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GREEK VERBS

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1. OVERVIEW OF FORMS

The Greek verb has two voices (active and passive), two aspects (continuous and noncontinuous) and three tenses (present, future and past). Like this:

Active:

Continuous

Present *ðu'levo I am working*Future *θa ðu'levo I shall be working*Past *'ðuleva I was working*

Noncontinuous

(na) *ðu'lepso I (should) work**θa ðu'lepso I shall work**'ðulepsa I worked*

Passive:

Continuous

Present *'di nome I am getting dressed*Future *θa 'di nome I shall be getting d.*Past *di 'nomuna I was getting dressed*

Noncontinuous

(na) *di 'θo I (should) get dressed**θa di 'θo I shall get dressed**'di θi ka I got dressed*

In addition there are a conditional tense, an imperative, and a set of perfective tenses made with the verb *to have*:

Conditional:

*θa 'ðuleva I would work**θa di 'nomuna I would get dressed*

Imperative:

'ðuleve work! 'ðulepse work! 'disu get dressed!

Perfective:

*'exo ðu'lepsi / ndi 'θi I have worked / got dressed**θa 'exo ðu'lepsi / ndi 'θi I shall have worked / got dressed**'ixa ðu'lepsi / ndi 'θi I had worked / got dressed*

2. USE OF THE FORMS

2.1. Active versus passive

In principle, active verbs are those where the subject carries out the action ('he ate the tiger'), while passive verbs are those where the subject suffers the action ('he was eaten by the tiger', or more colloquially 'he got eaten'). But Greek makes rather wider use of the passive forms than this:

- Some very common verbs are passive in form but have an active meaning - i.e. the subject carries out the action:

*'skjeptome I think**'stekome I stand**kji 'mame I sleep*

Verbs with such meanings have no active form. Some grammarians call these verbs 'deponent'.

- Some verbs take the active form when the action is done to something else, but the passive form when the action is done to the subject:

*'kri vo I hide (something)**'kri vome I hide (myself)**'pl eno I wash (something)**'pl enome I wash (myself)*

Some grammarians call these verbs 'reflexive'.

- Genuine passives - i.e. neither 'deponent' nor 'reflexive' - are rare in Greek, and a sentence such as 'he got eaten' would normally be rendered as

'they ate him'. But because many common words behave either like deponents or like reflexives, you still have to know all the passive forms.

- Three particular verbs take active forms in their continuous tenses and passive forms in their noncontinuous tenses. These are shown in the Vocabulary as 'mixed' verbs.

A number of verbs appear in the Vocabulary in both active and passive forms, with an appropriate difference of meaning: *ma'zevo* collect, *ma'zevome* get picked up. In theory any verb can be either active or passive, but this doesn't always seem to happen, so the best course is to treat the active and passive as separate verbs.

2.2. Continuous versus noncontinuous

English has both continuous and noncontinuous verb-forms: *he was standing* (continuous, denoting a state, or an action whose completion is not important) versus *he stood* (noncontinuous, denoting an event that is now over). Greek makes the same difference in the future and in the past (but see later for the noncontinuous present):

<i>θα 'ðo tin e'leni</i>	<i>I shall see Helen (once)</i>
<i>θα 'vlepo tin e'leni</i>	<i>I shall see Helen (repeatedly)</i>
<i>tin 'iða</i>	<i>I saw her (once)</i>
<i>tin 'evlepa</i>	<i>I used to see her</i>

2.3. Conditional, imperative, perfective

The conditional, as in English, is used when there is an 'if' present or implied: *'ðen θα 'ðuleva* *I wouldn't work (if...)*. The imperative is used to give instructions. The perfectives have the same meanings as in English (and have no non-continuous forms).

2.4. Persons

In English verbs, the person carrying out the action is denoted by the pronoun immediately before the verb: *'I arrived*, *'you did it*. In Greek it is the ending of the verb that defines the person: *'θelo* *I want*, *'θelis*, *'θelete* *you want*, and the pronoun is used only for emphasis. Greek recognises six 'persons' in the grammatical sense, and each of the tenses shown in the overview above varies its ending (see later) to denote these six persons:

Singular	Plural	
1st	I	we
2nd	you (informal)	you (formal)
3rd	he/she/it	they

The 3rd sing. means 'he or she or it' in Greek - there is no distinction.

