

Highlighting Greek Sentences

(Using Nouns of the Second Declension)

1. Introduction: What Is Highlighting and Why Do We Need It?

Highlighting is the process of identifying and marking the various parts of speech (verbs, nouns, etc.) in a sentence in order to understand the content intended to be communicated. Why is highlighting necessary? Whereas English depends on word *order* to make meaning, Greek depends on word *formation* to make meaning. In other words, word order in Greek does not mean the same thing as it does in English. Therefore, it becomes important to highlight Greek sentences in order to reconstruct them in ways that will render good, English sentences. If this does not make sense yet, don't worry. Everything is explained in detail below. Without highlighting, translating from Greek to English can become confusing and frustrating, so make sure you and highlighting become quick friends!

2. Ground Rules

Before we dive into highlighting, a few “ground rules” must be established. First, English is an *SVO* language. S stands for “subject,” V stands for “verb,” and O stands for “object.” This is the word order English depends on in order to make meaning (unless you're Yoda). For example, in the sentence “men see apostles,” the word “men” is the subject, the word “see” is the verb, and the word “apostles” is the object. If finding the subject (for example) is difficult, try asking questions like “who?” or “what?” In the example above, you could ask “who saw the apostles?” The answer is “men.”

Second, Greek *usually* follows a *VSO* word order (verb, subject, object), but that is not always the case. Because of special tags¹ found at the end of Greek words that indicate who or what the subject is (for example), word order is very flexible in Greek. In other words, how a Greek word is *formed* indicates if it is the subject, verb, or object of a sentence, not the *order* of the words itself. Again, word order in Greek does not mean the same thing as it does in English.²

Third, some clarification of terminology is in order. Whenever we come across the subject of a sentence in English it is said to be in the *subjective case*. In the sentence “men see apostles,” the word “men” is said to be in the subjective case because it is the subject of the sentence. In Greek, we are going to call this the **nominative case**. Stated another way, the nominative case tells us who or what is the subject of any particular sentence. Likewise, whenever we come across the object of a sentence in English we will say that it is in the *objective case*. In the sentence “men see apostles” the word “apostles” is in the objective case because it is the object of the sentence. In Greek, we are going to call this the **accusative case**. Stated another way, the accusative case tell us who or what is the object of any particular sentence.

¹ For nouns, these tags are called *case-number suffixes*. They indicate what case a noun is in (nominative, accusative, etc.) and its number (singular or plural). For verbs, these tags are called *person-number suffixes*. They indicate the person (first, second, or third) and number (singular or plural) of the verb.

² However, word order, in Greek, does mean something. Usually, it is used for emphasis.

3. Case-Number Suffixes of the Second Declension

In Greek, to know whether a noun is functioning as the subject or object of a sentence, we must examine its case-number suffix. As stated before, the nominative case tells us that a word is the subject of a sentence. In the second declension, the nominative case has two different case-number suffixes in its masculine forms; a singular ending and a plural ending. They are as follows:

–ος (nominative/masculine/singular)
and
–οι (nominative/masculine/plural)

These suffixes then attach themselves to the lexical morphemes of nouns. Here is what it looks like in practice. The word ἄνθρωπος (άνθρωπ + ος) means “man” and would be the subject of any particular sentence it finds itself in. How do we know this? We know this because the lexical morpheme άνθρωπ– was given the case-number suffix –ος which is the nominative, singular suffix. The word ἄνθρωποι (άνθρωπ + οι) means “men” and functions the same way.

Likewise, the accusative case also has two different case-number suffixes in the masculine forms of the second declension; a singular ending and a plural ending. They are as follows:

–ον (accusative/masculine/singular)
and
–ους (accusative/masculine/plural)

Now, if we have the word ἄνθρωπον (άνθρωπ + ον), which means “man,” we know this word is now said to be the object of whatever sentence it finds itself in because it is in the accusative case. Observe the word ἄνθρωπους (άνθρωπ + ους). It too is in the accusative case. However, it is plural and thus means “men.” However, it too functions that same way as its singular cousin.

