

## CHAPTER 1 | The Basics

This book is a user-friendly grammar of Modern Greek. It aims to be a comprehensive navigator, which will help absolute beginners like you get inside the world of Modern Greek and explore it safely. I guess that this world is hardly known to most of you, so a brief introduction might help. (But if this is too much for you or you believe you can do without it, skip this page and go directly to Unit 1.1 on [page 2](#).)

Modern Greek is the official language of Greece and one of the official languages of Cyprus. It is spoken today as a first or second language by 12-15 million people, not only in Greece and Cyprus, but also in countries with minority or immigrant communities of Greek origin (such as the USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, Georgia, Ukraine etc.). Modern Greek is also one of the official languages of the European Union.

As a descendant of Ancient Greek, Modern Greek belongs to an independent branch of the Indo-European language family. Compared to its ancestor, Modern Greek has a relatively simpler phonological system, with only five vowels and numerous consonants. Stress in Modern Greek is dynamic and restricted to one of the three final syllables of the word. Typologically, Modern Greek is an inflectional language, which means that grammatical information (such as number, case, tense, aspect etc.) is indicated by the endings of inflected words (nouns, pronouns, articles, adjectives, verbs). One of the main syntactic features of Modern Greek is free word order: The major constituents of the sentence (such as the subject, the verb or the object) may occupy different positions within it. Sentences with identical major constituents in a different order share roughly the same meaning but not the same focus (emphasis). Compounding and derivation are two of the major mechanisms of word formation, which explains why many words, even very common ones, are rather lengthy. Compared to English, reading in Modern Greek is easy. All you have to do is learn what each letter (or combination of letters) of the Greek alphabet represents, and then put things together in practice. Spelling, though, is not that easy. Unlike consonants, vowels are represented in various ways, and this might be a problem in terms of writing correctly (but there are rules to help you).

Like with any language, learning Modern Greek means developing certain skills. For instance, one must be able to understand what other people say, communicate with them, read, write, spell etc. All of these skills are important, but some are more important than others. Understanding and speaking (skills related to oral communication) are more important than reading and writing (skills related to written communication). If I master Italian, for example, what I will say is *I speak Italian* rather than *I write Italian*. Besides, there are people who speak fluently and cannot read or write a word.

Although less important, reading and writing are absolutely necessary in the learning con-

text you have chosen here (and there are several such contexts around). This is an e-book, which is a book after all, and what you see is a grammar, typically a written text. In this learning context, reading and writing are necessary as a first step to oral communication. So let's start with them.

## 1.1 The Greek Alphabet

The Greek alphabet consists of 24 letters, all in a capital and a small version. Small letters may differ from capital ones. Writing goes from left to right. Calligraphy (a Greek word) is not widespread these days, and hand writing does not differ radically from typing. Some letters are similar to letters of the Latin and the Cyrillic alphabets, a fact that makes life easier, but still might cause confusion.

It's now time to go through the Greek alphabet. Each letter (both capital and small) is introduced as a typing font. If you press on it, you can hear its pronunciation, by a female and a male voice. (If you press [here](#) you can see the hand-written version of the alphabet on YouTube.) English words are used as examples of pronunciation whenever possible. Keep in mind, though, that there is always some difference between the two languages. The names of the letters are not crucial at the moment, so stay focused on phonetics.

GREEK LETTER	DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS
A/α	The letter A/α represents a short [a], like in <i>hat</i> . (There are no long vowels in Modern Greek.) From now on I will use [a] as a support sound in order to introduce consonants.
B/β	This letter is not a [b], as you might expect. It's a [v], like in <i>vase</i> .
Γ/γ	The sound represented by Γ/γ has no equivalent in English. It is closer to the initial sound of the French word <i>rendez-vous</i> (and, please, check <a href="#">google.translate</a> for the real French pronunciation). Note that the small-letter version of the typing font has no inner space at the bottom.
Δ/δ	This letter represents [ð] like in <i>than</i> .
E/ε	E/ε stands for [e], like in <i>pen</i> .
Z/ζ	I believe it is really easy to relate the capital letter to [z], like in <i>zoo</i> . In order to write the small letter, first draw a horizontal line and then go on with a final <i>s</i> .
H/η	The letter H/η represents a short [i], like in <i>tip</i> .
Θ/θ	This letter stands for [θ], like in <i>thin</i> .