Like many languages, Greek has two forms for 'you', one informal and one formal. The informal form is used when addressing family, friends, children and animals; the formal form is used when addressing anyone else, and when addressing more than one person of whatever status. This usage is the same as that of French *tu/vous* and German *Du/Sie* - but in Greek you can use the informal form to practically anyone you've spoken to before, unless you feel that an air of particular formality is appropriate.

There is no satisfactory word in Greek for the indefinite pronoun 'one' in English, as is *'One doesn't do that*'. Instead, use whichever person seems appropriate in the context - usually *'you (inf.)*' or *'you (fml.)*'.

3. FORMING THE TENSES

3.1. Resources

Greek uses four resources to make the different tenses:

- it can use a different stem. The active stems shown above are *ḏulev* for the continuous and *ḏuleps* for the noncontinuous, while the passive stems are *din* and *diθ* respectively.
- it can use different endings: *o*, *a*, *ome*, etc. in the overview above. This document uses a dot to separate the stem from the ending in places where that makes it clearer.
- it can add a particle such as *θa* or *na* before the verb.
- it can move the stress to a different syllable: *θa ḏu'lepso* (future) versus *'ḏulepsa* (past).

3.2. Verb classes

We also need to distinguish between Class I verbs and Class II verbs, since they form the tenses differently. Fortunately the distinction is easy to make: Class I verbs are those whose dictionary-form is stressed on the stem - *'vlepo*, *'krivome* - whereas Class II verbs are those whose dictionary-form is stressed on the ending: *mi 'lo*, *bo'ro*, *θi 'mame*, *kra'tçeme*. A few Class II verbs behave slightly differently from the majority, so I call them Class IIX and mark them in the Vocabulary with 'x'. Passives in *eme* behave slightly differently from passives in *ame*, but we don't need to give them names because their category is apparent from the dictionary-form.

Forming the tenses is dealt with in detail below.

4. VERB 'TO BE'

Present	Past		
'ime	<i>I am</i>	'imuna	<i>I was</i>
'ise	<i>you (inf.) are</i>	'isuna	<i>you (inf.) were</i>
'ine	<i>he/she/it is</i>	'itane	<i>he/she/it was</i>
'imaste	<i>we are</i>	'imaste	<i>we were</i>
'iste	<i>you (fml.) are</i>	'isaste	<i>you (fml.) were</i>
'ine	<i>they are</i>	'itan	<i>they were</i>

It will be seen that *we are* and *we were* are the same in Greek (but *'imastan we were* can be used if the context doesn't make the meaning clear). There are also other variant forms, which I don't list. There is no noncontinuous. The future is made by prefixing *θa*, usually with vowel elision: *θa 'ime* or *'θame I shall be*.

5. CONTINUOUS PRESENT

English has two present tenses, one continuous and one noncontinuous: *I work* and *I am working*. In Greek the continuous present is used to render both meanings: *ḏu'levo tin i'mera I work during the day*, *ḏu'levo 'tora I'm working now*. The Greek noncontinuous present has other functions, described later.

5.1. Active continuous present

To form the active continuous present, add personal endings to the continuous stem:

Class I	Class II	Class IIX
'ftan.o	mi 'l.o	bo'r.o

	'reach'	'speak'	'can'	
I:	'ftan.o	mi'l.ao	bo'r.o	
you:	'ftan.is	mi'l.as	bo'r.is	
he:	'ftan.i	mi'l.ai	bo'r.i	
we:	'ftan.ume	mi'l.ame	bo'r.ume	
you:	'ftan.ete	mi'l.ate	bo'r.ite	
they:	'ftan.une	mi'l.ane	bo'r.une	

Notes:

- in Class I verbs the stress remains on the stem; in Class II and Class IIX verbs it remains on the ending.

- Class II verbs have a throughout the ending, the dictionary-form mi'lo becoming mi'lao colloquially. Other vowels are however found in the ending in higher styles.

- Class IIX has the same vowels as Class I (except in the 2nd plur.), but with the stress on the ending instead of on the stem.

- final e in the 3rd plur. may be omitted.