The second declension also has neuter nouns which have their own case-number suffixes for the nominative and accusative cases. This gets a little tricky because *both* forms look identical. They are as follows:

–ον (nominative or accusative/neuter/singular)
and
–α (nominative or accusative/neuter/plural)

The word δῶρον (δωρ + ον) means “gift.” It can either be in the nominative case or in the accusative case. Only context will clarify. Likewise, the word δῶρα (δωρ + α) means “gifts” and it too could either be in the nominative or accusative case. This can be a bit confusing at first. Therefore, you must note *carefully* neuter nouns and let the surrounding context tell you whether or not these nouns are in the nominative or accusative cases!

4. Quick Review

1. English is an *SVO* language. Meaning is derived from this word order.
2. Greek defaults to a *VSO* word order but is rather flexible. Meaning is derived from word formation rather than word order.
3. In Greek, the subject of a sentence is said to be in the nominative case.
4. In Greek, the object of a sentence is said to be in the accusative case.
5. Case-number suffixes are attached to lexical morphemes. They tell us what words in the sentence are in the nominative case (subject) and in the accusative case (object).
6. Neuter nouns of the second declension have the same case-number suffixes in both the nominative and accusative cases. Only the context will decide what case it is in.

5. Highlighting Simple Greek Sentences

With our ground rules in place and a brief understanding of the nominative and accusative cases, we can now begin to highlighting simple Greek sentences using nouns of the second declension. Take this Greek sentence for example:

βλέπουσιν ἄνθρωποι ἀποστόλους

This sentence means “men see apostles” in English. But how did we arrive at this translation? Let us go through a step by step process to translate this sentence.

Step #1 – Morphological Analysis

Identify and break up the sentence into its various morphemes. Assign each a meaning:

βλέπ|ουσιν ἄνθρωπ|οι ἀποστόλ|ους = 6 morphemes total

1. βλέπ = lexical morpheme, “see”
2. ουσιν = person-number suffix, “they”
3. ἄνθρωπ = lexical morpheme, “man”
4. οι = case-number suffix, nominative/plural
5. ἀποστολ = lexical morpheme, “apostle”
6. ους = case-number suffix, accusative/plural

Step #2 – Highlighting

To highlight a verb, circle any of them you may find in the sentence to make them stand out:

βλέπουσιν ἄνθρωποι ἀποστόλους

To highlight anything in the nominative case (i.e., the subject), underline those nouns once:

βλέπουσιν ἄνθρωποι ἀποστόλους

To highlight anything in the accusative case (i.e., the object), underline those nouns twice:

βλέπουνσιν ἄνθρωποι ἀποστόλους

Altogether our sentence should now look like this when we have finished highlighting:

βλέπουνσιν ἄνθρωποι ἀποστόλους

Step #3 – Translation

Remember, English is an *SVO* language. It may be helpful to highlight English the same way we highlight Greek. Think of it this way:

Subject Verb Object

or

Nominative Verb Accusative

Our goal is to take our scrambled Greek sentence and place it back into the above word order in English. If you look back at the original Greek sentence and performed proper morphological analysis, you will see that the Greek literally says “they see men apostles” which is terrific Greek but lousy English. Because we know that ἄνθρωποι is in the nominative case (having underlined it once), we know it is the subject of the sentence – so we place it first in our English sentence. Having circled βλέπουνσιν we know it is the verb – so we place it in the middle. Finally, we know that ἀποστόλους is in the accusative case (having underlined it twice) – so we place it last. In this new order we can now see the sentence literally translates to “men they see apostles,” but this is not a translation but an over-translation. The smoother translation would then be “men see apostles.” This is an accurate reading of the Greek and is a proper, English sentence. Take a look at the big picture one more time as see if it makes sense to you:

βλέπουνσιν ἄνθρωποι ἀποστόλους = “men see apostles”

