

Using Present Tense Markers to Make Beginning Greek Easier

Greek verbs have a daunting reputation and their complexity most often generates the a steep learning curve for students of Beginning Greek. To level out this curve somewhat, there is a component of constructing forms of Greek verbs that has great pedagogical value, but is underutilized: present tense markers added to verb stems. Teachers may not be aware of these markers, or only in a tangential way, and textbooks do not take structural advantage of them, but this also means that teachers can easily capitalize on the patterns of present tense markers with any method or textbook. This presentation outlines the helpful patterns linked to four present tense markers.

The most widespread and productive of these markers is the suffix $-\zeta-$. This involves taking a root and making a verb of it (e.g., $\theta\alpha\nu\mu\alpha \rightarrow \theta\alpha\nu\mu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$, $\nu\omicron\mu- \rightarrow \nu\omicron\mu\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$). Uniquely of the four markers discussed here, this suffix remains attached to the stem in other tenses. As is normal for dentals, the $-\zeta-$ becomes $-\sigma-$ when a σ is added ($\theta\alpha\nu\mu\acute{\alpha}\sigma\omega$, $\acute{\epsilon}\theta\alpha\acute{\upsilon}\mu\alpha\sigma\alpha$, $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\mu\iota\sigma\alpha$), or $-\epsilon-$ in the case of $-\iota\zeta-$ (future tense $\nu\omicron\mu\iota\tilde{\omega}$).

A less common marker but familiar from several high-frequency verbs is the suffix, $-\sigma\kappa-$. The key here is to convey and reinforce that this marker is specific to the present tense and so does not remain in any other tense. Especially since these verbs consistently have a second aorist, it helps to realize that the $-\sigma\kappa-$ does not “disappear” but is added to the stem to form the present (e.g., $\epsilon\upsilon\rho- \rightarrow \epsilon\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\sigma\kappa\omega$, $\theta\alpha\nu- \rightarrow \theta\nu\acute{\eta}\sigma\kappa\omega$).

Similarly a prefixed reduplication also marks the present tense. Reduplication is more often associated with the perfect tense, but in the present tense a duplicated consonant is separated by $-\iota-$ instead of $-\epsilon-$. As with $-\sigma\kappa-$, the key is to understand that this is an addition that marks the present tense, not a component of the stem that vanishes in other tenses. Once again,

verbs that use this marker have second aorists, so understanding this pattern illuminates unusual stem changes elsewhere. While the number of verbs with this present reduplication is low, they and their compounds are very frequent (e.g., γίγνομαι, γινώσκω, δίδωμι, τίθημι, ἵστημι, ἴημι).

Finally, there is -v-, another suffix that is exclusive to the present tense and which is commonly added to the stem of verbs having a second aorist. Again, the key is that this suffix is added to mark the present tense, not one that is deleted in other tenses. A number of high-frequency verbs have principal parts that are more easily understood when this marker is recognized (e.g., βαίνω, δείκνυμι, λαμβάνω; and because λν → λλ, ἀπόλλυμι, βάλλω).

A handout will include information about these markers and list the principal parts of all verbs from the Dickinson College Commentaries Core Greek Vocabulary that have these markers.