5.1.1. Shortened forms

A few Class I verbs whose stem ends in a vowel or χ have shortened forms of the active continuous present. These shortened forms are used side by side with the longer forms, but are more colloquial. They are shown in the Vocabulary with an x: a'kuo x.

Full	Shortened	Full	Shortened
'hear'	'say'		
I:	a'kuo	a'kuo	'le χ o 'leo
you:	a'kuis	a'kus	'lejjis 'les
he:	a'kui	a'kui	'lejji 'lei
we:	a'kuume	a'kume	'le χ ume 'leme
you:	a'kuete	a'kute	'lejje χ e 'lete
they:	a'kuune	a'kune	'le χ une 'lene

'be at fault'	'eat'		
I:	'fteo	'fteo	'tro χ o 'troo
you:	'fteis	'ftes	'troj χ is 'tros
he:	'ftei	'ftei	'troj χ i 'troi
we:	'fteume	'fteme	'tro χ ume 'trome
you:	'fteete	'ftete	'troj χ e χ e 'trote
they:	'fteune	'ftene	'tro χ une 'trone

Similarly 'θes you (*inf.*) want instead of 'θelis, and 'pao 'pas 'pai 'pame 'pate 'pane as a frequently used alternative to pi'jjeno.

5.2. Passive continuous present

Passive verbs form their continuous present by adding passive endings to the continuous stem:

Class I	Class II	Class II	
'get up'	'sleep'	'get tired'	
I:	'di n. ome	kj i 'm. ame	va 'rj j. eme
you:	'di n. ese	kj i 'm. ase	va 'rj j. ese
he:	'di n. ete	kj i 'm. ate	va 'rj j. ete
we:	di 'n. omaste	kj i 'm. umaste	va 'rj j. umaste
you:	'di n. este	kj i 'm. aste	va 'rj j. este
they:	'di n. onde	kj i 'm. unde	va 'rj j. unde

Notes:

- in Class I verbs the stress remains on the stem, except for the 1st plur. *di 'nomaste*, where the ending is three syllables long and must therefore always carry the stress. In Class II verbs the stress remains on the ending.
- verbs ending in *ame* resemble their active counterpart *mi 'lo* in that *a* is present in four of the six endings, *u* being used in the other two. Verbs ending in *eme* have *e* where verbs in *ame* have *a*.
- the three 'mixed' verbs form their continuous present tense like *'di nome*.

5.3. Similarities of sound

The endings *ete* and *ate* refer to 'you (fml.)' when added to active verbs, but to 'he/she/it' when added to passive verbs; similarly the endings *ume* and *ame* refer to 'we' on active verbs, but to 'I' on passive verbs (passive *ome* not being readily distinguished from active *ume* in speech). So you need to know whether a verb is normally active or passive to know which person is meant:

'ftanete you (fml.) arrive
si 'konete he gets up

mi 'late you (fml.) speak
θi 'mate he remembers

'θel ume we want
'erxome I come

mi 'lame we speak
kji 'mame I sleep

6. NONCONTINUOUS STEM

6.1. Forming the stem

As can be seen in the Vocabulary, every Greek verb has two stems, one continuous and one noncontinuous: the continuous stem is used to make the continuous tense, and the noncontinuous to make the noncontinuous tenses. There is no reliable way of predicting one stem from the other, so at the end of the day you have to learn each verb individually (and not all dictionaries list both stems!). But the following patterns are worth noting:

- most Class I active verbs (Types a to f) form the noncontinuous by adding *s* to the continuous stem, with various modifications to the resulting consonant-cluster.
- Class I active verbs of Types g to k don't add *s*.
- all Class II active verbs (i.e. Types l and m) add *s* to form the noncontinuous. There is some variation in the vowel preceding the *s*.
- the passive noncontinuous is formed from the active noncontinuous stem.
- all passive noncontinuous forms end in 'o, and usually 'θo, and the stress always falls on the last syllable.

Noncontinuous forms show a number of alternatives: for example *'ðoso* (from *'ði no* Type k), is *'ðoko* in very popular speech, while *epitre'fθo* (from *epi 'trepome*, Type p) has the more learned form *epitra'po*. Also, passive noncontinuous forms that end in *'sθo* or *'fθo* are often pronounced *'sto* and *'fto* (see under Pronunciation). Alternatively the *p* of Type p verbs may be retained

under learned influence: skjep'θo. So this verb can appear as skjep'θo, skjep'to, skje'fθo or skje'fto.