**Table 1.1:** *The Greek Alphabet: Letters and Their Phonetic Representation.*

GREEK LETTER	DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS
I/i	The letter again represents [i] like in <i>tip</i> (see H/η). So far two different letters, H/η and I/i, represent exactly the same sound. Conversely, if you hear [i] you cannot tell which letter denotes it. At this point you might wonder why two different letters should be used for an identical sound, and here is the answer: The Modern Greek writing system preserves in some respects the Ancient Greek tradition, and in Ancient Greek the two letters stood for different sounds. Now the phonetic difference is gone, but the writing difference is still here.
K/κ	This letter stands for an unaspirated [k] sound which is close to <i>book</i> .
Λ/λ	Here we have an [l] that is closer to the light [l] of <i>like</i> and not the dark [l] of <i>little</i> .
M/μ	It is easy to relate the capital M to an [m] sound like in <i>make</i> . In order to write the small letter, first draw a vertical line, then something close to the Latin <i>u</i> .
Ξ/ξ	What we have here is a double consonant, namely [ks], like in <i>ox</i> . In order to write the small letter, first draw a horizontal line, then a semicircle, and then a final <i>s</i> .
N/ν	This letter stands for [n], like in <i>noise</i> .
O/o	The letter O/o represents a short [o], like in <i>top</i> .
Π/π	This letter represents an unaspirated [p] sound, like in <i>stop</i> .
P/ρ	The sound represented by P/ρ is significantly different from the pronunciation of the English [r] in <i>tropical</i> , and closer to the Italian or the Spanish [r] in <i>Roberto</i> or <i>Ramón</i> (if you don't speak Italian or Spanish, check <a href="#">google.translate</a> for the correct pronunciation). In order to produce [r] the tip of the tongue must take a frontal position and loosely touch the area over the teeth of the upper jaw.
Σ/σ (-ς)	This letter represents an [s] sound, like in <i>see</i> . Notice that [s] has two small-letter versions. When [s] is word-final, it is written as -ς. In other positions it is written as σ.
T/τ	The letter T/τ stands for an unaspirated [t] sound, like in <i>spot</i> .
Y/υ	This letter is the third representation of the sound [i] like in <i>tip</i> . Now you have three letters to worry about.
Φ/φ	The letter Φ/φ stands for [f], like in <i>fish</i> .
X/χ	The sound represented by X/χ is close to <i>ham</i> or the Scottish <i>loch</i> , but really closer to the Spanish <i>jamón</i> (check again <a href="#">google.translate</a> ).

**Table 1.1:** *The Greek Alphabet: Letters and Their Phonetic Representation.*

GREEK LETTER	DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS
Ψ/ψ	The letter Ψ/ψ represents a double consonant, namely [ps]. The sound is close to <i>stops</i> .
Ω/ω	This is the last (but not least) letter of the Greek alphabet. Ω/ω again represents [o] like in <i>top</i> . Note that the capital version of the typing font is different from the hand-written version.

**Table 1.1:** *The Greek Alphabet: Letters and Their Phonetic Representation.*

In order to get Greek typing fonts start from here: <http://www.greek-language.com/Fonts.html>.

### Confusing Letters

When reading or writing Modern Greek, remember: *B/β* is not *B/b*, it represents [v]. *H/η* is not *H* or *n*, it represents [i]. The small-letter version of *N/ν* is not *v*, since this letter represents [n]. *P/ρ* is clearly not *P/p*, it is [r]. Finally *Y/υ* stand for [i] and *X/χ* stand for [h].

### Common Mistakes in Absolute-Beginner Writing

- In the small-letter version of *T/τ* the vertical line does not exceed the horizontal line like in the Latin *t*.
- The small-letter version of *Y/υ* has no additional line like the Latin *u*. And its bottom is circular, not angular. If you make it angular what you will have is *v*, that is [n].
- Unlike the Latin *I/i*, the small-letter version of *I* has no dot on top (*ι*).

### Small and Capital Letters

- Small-letter words are spelled with an initial capital letter when they start a sentence.
- All proper nouns are also spelled with an initial capital: Names of persons, months, days of the week (unlike French). Abstract nouns (such as *justice*) and concrete nouns (such as *table*) are spelled with an initial small letter.
- The full stop (.), the comma (,), the exclamation mark (!) and the ellipsis (...) are identical to the ones used in the Latin alphabet. The Greek interrogation mark (;) as well as quotation marks («\_\_») are different.

It is now time to practice. First try to read and then press on the word to check pronunciation.

