

Rex WALLACE

Using morphophonology in elementary ancient Greek

Most elementary ancient Greek textbooks do not employ much in the way of linguistic theory or practice in presenting the Greek grammatical system. This is unfortunate because linguists' insights can benefit classics students pedagogically, particularly in understanding changes affecting stems in inflectional morphology. In this presentation I discuss one particularly venerable analytic procedure—part of the arsenal of linguistic analysis since Hermann Grassmann's publication on Sanskrit and Greek aspiration in 1863,—namely, morphophonemic analysis, and I show how it can be profitably used in the classroom as a supplementary tool for exploring the structure of Greek noun and verb paradigms.

In these paradigms, the same 'word' may have two or more stems. For example, in the paradigm of 'vein', the nom. sing. and dat. pl. are built to the stem *phlep-* while the other cases are built to *phleb-*. Distribution of these stems within the paradigm is predictable and rule-governed. *Phlep-* is found ONLY before *-s*. This rule can be understood in terms of the phonology of the stem's final sound, *-b*, and the ending's initial sound, *-s*. Voiced *-b* changes to voiceless *-p* before voiceless *-s*. The larger insight is that this behavior, the devoicing of voiced stops before *-s*, is not restricted to *phleb-*, but is found in every word whose stems end in voiced stop. Whenever a voiced stop appears before *-s*, it becomes voiceless regardless of grammatical category. The sound pattern of Greek does not permit voiced stops adjacent to voiceless sounds such as *-s*.

If students are presented with 6 morphophonological rules, they can make sense of the variation found in most third declension noun paradigms:

- 1a. voiced stops » voiceless before *-s*: *phlébs* » *phléps* 'vein'
- 1b. aspirated stops » unaspirated before *-s*: *ónukhs* » *ónuks* 'nail'
- 1c. dental stops are lost before *-s*: *pây-d-s* » *pây-s* 'child'
- 1d. *Vns* clusters develop to *V:s*: *gígants* » *gígans* (by 1c.) » *gíga:s* 'giant'
- 1e. stop consonants in word-final position are lost: *pây-d* > *pây* 'child'
- 1f. words with aspirates in successive syllables deaspire the first aspirate: *thrikhós* » *trikhós* 'hair'

More importantly, when students are confronted with morphological alternations outside this domain, they are equipped to explain these (verbal) forms by the same morphophonological rules:

- 2a-c. aorists: *eblabsa-* » *eblapsa-* 'harm'; *egrapsa-* » *egrapsa-* 'write'; *epeytsa-* » *epeysa-* 'persuade'
- 2d. aorist active participles: *lú:sants* » *lú:sans* (by 1c.) » *lú:sa:s* 'loosen'
- 2e. present active participles: *lú:ont* » *lú:on* (neuter) 'loosen'
- 2f. reduplicated present formations: *thíthæ:mi* » *títhæ:mi* 'put'

Thus, a morphophonological approach to Greek nominal and verbal forms enables students to see stem variation within and across paradigms not as random, but rather as intimately tied to regular sound patterns of Greek. The fact that words have different stem forms is not an irregular feature peculiar to particular words, but a reflection of the very essence of the rule-governed behavior of Greek sounds.