6.2. Change of Class

The stress can fall on the stem in the continuous form but on the ending in the noncontinuous form, and *vice versa*, so a verb can change from Class I to Class II, and *vice versa* when changing aspect. As follows:

- all passive verbs, of either Class, are Class IIX in the noncontinuous.
- all active Class II verbs (Types l and m) change to Class I in the noncontinuous.
- most active Class I verbs don't change Class, but a few (Types h and i) change to Class II in the noncontinuous.

7. NONCONTINUOUS PRESENT

7.1. Formation

To form the noncontinuous present, add the *active* endings of the appropriate Class (I or IIX) to the noncontinuous stem. Since the noncontinuous is most often used after the particle na, I show that too:

	'lose'	'ask'	'get tired'	
I:	na-'xas.o	na-ro'tis.o	na-vare'θ.o	
you:	na-'xas.is	na-ro'tis.is	na-vare'θ.is	
he:	na-'xas.i	na-ro'tis.i	na-vare'θ.i	
we:	na-'xas.ume	na-ro'tis.ume	na-vare'θ.ume	
you:	na-'xas.ete	na-ro'tis.ete	na-vare'θ.ite	
they:	na-'xas.une	na-ro'tis.une	na-vare'θ.une	

The few active Class I verbs that change to Class IIX in the noncontinuous (Types h and i) behave as follows (note the change from γ to jj in 'vγo):

	'say'	'go out'	'go up'	
I:	na-'p.o	na-'vγ.o	n-ane'v.o	
you:	na-'p.is	na-'vjj.is	n-ane'v.is	
he:	na-'p.i	na-'vjj.i	n-ane'v.i	
we:	na-'p.ume	na-'vγ.ume	n-ane'v.ume	
you:	na-'p.ite	na-'vjj.ite	n-ane'v.ite	
they:	na-'p.une	na-'vγ.une	n-ane'v.une	

Verbs of Type t take active Class I forms in the noncontinuous:

	'sit'	'come'	'come' (see note)	
I:	na-ka'θis.o	na-'erθ.o	'n-art.o	
you:	na-ka'θis.is	na-'erθ.is	'n-art.is	
he:	na-ka'θis.i	na-'erθ.i	'n-art.i	
we:	na-ka'θis.ume	na-'erθ.ume	'n-art.ume	
you:	na-ka'θis.ete	na-'erθ.ete	('n-art.ete)	
they:	na-ka'θis.une	na-'erθ.une	'n-art.une	

Note: The shortened forms 'n-arto etc. are arrived at by phonetic processes described under Pronunciation, and are very common (except for 'n-artete) in the colloquial language.

'fao, the noncontinuous of 'troγo, behaves like 'pao: 'fao 'fas 'fai 'fame 'fate 'fane.

7.2. Use of the noncontinuous present

The noncontinuous present can be used only after the particles *na* and *θa* and a few conjunctions. In all cases it means that the action is seen as having an end, or at any rate as not running on indefinitely:

an 'fai *if he eats (once)*
 an 'troi *if he (makes a habit of) eating*
 'θelo na- 'ðulevo *I want to work (habitually)*
 'θelo na 'ðulepso *I want to do some work*

The noncontinuous present cannot stand without such an introductory particle.

8. CONTINUOUS AND NONCONTINUOUS FUTURE

To make the continuous future, prefix *θa* to the continuous present; to make the noncontinuous future, prefix *θa* to the noncontinuous present:

θa-ðu'levume 'kaθe 'mera *we'll be working every day*
 θa-va'rjjeme me-to-'jjani *I'll be getting bored with Yannis*
 θa-ðu'lepsume 'avrjjo *we'll do some work tomorrow*
 θa-vare'θo me-a'fti-ti-ðu'lja *I'll get bored with that work*

The negative *ðe*n precedes *θa*:

ðe-θa-ðu'levume 'kaθe 'mera *we won't be working every day*
 ðe-θa-vare'θo me-to-'jjani *I won't get bored with Yannis*