Meaning is irrelevant at the moment so again focus on phonetics. Here are some really short words to start with.

(1a) με, μα, μη, σε, ας, πας, φας, πες, δες, λες

(1b) ΝΑ, ΑΝ, ΘΑ, ΤΑ, ΖΩ, ΔΕΝ, ΠΩΣ

In order to work with longer words, we need something more. Let me then introduce stress, a necessary complement of the Modern Greek phonetic system.

## 1.2 Stress

I will try to explain stress using a pair of words. These words consist of exactly the same sounds, in the same order (phonetically [pote]). Listen to them:

(2) ΠΟΤΕ / ΠΟΤΕ

Can you hear a difference? I hope your answer is “yes” (if it’s “no”, listen again). Why this difference? Because the vowels inside them seem to carry different weights. In the first word [o] is pronounced somewhat more loudly and a bit longer than [e]. In the second word this sort of emphasis is put on [e], which is now pronounced more loudly and longer than [o]. This is stress.

Let’s turn to more examples. What you have to do now is listen to the following words and decide which vowel sounds stronger (and then go to example 5 on [page 6](#) to see the marked vowel):

(3) ΦΟΡΑ            ΦΟΡΑ  
ΑΘΗΝΑ          ΑΘΗΝΑ  
ΩΜΟΣ            ΩΜΟΣ

Words with identical phonetic structure like the previous ones are real words. And these words differ in meaning because of the stress. ΠΟΤΕ and ΠΟΤΕ, for instance, mean “when” and “ever” (or “never”) respectively. Stress then affects meaning and therefore communication, a fact that goes significantly beyond these pairs of words (and several like them) and holds for every Modern Greek word. Stress actually works together with sounds to form the “profile” of each word. Errors of stress might then damage a word’s “profile” and cause confusion, or even destroy communication. At this moment you should stop worrying too much about your accent (I know you do) and start worrying about stress: No matter how “badly” you pronounce the Modern Greek γ (within certain limits, of course), people will certainly assume you are not a native (so what?), but they will understand what you are trying to say. If you mis-stress a word,

people will simply not get what you mean.

A few remarks about stress now:

- Stress is not fixed (like in French), but at least it is restricted to one of the last three syllables of the word. No matter how long a Greek word is (and there are several lengthy ones), the stress will never move beyond the third syllable.

(4)    τηλεφώνημα    τηλεφωνία    τηλεφωνικός  
          3 2 1            3 21            3 2 1

- Each word may bear only one stress (but see Unit 10.2.3 on [page 145](#) for an exception).
- The stress is represented in small-letter writing (unfortunately not in capital letters) by an accent mark on the stressed vowel of the word. Let's see the small-letter version of examples 2 and 3:

(5)    πότε/ποτέ, φόρα/φορά, Αθηνά/Αθήνα, ωμός/ώμος

The accent mark is there to indicate *which* vowel is stronger. Accordingly, it is not used in monosyllabic words (check example 1 on [page 5](#)).

- As absolute beginners, you should keep in mind that the accent mark is not decoration. It is an obligatory part of writing, which will help you develop your stress awareness.

Note that the accent mark is not a dot, but looks more like an index.

### 1.3 Time for Practice

Having introduced stress, let's practice now with some longer words:

(6)    έλα, από, νερό, βάζω, μαμά, θέλω, δίνω, θύμα,  
          φυτό, ξέρω, ψάρι, πάμε, χαρά, τώρα, όταν

The following words are phonetically the same, but their stress is different. Read first and then listen:

(7)    νόμος/νομός, μόνος/μονός, θόλος/θολός, χάλι/χαλί,  
          κάλος/καλός, φίλη/φιλί, πόλη/πολύ, ράφι/ραφή

Now, here are some longer words. Notice that the stress will always be on syllables 3-1:

(8) σήμερα, ποτήρι, απορώ, καλημέρα, τηλέφωνο, τηλεφωνώ, εφημερίδα

I kept some really long ones for the end. Take a long breath and start!

(9) εξωτερικός, καταναλώνω, αλατοπίπερο, ενημερωμένος, παρατηρητικός, αποδοτικότητα, ανεβοκατεβάζω, παραληρηματικός, περιχαρακώθηκα

Combinations of two or even three consonants are very common in Modern Greek:

(10a) τρία, κράτος, κλίμα, χρώμα, πέφτω, πλένω, αφρός, γλυκός, γνώμη, πράγμα, μνήμη, βρίσκω

(10b) άστρο, αστραπή, σπρώχνω, εχθρός, σκληρός, άνθρωπος, έμβρυο

Note that combinations of two identical consonants are pronounced exactly like the single consonant version.

