Greek Lessons 3 and 4

The goals of Greek Lessons 3 and 4 are to explore Greek bases, both how they work and how they combine (which they do often!). We'll cover those topics in this video presentation. In the accompanying audio presentation, we'll look at the prefixes and bases introduced in these lessons. And as I always do, I'll also add a few comments about the forms to memorize.

Most English speakers find memorizing Greek forms a bit more difficult than Latin ones because they show up in fewer commonly used derivatives and thus feel more foreign, less familiar. For instance, it's easy to remember that the Latin prefix *de-* means "down" if you recall words like descend or decline. But its Greek counterpart *cata-* which also means "down," offers no such simple "hook words." Catalyze (literally, "break down")? Cataclysm ("a washing down")? Catalogue ("a listing down")? Nah, derivatives like those don't help us remember what *cata-* means. Put simply, Greek is just harder. Why?

The Greek language didn't influence English in its formative period during the Middle Ages the way Latin did, for a very simple reason. No Greek-speaking people ever conquered England the way the Latin-talking Normans did. Thus, the Greek-based words we have ─ and make no mistake about it: there are *lots* of them! ─ are newer to English and have entered our language relatively recently through channels other than conquest and subjugation, neither of which are ─ please note! ─ Greek words. Moreover, what few Greek terms permeated early English for the most part came in disguised as Latin terms, because during antiquity the Romans themselves borrowed many Greek words, especially technical vocabulary. The result was that Greek permeated Latin well before the Middle Ages, and through that spread far beyond the Greeks' political and economic reach.

Moreover, in the last few centuries as science and technology have expanded, the influence of Greek has grown immensely. Its impact on English is now in many respects more important than Latin. Academic language with its natural proclivity for specialized terminology has demonstrated an as-yet-unquenchable appetite for Greek-based words. All across the globe terms based on Greek roots have become by all fair standards the mother tongue of sciences and technical fields and from there have infiltrated common speech. It is no exaggeration to say that every passing day sees more and more Greek words "strategizing" their way into English. To wit, if meteorologists run out of names because there are so many hurricanes in one season, what do they do? They go to the Greek alphabet: Hurricane Alpha, Hurricane Beta, and so on. All in all, when the modern world needs a new word, it usually looks back to Greece.

The names of most academic disciplines come from Greek: mathematics, chemistry, physics, astronomy, economics, drama, theatre and even … historical etymology. Nor do these words always stay put behind the walls of universities. They osmose ─ a Greek term ─ into the general parlance. Many non-scientists today are familiar with terms which started out as Greek-based technical jargon: clone, catastrophe, chaos, gene and blasphemy. In sum, except for Latin and Common Germanic, the most important language that any modern English-speaker understand who's interested in where their vocabulary comes from and how it was and is formed is Greek. Think of it this way. English is a three-layer pie: a German crust under a thick and creamy Latin filling slathered on top with Greek frosting.

Something you'll quickly learn about Greek which makes a striking difference with typical Latin practice is that Greek bases very frequently combine within a single word. "Bibliography," for example, has two bases: BIBLI- meaning "book" and GRAPH- meaning "write." "Paleozoic" is a combination of the bases PALE- ("old") and ZO- ("life"). At the heart of "encyclopedia" is the base CYCL- ("wheel"), which has been appended onto another base PED- ("educate"). Note that -o- is used as a buffering vowel so often you could almost make it a rule. While -i- works much the same way in Latin, it still only shows up in less than half of the forms. Not so for the -o- in Greek! There -o- rules…

… particularly when the second base of a combination begins with a consonant: PSYCHo-LOGy, TACHo-METER, PATHo-GEN. This is true even when the first base ends with a vowel: GEo-METR-y, IDEo-GRAM, HELIo-CENTR-ic, though there are exceptions where the combining -o- is just omitted: TELE-PHONE, EGO-MANIAC, OO-CYTE. But those are actually less frequent than words that have the -o- even though they don't need it: ZOo-LOG-y ─ could just as well be "zology" ─ TELEo-LOG-ical. What's wrong with "telelogical"?

There are times that logic reigns. For instance, when two consonants run into each another ─ the first at the end of the first base and the second at the start of the second ─ if they can be pronounced together easily, no -o- is needed and so often it's not used, as in PAN-DEM-ic. It's easy to say /n/ before /d/. The same principle holds true when the second base begins with a vowel which usually causes no problem in pronunciation: MON-ARCH-y, PSYCH-IATR-ic, PED-AGOG-y. This rule applies even if two vowels collide, for instance, THE-ARCH-y, ZO-IATR-y, GE-ORGE. That's right! The name "George" comes from Greek. GE- means "earth" and ORG- means "work, worker." Put them together ("earth-worker") and you get the original sense of the name: "farmer." So "Farmer George" is redundant.

The combining -o- is so pervasive in Greek derivatives that it eventually became an English suffix all on its own. It's used most often in derogatory clips like psycho, politico, pyro, nympho, and homo. But like many annoying modern coinages, it is not restricted to Greek-based words and shows up in a cesspool of hybrids like sicko, pinko, Anglo, weirdo, wino. Stop-o, please-o! That's enough-o!