9. THE PARTICLE *na*

9.1. Using *na* to join verbs

Virtually all languages have a mechanism for joining two verbs together; English puts the second verb in the infinitive: *we want to eat, they decided to leave*. Greek has no infinitive, so it puts the second verb in the present (usually noncontinuous) and joins the two verbs with *na*. This means that the second verb, as well as the first, has to show personal endings:

'θelo na- 'erθo *I want to come*
 'θelis na- 'erθis *you (inf.) want to come*
 'θeli na- 'erθi *he/she/it wants to come*
 'θelume na- 'erθume *we want to come*
 'θelete na- 'erθete *you (fml.) want to come*
 'θelune na- 'erθune *they want to come*

The second part of these expressions is a complete clause in Greek (*I want that I should come*), so different meanings can be created by using different personal endings on the two verbs:

'θelo na- 'erθis *I want you (inf.) to come*
 'θelo na- 'erθi *I want him come*
 'θelume na- 'erθete *we want you (fml.) to come*
 'θelete na- 'erθo *you (fml.) want me to come*

Some other common expressions followed by *na* and either the noncontinuous or continuous present according to meaning are:

- el 'pizo *hope to*:
 el 'pizo na-jji 'riso 'avrio *I hope to come back tomorrow*
- ko 'ndevo *be close (to doing sthg.)*:
 ko 'ndevo na-stama 'tisi *he's close to stopping, he's nearly stopping*
- m-a 'resi *I like to*:
 m-a 'resi na- 'troxo e'ljes *I like eating olives*
- sko 'pevo *intend to*:
 'pote sko 'pevis na- 'maθis elini 'ka? *when do you intend to learn Greek?*

- 'skjeptome *think of*:
'skjeptonde na- 'fiχune *they're thinking of leaving*
- 'ksero *know (how to)*:
ðeŋ- 'gzeri na- 'χrafi *he doesn't know how to write*
- 'leχo *talk about*:
'lei na- jji 'risi *he's talking about going back*
- bo'ri (3rd sing. of boro) *it's possible*:
bo'ri na- 'erθume *perhaps we'll come*
- ðen- a'ksizi *it's not worth*:
ðen- a'ksizi na- stenoxori 'θis *it's not worth your getting annoyed*
- apaχo' revete (3rd sing.) *it is forbidden*:
apaχo' revete na- 'fas pso' mi *it's forbidden for you (inf.) to eat bread*
- epi 'trepete (3rd sing.) *it's allowed*:
epi 'trepete na- 'fiχume? *is it allowed that we leave? are we allowed to leave?*
Used by itself, epi 'trepete means *May I?*

9.2. Using na as a noun-clause

Expressions introduced with na are of course noun-clauses, and have four important further uses:

- after adjectives:
ka'litero na- 'fame e'ðo *it's better for us to eat here*
- after the prepositions 'ðixos and xo'ris *without*:
ðu'levume 'ðixos na- pliro' nomaste *we work without getting paid*
- after the preposition jja to to indicate purpose:
'erxome jja- na- 'ðo to- 'spiti *I'm coming in order to see the house*
- standing alone, to indicate a possible but not actual course of action:
na- 'fiχo? *are you suggesting that I should leave?*
'pu na- 'pame? *where are we to go?*
'pote na- 'erθume? *when would you like us to come?*

As a noun-clause, an expression with na can begin with the definite article: to na- 'fijjis a' mesos 'ine to- ka'litero *your leaving immediately is the best.*

9.3. Negative of na

na is made negative by adding mi n, not ðen:

'θelo na- 'mi n- 'erθis	<i>I want you not to come</i>
bo'rune na- 'mi - 'fiχune	<i>they might not leave</i>
'ti na- 'mi - 'fao?	<i>what am I not to eat?</i>
ðu'levo jja- na- 'mi - va' rjeme	<i>I work so as not to be bored</i>
to- na- 'mi n- 'dros...	<i>your policy of not eating...</i>

This difference between mi n and ðen enables Greek to make distinctions of meaning which English has to make in other ways:

ðe- 'θeli na- stama' tisi	<i>she doesn't have a desire to stop</i>
'θeli na- 'mi - stama' tisi	<i>she has a desire to not stop</i>
ðem- 'brepi na- 'pate	<i>it isn't necessary that you should go</i>
'prepi na- 'mi m- 'bate	<i>it's necessary that you should not go</i>