(I) αλλά, Ελλάδα (this is the word for Greece!), γράμμα, άρρωστος, ιπποπόταμος

The letter Σ/σ (-ς) always stands for [s] among vowels, either inside the word or across word boundaries. It represents [z] when followed by [m] or [v] (for a full list and examples press here: <http://www.foundalis.com/lan/grphdetl.htm>). Listen and compare:

(II) άσε, όσα, πέρασα, θάλασσα, στόμα, σπόρος, σμήνος, σβήνω

Combinations of vowels are also possible:

(11) ζωή, ζώα, μία, τρώω, αέρας, εννέα, περίεργος, αηδόνι

Perhaps you have already noticed that the word-initial position may be kept by any sound. Final position, though, is usually kept by a vowel. The only consonants in word-final position are [s] and [n].

By now, you must have started to wonder whether there is a [b] or a [d] in Modern Greek. The answer lies in the following section.

## 1.4 More Sounds

There are some sounds which are represented not by one letter but by a combination of two letters. These sounds may be consonants or vowels.

### 1.4.1 Consonants

- The combination  $\mu\pi$  represents a [b] sound, which is close to *book*.
- The combination  $\nu\tau$  represents a [d] sound, which is close to *door*.
- The combinations  $\gamma\kappa/\gamma\gamma$  represent a [g] sound, which is close to *gum*. (Notice that  $\gamma\gamma$  is an exception to the rule about identical consonants. Remember? If not, check Unit 1.3 on [page 7](#)).

- In word-initial position  $\mu\pi$ ,  $\nu\tau$ ,  $\gamma\kappa$  are pronounced like [b], [d] and [g]. Inside the word they may be pronounced like [b/mb], [d/nd], and [g/ng], and in this case you are free to use any one of them. What you cannot do is pronounce  $\mu\pi$  like [mp],  $\nu\tau$  like [nt] and  $\gamma\kappa/\gamma\gamma$  like [nk].
- Like other consonants (see Unit 1.3 on [page 7](#)), [b], [d] and [g] can combine with consonants (usually [r]):  
(III)  $\mu\pi\rho\sigma\tau\acute{\alpha}$ ,  $\nu\tau\rho\sigma\pi\acute{\eta}$ ,  $\gamma\kappa\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\omicron\varsigma$

Apart from single consonants like [b], [d], [g], there are two double consonants which are represented by two letters:

- The combination  $\tau\sigma$  represents [ts].
- The combination  $\tau\zeta$  represents [dz].

Like [ks] and [ps], these consonants are produced by already existing single sounds, so they bring nothing new to the sound palette of Modern Greek.

I believe you are ready now to read the following words and then check pronunciation:

- (12)  $\mu\pi\rho\rho\acute{\alpha}$ ,  $\nu\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu\omega$ ,  $\gamma\kappa\acute{\alpha}\zeta\iota$ ,  $\alpha\mu\pi\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\iota$ ,  $\text{Αντ\acute{o}\nu\eta\varsigma}$ ,  $\phi\epsilon\gamma\gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota$ ,  $\omicron\mu\pi\rho\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\alpha$ ,  
 $\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\rho\alpha\varsigma$ ,  $\gamma\kappa\rho\epsilon\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ ,  $\tau\sigma\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\alpha$ ,  $\tau\sigma\iota\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\tau\omicron$ ,  $\tau\zeta\acute{\alpha}\mu\iota$ ,  $\tau\zeta\acute{\iota}\tau\zeta\iota\kappa\alpha\varsigma$

### 1.4.2 Vowels

There is only one new vowel here. This is [u], like in *foot*, which is represented by the combination  $\omicron\nu$ . There are, though, other combinations to represent vowels you already know:

- The sound [i] is also represented by the combinations  $\epsilon\iota$  or  $\omicron\iota$ . Now you have five representations of [i] to worry about.
- The sound [e] is also represented by  $\alpha\iota$ .

Now read the following words and check pronunciation. Note that the accent mark (if necessary) falls on the second letter of the combination:

(13) κάνει, μπορεί, ώμοι, ωμοί, είμαι, αίμα, ουρά, ούλα

### **The Double Dot**

Combinations that represent consonants equal a single sound (or sounds). In other words, *μπ* is always [b/mb], etc. Combinations of vowels don't. In other words, *αι* is most of the times [e], but could also be [ai]. How can you tell the difference while learning new words or while reading? These procedures involve writing, and a special mark is here to help.