Easy, right? We thought so! 😊

6. Additional Practice

Let us try to repeat the same process with a different sentence:

ἄνθρωπους βλέπουνσιν ἀπόστολοι

Step #1 – Morphological Analysis

Identify and break up the sentence into its various morphemes. Assign each a meaning:

ἄνθρωπ|ους βλέπ|ουσιν ἀποστόλ|οι = 6 morphemes total

1. ανθρωπ = lexical morpheme, “man”
2. ους = case-number suffix, accusative/plural
3. βλέπ = lexical morpheme, “see”
4. ουσιν = person-number suffix, “they”
5. αποστολ = lexical morpheme, “apostle”
6. οι = case-number suffix, nominative/plural

Step #2 – Highlighting

Next, circle any verbs, underline once anything in the nominative case, and underline twice anything in the accusative case. Now our sentence should look like this:

ἀνθρώπους βλέπουσιν ἀπόστολοι

Step #3 – Translation

Finally, we rearrange it to the English *SVO* word order and smooth out the translation to make a proper, English sentence. Therefore our translation will be:

ἀνθρώπους βλέπουσιν ἀπόστολοι = “apostles see men”

Taking all of the ground rules, terminology, and highlighting steps into account, see if you can understand how we arrived at our translations shown below:

γράφει δοῦλος νόμον = “a servant writes a law”

λύουσιν ἀδελφοὶ δοῦλους = “brothers loose servants”

φέρει υἱὸς δῶρα = “a son brings gifts”

λέγει ἀδελφὸς λόγον = “a brother speaks a word”

γινώσκετε θάνατον = “you know death”

ἁμαρτωλοὺς σώζει θεός = “God saves sinners”

7. Additional Case-Number Suffixes in the Second Declension

There are two additional cases that must be studied in order to highlight increasingly complex Greek sentences. The **genitive case** identifies the possessor of a sentence. In the phrase “men’s wisdom,” the word “men’s” is said to be in the genitive case because it is the men who are possessing wisdom. This phrase could also be expressed by saying “the wisdom of men.” Here, the phrase “of men” is said to be in the genitive case. Generally speaking, we need the helping word “of” to properly translate words in the genitive case. The genitive case in both its masculine and neuter forms of the second declension has two different case-number suffixes; a singular ending and a plural ending. They are as follows:

- ου (genitive/masculine or neuter/singular)
- and
- ων (genitive/masculine or neuter/plural)

Therefore, ἀνθρώπου (ανθρωπ + ου) means “of a man” and ἀνθρώπων (ανθρωπ + ων) means “of men.” Likewise, δώρου (δωρ + ου) means “of a gift” and δώρων (δωρ + ων) means “of gifts.”

The **dativ** case identifies the indirect object of a sentence. In the sentence “he gave men gifts,” the word “men” is said to be in the dative case because the men are indirectly receiving the action of giving, whereas the gifts are directly receiving the action of giving. Stated another way, this sentence could be expressed “he gave gifts to men.” Here, the phrase “to men” is said to be in the dative case. Generally speaking, we need the helping word “to” to properly translate words in the dative case. The dative case in both its masculine and neuter forms of the second declension has two different case-number suffixes; a singular ending and a plural ending. They are as follows:

- ῳ (dative/masculine or neuter/singular)³
- and
- οις (dative/masculine or neuter/plural)

Therefore, ἀνθρώπῳ (ανθρωπ + ῳ) means “to a man” and ἀνθρώποις (ανθρωπ + οις) means “to men.” Likewise, δώρῳ (δωρ + ῳ) means “to a gift” and δώροις (δωρ + οις) means “to gifts.”

