they probably have in mind the thought we would express as “The beautiful cup of the good king” rather than “The good cup of the beautiful king.” As your Greek vocabulary grows, you should remain sensitive to the matter of semantic range and attempt to express the thought represented in Greek with the best English word you can find. Don’t be slavishly bound to a single English word.

How to translate Greek adjectives: Details

1) Before you can understand a Greek adjective, you need to *know its lexical form and semantic range*. The lexical form gives you the information necessary to understand the form of the word. The semantic range gives you the information necessary to understand the meaning of the word. If you don’t know one or the other of these things, you will need to look the word up in a lexicon.

2) Once you know the lexical form of the adjective, you can use morphological analysis to identify its **base**. Then you can *analyze the specific form* in the sentence you are reading and identify its gender, case, and number.

3) Identify the noun the adjective describes. What noun in the phrase has a form with the same gender, case, and number as the adjective? That is (almost certainly) the noun the adjective describes. If the adjective does not agree with any noun in the phrase, a definite article will accompany the adjective. Interpret the article + adjective as a nominal adjective.

Tip: One simple way to discipline yourself to get agreement of adjectives right is to draw a line from every adjective to the noun you think it modifies and then to confirm that both items have the same gender, case, and number.

4) Consciously decide the use of the adjective. Is it *attributive, predicative, or nominal*?

5) Keeping all these matters in mind, translate the sentence. Be sure that your translation is clear and makes sense.

What now?

- After you have carefully worked your way through each of the paradigm adjectives, making sure that you can properly construct all twelve forms of all five adjectives, practice using these adjectives with the nouns you know. Make up simple phrases that contain both nominatives and genitives, and write them in Greek. E.g., “the beautiful horses of the immortal gods”; “the sweet punishment of the very good (“better”) boy”; “the better of the true kings”; the beautiful hair (Greek uses the plural “hairs” to mean “a head of hair”) of the sweet mother.” At this point it doesn’t matter if the phrases are somewhat nonsensical. A few minutes of writing silly phrases won’t do any harm, and if you learn to understand how adjectives agree with their nouns, you will have made significant progress towards your goal of reading real Greek texts.
- Using the adjectives that you know, write several phrases each that illustrate the three uses (attributive, predicative, nominal) of Greek adjectives.