(IV) παιδάκι / παιῖδάκι

The double dot on top of the second letter indicates that *αι* should be pronounced like [ai]. If the word is stressed on the first of the two vowels the accent mark by itself indicates separate pronunciation and the double dot is not necessary:

(V) Μάιος

When the combination has no accent mark or the accent mark is posited on the second letter, the letters represent a single sound (check the words of example 13).

- The double dot in writing is not decoration. In order to realize how important it is, go again to *παιδάκι* and *παιῖδάκι*. The first word means “little child”, the second “lamb chop”.

**Two Tricky Combinations: *av/ev***

One of the most tricky parts of Greek spelling concerns the *av/ev* combinations. Here the letter *Y/v* does not stand for a vowel but for a consonant (a unique case in Modern Greek writing). And, as if to make things worse, this consonant may be [v] or [f] according to the following sound:

- [v] when the following sound is voiced (voiced sounds are vowels, and consonants such as [l] or [r]).
- [f] when the following sound is voiceless (voiceless sounds are consonants such as [t], [k], [x]).

(VIa) αῤῥό, αῤῥή, Παρασκευή, εῤῥοῤῥώ

(VIb) αῤῥός, εῤῥολία, εῤῥαρισῥώ

(For a full list of voiced and unvoiced consonants press here: [http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Greek\\_pronunciation](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Greek_pronunciation)).

I kept the worst for the end: If the *av/ev* is stressed, the accent mark falls on *v*, a rather peculiar choice since the letter represents a consonant here:

(VII) ἀῤῥιο, εῤῥολος, Εῤῥα

Notice that if the accent mark falls on the first letter of the combination, then the two sounds are pronounced separately and now *Y/v* represents a vowel:

(VIII) ἀῤῥνος, ἀῤῥλος

## 1.5 Synopsis

It is now time to summarize the basics of pronunciation (and writing). Sounds are followed by every possible writing representation (in small-letter writing), along with examples (meaning is not necessary at the moment, but I believe we need some fresh air after all these pages on pronunciation).

### 1.5.1 Vowels

The Modern Greek vowel system is a simple (elementary) system, consisting of 5 short vowels.

SOUND	LETTER	EXAMPLE
[a]	α	μαμά (“Mom”)
[e]	ε, αι	νερό (“water”) παίζω (“to play”)

**Table 1.2:** *Modern Greek Vowels and Their Representation in Writing.*

SOUND	LETTER	EXAMPLE
[i]	η, ι, υ, ει, οι	ημέρα (“day”) ίσως (“perhaps”) ύψος (“height”) είμαι (“to be”) οικονομία (“economy”)
[o]	ο, ω	φοράω (“to wear”)
[u]	ου	ουρανός (“sky”)

**Table 1.2:** Modern Greek Vowels and Their Representation in Writing.

For a technical representation of the vowel system press here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern\\_Greek\\_phonology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_Greek_phonology) .

Three of the above vowels have two or more writing representations. Considering that *αι* and *ε*, for example sound exactly the same, correct spelling seems quite tricky. There is no reason to panic: After all, you are not the first to deal with this problem. Generations of natives had to go through this at school. Besides, even if you write *ε* instead of *αι* people will get what you mean. Apart from this, you should keep in mind the following points:

- You can draw conclusions about spelling based on grammar. For instance nouns, adjectives and pronouns are related to an *ο* as part of their ending, while verbs are related to a final *-ω*.
- You can draw conclusions about spelling based on compounding and derivation. Words seem to keep their initial spelling in both cases (compare to *human*, *humanity*, *humane*, *humanitarian*), and this will also be a great help to you.

### 1.5.2 Consonants

The Modern Greek consonant system consists of 18 simple consonants and 4 double consonants. Some consonants (namely 5) are represented by two letters and the rest by a single letter. But all of them (with one exception, [g]) have a single writing representation (considering the vowel system, this is a relief).