8. Highlighting Complex Sentences

Having been introduced the genitive and dative cases, we now turn to highlighting increasingly complex Greek sentences. These sentences are ones that contain such elements as negatives, conjunctions, words in the genitive and dative cases, prepositional phrases, and the like. Our goal here is to figure out where these elements are in the sentence and (in a manner of speaking) temporarily remove them from the sentence. To do so, we will have to expand Steps #2 (Highlighting) and #3 (Translation). In Step #2, if we find anything in a sentence that is not a verb or in either the nominative or accusative cases (like the genitive or dative cases, for example), we will isolate those words and phrases by putting them in parentheses. They will be what we will call “leftovers,” meaning we will not bother with them just yet. In Step #3, once we have properly identified (and translated) our verbs and words in the nominative and accusative cases, we then go back to the words we put into parentheses and reintroduce them to the sentence in their proper places, giving us the full meaning of the sentence. A few examples should help make this clear.

Note the following sentence:

βλέπουσιν ἄνθρωποι ἀποστόλους θεού

³ Note *carefully* the iota subscript!

Step #1 – Morphological Analysis

Identify and break up the sentence into its various morphemes. Assign each a meaning:

βλέπ|ουσιν ἄνθρωπ|οι ἀποστόλ|ους θε|ού = 8 morphemes total

1. βλέπ = lexical morpheme, “see”
2. ουσιν = person-number suffix, “they”
3. ἄνθρωπ = lexical morpheme, “man”
4. οι = case-number suffix, nominative/plural
5. ἀποστολ = lexical morpheme, “apostle”
6. ους = case-number suffix, accusative/plural
7. θε = lexical morpheme, “God”
8. ου = case-number suffix, genitive/singular

Step #2 – Highlighting

Next, circle any verbs, underline once anything in the nominative case, and underline twice anything in the accusative case. Now our sentence should look like this:

βλέπουσιν ἄνθρωποι ἀποστόλους θεού

Our morphological analysis has shown us that the word θεού is in the genitive case. This means we will put it in parentheses, thus making it a “leftover.” We will deal with it at a later time. Now our sentence should look like this:

βλέπουσιν ἄνθρωποι ἀποστόλους (θεού)

Step #3 – Translation

Now translate βλέπουσιν ἄνθρωποι ἀποστόλους. It means “men see apostles.” After (and only after) we have stripped the sentence down to this bare minimum meaning can we reintroduce our “leftovers” into the sentence. Now take θεού (meaning “of God”) and put it back where it was beside ἀποστόλους. The phrase now means “apostles of God.” Now our whole sentence can be translated as “men see apostles of God.”

The same process is done with words in the dative case. The sentence φέρει υἱὸς δῶρα ἀνθρώπῳ can be stripped down to just φέρει υἱὸς δῶρα (meaning “a son brings gifts”) because ἀνθρώπῳ is said to be in the dative case and is therefore a “leftover.” But once we have done a proper translation of just our subject, verb, and object we can now reintroduce ἀνθρώπῳ (meaning “to a man”) back where it was beside δῶρα allowing us to read that phrase as “gifts to a man.” Now our whole sentence can be translated as “a son brings gifts to a man.”

At this particular point of your journey in learning New Testament Greek, we *highly* recommend the process of highlighting. Doing so will not only help you become more familiar with spotting the various parts of speech in Greek but it will also help you avoid unnecessary mistakes.

9. Case-Number Suffixes of the Second Declension

For the sake of completeness, the paradigms of ἄνθρωπος (masculine) and δῶρον (neuter) are given below to help synthesize the information given above with regards to nouns of the second declension. It would serve you well to *memorize* these charts as these patterns of inflection are unavoidable in Greek.

<i>Masculine</i>	Singular		Plural	
N.	ἄνθρωπος	a man	ἄνθρωποι	men
G.	ἀνθρώπου	of a man	ἀνθρώπων	of men
D.	ἀνθρώπῳ	to a man	ἀνθρώποις	to men
A.	ἄνθρωπον	a man	ἄνθρωπους	men

<i>Neuter</i>	Singular		Plural	
N.	δῶρον	a gift	δῶρα	gifts
G.	δώρου	of a gift	δώρων	of gifts
D.	δώρῳ	to a gift	δώροις	to gifts
A.	δῶρον	a gift	δῶρα	gifts