SOUND	LETTER	EXAMPLE
[p]	π	πάω (“to go”)
[b]	μπ	μπαμπάς (“Dad”)
[f]	φ	φίλος (“friend”)

**Table 1.3:** Modern Greek Consonants and Their Representation in Writing.

SOUND	LETTER	EXAMPLE
[v]	β	βάζω (“to put”)
[k]	κ	καλός (“good”)
[g]	γκ/γγ	γκρεμός (“cliff”), φεγγάρι (“moon”)
[h]	χ	χαλί (“rug”)
[ɣ]	γ	γάλα (“milk”)
[t]	τ	τώρα (“now”)
[d]	ντ	ντύνω (“to dress”)
[θ]	θ	θέλω (“want”)
[ð]	δ	δίνω (“to give”)
[m]	μ	μέλι (“honey”)
[n]	ν	νερό (“water”)
[l]	λ	λέω (“to say”, “to tell”)
[r]	ρ	ρωτάω (“to ask”)
[s]	σ/-ς	σκληρός (“hard”, “tough”)
[z]	ζ	ζάχαρη (“sugar”)
[ks]	ξ	ξέρω (“to know”)
[ps]	ψ	ψάρι (“fish”)
[ts]	τσ	τσατσάρα (“hair comb”)
[dz]	τζ	τζάμι (“window glass”)

**Table 1.3:** *Modern Greek Consonants and Their Representation in Writing.*

For a technical representation of the consonant system press here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern\\_Greek\\_phonology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_Greek_phonology) .

### 1.5.3 Stress

In order to pronounce a word, stress is as necessary as sounds. Stress is single and restricted to one of the last three syllables of the word. Stress is a property of vowels. Consequently, only vowels can bear the accent mark in writing.

## 1.6 Towards Perfection

Some sounds may be affected by surrounding sounds, or even affect them. In the present unit we shall examine such sounds. This is putting the final touch to your new perfect Modern Greek accent. Keep in mind, though, that lack of perfection will not destroy communication. Even if you only stick to the information given so far, or even if your pronunciation is not ideal,

people will still understand what you are trying to say.

### 1.6.1 Four Consonants...

Listen to the following words:

(14) κρύος, καλός, ακόμα, ακούω

The sound [k] in these words is close to the [k] sound in the word *book*. Now check the following words:

(15) κερί, κεράσι, άκυρος, κοιμάμαι

Here [k] sounds different. Actually it sounds more like *cute* than like *book*. Now try to read these words. When you pronounce the words of the first group, your tongue seems to take a position in the back of the mouth. But when you pronounce the words of the second group, the tongue seems to take a frontal position.

This is an instance of a rule affecting four consonants, namely [k], [g], [h], [γ]. These consonants keep their initial pronunciation (as introduced in Tables 1.1 on [page 2](#) and 1.3 on [page 11](#)) when they are followed either by a consonant or by the vowels [a], [o], [u]. Their pronunciation becomes frontal when they are followed by the vowels [i] and [e].

Here are more examples to listen to and practice:

(16a) κλειστός, καλά, κόρη, κούραση / κενός, κύμα

(16b) χρώμα, χαρά, χόμα, αχούρι / χέρι, χύμα

(16c) γράφω, γάλα, γόνατο, γουρούνι / γέρος, γύρος

(16d) γκρεμός, φεγγάρι, αγκώνας, αγγούρι / άγγελος, άγκυρα

### 1.6.2 ...and a Vowel

Listen to the following word:

(17) παιδεία

Do you hear the [i] after the [δ] sound? Yes, you do. Now listen to the following word:

(18) παιδιά

Do you hear the [i] sound now? I know it is hard, because writing is misleading at this point, so forget about writing and focus on listening again (and again, if necessary). What you really hear instead of [i] is a [j], like in the word *γύρος* (phonetically, the word is represented as [peδja]).

Listen now to the following word:

(19) δουλεία

The [i] after the [l] sound is clear. What about the following word?

(20) δουλειά

The [i] seems to be totally gone, I mean there is nothing left in its position. Instead, something has happened to the previous sound. Listen again: It is not the ordinary [l] (see Tables 1.1 on [page 2](#) and 1.3 on [page 11](#)) but another kind of [l] sound.

This is just an instance of a general phonetic tendency of Modern Greek to eliminate vowel combinations: When followed by another vowel, unstressed [i] has two options:

- One is to transform into a consonant, like in the word *παιδιά*.
- The other one is to disappear, affecting the previous consonant, like in the word *δουλειά*.

I will not go into details at this point, partly to save you time and energy, and partly because I believe you can do it (but if you want to read more press here <http://www.foundalis.com/lan/grphdetl.htm> , Unit Palatalization). Try to read the letters in bold like one syllable, then check pronunciation.

(21a) χωριά, κάποιος, καμιά, πρωτιά, βαθιά, ήπια

(21b) γλυκιά, ήλιος, οχιά, μαγκιά

## 1.7 Beyond Words

Producing single words does not equate producing them together, as parts of a sentence. Inside a sentence words may undergo several changes not examined in the previous units. A sentence may also have additional properties that have not been discussed so far. This is what we are going to do here.

### 1.7.1 “Words” Larger than Words

I think it is now time for your first Modern Greek sentence. But let me first introduce Πέτρος (☺), one of the main characters in the examples of this book.

(22) Ο Πέτρος είναι από την Αθήνα.  
“(-) Peter is from (-) Athens.”

Let me first explain the sentence. *Είναι* corresponds to the verb “is”, *από* is a preposition mean-

ing “from”, *Αθήνα* is Athens. The words *Ο/την* are articles, equivalent to the English *the*, and in Modern Greek they combine with every noun, including proper nouns (the hyphen signals the missing article in the English translation). Try to read it now and then press on the sentence. What do you hear? If I had to change writing to represent hearing, the sentence would be somewhat like this:

(23) ΟΠέτρος / είναι / αποτηνΑθήνα  
 [opetros ine apotinaθina]

Phonetically speaking, the boundary among some words seems to be lost. These words are now coming together, to form one larger phonetic unit. Considering that this unit bears only one stress (indicated by the vowel in bold), what we have here is a new “word”, larger than ordinary words.

- Keep in mind that the components of such units are not random. In other words, you cannot split sentence 22 like this:

(24) ☹ ΟΠετροσειναι / απότην / Αθήνα

- As a rule, “grammatical” words (like articles or prepositions) seem to lose their status as independent words and “stick” to “lexical” words (like nouns or verbs) on their side. Let’s take the preposition *από*. In a process like this, *από* turns into *απο-*. It becomes something like a prefix (compare to **un**-known) losing its stress.

Let’s go now to another sentence:

(25) Ο Πέτρος έκλεισε την πόρτα.  
 “(-) Peter closed the door.”

*Έκλεισε* is “closed”, *την πόρτα* is “the door” (the hyphen again signals the missing article in the English translation). I think it is easy to split the sentence into 3 phonetic units, namely *ΟΠέτρος / έκλεισε / τηνπόρτα*. I want you now to focus on the third unit and listen carefully.

(26) τηνπόρτα

What you have really heard is not [np]. What you heard is an [mb].

(27) [timborta]

I will spare the technical explanation, but if you want to know what happens press here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern\\_Greek\\_phonology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_Greek_phonology). The point is that phonetic units may undergo changes similar to those inside real words (compare to *im-possible*, *ir-resistible*), and this is not a peculiarity of Modern Greek. If you go back to your native tongue I am sure you will find similar phenomena (a Greek word again).

### 1.7.2 Intonation

Let's start with a sentence about the weather:

- (28) (-) βρέχει.  
“It is raining.”

This is an elementary sentence, consisting of only one verb (weather verbs have no subject, and the hyphen represents the missing subject in Modern Greek).

This sentence could be pronounced like this:

- (29) Βρέχει.  
“It is raining.”

But also like this:

- (30) Βρέχει;  
“Is it raining?”

The first sentence is clearly a statement, while the second sentence is a question. As you see intonation, the “melodic” structure that pervades a sentence, is enough to affect sentence interpretation in Modern Greek, and therefore meaning (compare to English, where questions have to undergo syntactic changes as well).

Intonation may also uncover the speaker's attitude towards what the sentence means. Listen to the following sentences:

- (31a) Βρέχει!  
(31b) Βρέχει!  
(31c) Βρέχει...  
(31d) Βρέχει...  
(31e) Βρέχει...

All of the above are statements about the rain. One of them expresses irony (my mother is

complaining about the rain and I believe she is exaggerating). One expresses surprise (I read the weather forecast and I was sure it would be a sunny day). One expresses a warning (my daughter is ready to go out wearing a t-shirt). One expresses disappointment (I was ready for a picnic). And another one expresses delight (now I am a farmer waiting for the rain to water the field). Can you find out which is which? (Here are the correct answers: Irony is 31d, surprise is 31a, warning is 31e, disappointment is 31c, and delight is 31b).

- Punctuation marks represent intonation in writing. The full stop represents simple statements, questions are marked by the interrogation mark, and surprise is expressed by the exclamation mark. Sarcasm/irony or disappointment are expressed by the ellipsis mark.
- Word stress is not affected by intonation. Phonetic units like the ones in 31a-31e will keep their original stress no matter what sort of intonation is imposed on the sentence.

### 1.7.3 Focus

Let's see the following sentence:

- (32) Ο Πέτρος έφαγε τα ψάρια.  
“(-) Peter ate the fish.”

*Έφαγε* is “ate”, *τα ψάρια* is “the fish”. The rest you already know. This is a statement bearing the information you read in the English translation.

Listen now to the following sentence:

- (33) Ο ΠΕΤΡΟΣ έφαγε τα ψάρια.  
“It is Peter who ate the fish.”

This is again a statement conveying the same information (“Peter ate the fish”). But the focus (emphasis, signaled in speech by louder voice) on the phrase *Ο Πέτρος* gives the second sentence an additional contrastive reading: It was Peter (*and not* the cat, for example) who ate the fish. Here again, like in intonation, the (phonetic) emphasis on a part of the sentence is enough to produce contrast (compare to English).

Focus may affect other parts of the sentence, which are not in initial position:

- (34) Ο Πέτρος έφαγε ΤΑ ΨΑΡΙΑ.  
“It was the fish Peter ate.”

Now the contrastive reading starts from the phrase *τα ψάρια*. It was the fish Peter ate, (*and not*, for example, the soup).

- There is no special punctuation mark to signal focus in writing. Sometimes italics or capital letters do the job.
- Like in intonation, stress is not affected by focus. But since everything must be louder, stress will be much louder, too.

At this point I must make something clear: Nobody expects you at this moment to handle sentence pronunciation, intonation or focus. This will come with time and practice. The point of Unit 1.7 was to help you develop some sort of sentence-pronunciation awareness, that's all. If by now you are able to read and pronounce single words, then you have achieved the basic aim of this chapter, and it is time to go on to the next one.

### **Yes and No**

Modern Greek “yes” (*vai*) sounds more like “no”. Many people get confused in the beginning when they hear *vai*, but then they get used to it. You'll get used to it, too. Just remember that the Modern Greek “no” is *όχι*.

People may say “yes” or “no” using body language. For “no” people raise their head, and/or raise their eyebrows. They may also use a sound like “ts” inhaling air. In terms of “yes”, people usually nod. This type of motion may be close to the vertical axis, starting from just a bit to the left and ending just a bit to the right (from your perspective).

### **Shouting**

Who said there are no long vowels in Modern Greek? Listen to this:

(IX) Πέτροοοοο! Ελένηηηηη!

These long vowels are not real vowels; they are just an instance of shouting. People often shout at each other, and this is not necessarily a sign of offensive or aggressive behavior. Keep in mind that the Greek culture is an open-air culture, and sometimes a loud voice is necessary in order for someone to be audible.

## **SUMMARY**

*Chapter 1 aims at developing elementary skills for language learning like pronunciation, and reading/writing. The Greek alphabet is the starting point for the introduction of the Modern Greek sounds, which work together with stress to form the phonetic “profile” of any Modern*

*Greek word. Apart from single words the chapter also deals with sentences, in order to introduce intonation and focus phenomena.*

### KEY WORDS

*alphabet, letter, sound, vowel, consonant, stress, accent mark, intonation, focus*

### EXERCISES

**1. After all this grammar, it is time for a break in a grammar-free world, such as the animal world. Read the following words and relate them to the pictures.**

1. ζέβρα	a. 
2. ρινόκερος	b. 
3. ελέφαντας	c. 
4. λιοντάρι	d. 
5. κροκόδειλος	e. 
6. τίγρη	f. 
7. δελφίνι	g. 
8. πελεκάνος	h. 

**2. Lots of Ancient Greek words have survived not only in Modern Greek but also in English and other languages. Match the following words with their description.**

1. τραγωδία
2. κωμωδία
3. πρωταγωνιστής
4. σκηνή
5. διάλογος
6. μονόλογος

a. The main character in a story.
b. The background of a play.
c. A conversation between two people.
d. A story which makes us laugh and usually has a happy ending.
e. A speech made by only one person, which is usually addressed to herself/himself.
f. A story which ends in ruin or destruction.

*For the Modern Greek translation of Chapter 1 press here [www.moderngreek.eu](http://www.moderngreek.eu)*