As a last cautionary note, make sure that you always write this combining vowel in lower case letters. That way you show that you know it's not part of the base. Except for that, the rules for etymologizing Greek words and their elements are the same as they were for Latin: put prefixes and suffixes in lower case (prefixes with a hyphen after, suffixes with one before), and write bases in all caps followed by a hyphen. Silent e's will plague Greek derivatives just the same as Latin ones. They're a pervasive problem in English. Remember to define the basic English word, that is, its singular, not its plural even if that's how the word is in the sentence. Ignore the endings *-s* or *-ing* or *-ed* that you may find tacked on to some English verb forms. You know all this. I'm only saying "Keep doing it!"

And that's it for the video presentation for Greek Lessons 3 and 4. Next you should listen to the audio presentation on the prefixes and bases in these lessons. You'll find a link to that audio presentation on the course web site. Happy etymologizing-o!

ASSIGNMENT

This is the audio presentation covering the assignments in Greek Lessons 3 and 4. Please open your textbook to page 179. Toward the top of the page Mr. Ayers gives some examples of how two Greek bases can be combined in a single word. Among those examples is PSYCH-o-ana-LY-sis which is worth taking special notice of. PSYCH- is a base, followed by the combining vowel -o-. After that comes a prefix(!) *ana*- and another base LY- and a suffix -*sis*. There's a prefix in the middle of the word!! How is that possible? What happened to the *pre*- in prefix? Doesn't it mean "before"? When did prefixes start being middly-fixes?

Well, if a prefix becomes an integral part of a word, as it does with "analysis," when that word is combined with another base attached to the front of it, the prefix will end up in the middle of the word. So, put a big star next to "psychoanalysis." It is a good reminder that sometimes in Greek ─ much less often in Latin ─ prefixes can come after a base and end up in the middle of a word.

Moving on to the bases you should memorize in this lesson, please turn to page 181.

The first base is BIBLI-, meaning "book." Please put the final -I in parentheses. It's dropped in our word "bible," one of this base's most pervasive derivatives.

About the next base, CANON-, please note it doesn't have three n's so it's not spelled the same way as its homonym "cannon," the large artillery gun used in warfare. This base is a two-n canon. To its meaning "rule" add the senses "roll (as in a class roll), list, standard list." A canon is at heart a list, usually written in a column which is what the word actually means in Greek. Things on a list are often there because they're the official items approved of by some authority. If you're on the list, you're officially approved. So "list" developed another sense "standard list." If a book is canonical, like the books of the Bible, it's seen as authentic, genuine. Holy people who are canonized are saints. They're on the Catholic Church's "official list."

The next base, CRYPT- ("hidden, secret"), has a similar-looking relative, CRY- which means "cold." CRY- is not included among the bases you need to memorize in this class, but in real practice you should be careful not to confuse these similar-looking Greek forms.

The next few items on this canon of word roots underscore the difficulty some of you may have in memorizing the meanings of Greek bases. That CYCL- means "wheel" is pretty easy to remember if you use a hook-word like "bicycle," a two-wheeled vehicle. GLOSS- is a bit more difficult but there is some help out there in derivatives like "glossary" ("a list of words, often from a foreign language"). Likewise, "icons" are images, "mime actors" imitate things, and "odes" are songs.

Be careful with that last base. OD- has a close relative HOD- ("road") which will appear on the canon for Lesson 5. HOD- unfortunately often loses its initial H- as in the word "exodus"

(literally "the road [HOD-] out [*ex*-]"), which means HOD- ends up looking exactly like OD- ("song") a lot of the time. To make matters only worse, Latin also has an OD- base which means "hate" and is completely unrelated to either Greek OD-'s. We get our word odium ("hatred") from this base. But since you know not to confuse Greek and Latin words, that shouldn't be a problem for you. Still, let's be frank: there are way too many OD-'s out there.

The last base on this official list is TOM- ("cut"). Note please that it shows up sometimes in a variant form TM- (no vowel), as in the word "tmesis," meaning "the act of cutting." Tmesis is the process of dividing a word and inserting another word inside it, for instance, "a whole nother thing." There "another" has had "whole" stuffed inside it. Tmesis tends to show up in swearing, as in "I don't know how I got there. I started drinking and somehow ended up in San Fran- [insert swear word] -cisco!"

There's a linguistic term for TM- variant: zero-grade. "Grade" in linguist-ese refers to the vowel used in a base. We've seen this already in the term "vowel gradation." So a zero-grade base means the base uses no vowel. The o-grade of the same base would be TOM-. Any vowel a base uses is called its whatever-grade, meaning there are a-grades, e-grades and so on. If you're aware of this, it can help you with memorizing Greek which often utilizes different grades for the same base.

In Lesson 4, Mr. Ayers introduces the first set of Greek prefixes. Please turn to page 184 and let's discuss them, starting at the bottom of the page with *a-*/*an-*, the Greek prefix meaning "not, without." Please add the sense "no," as in "no way, no how."

It's important to learn how to distinguish this prefix from the third one on this list, *ana-* ("up, back, again"). They can sometimes be confused because the up-prefix *ana-* will occasionally lose its second *-a* and become just *an-*, making it identical in form to the *an-* variant of the not-prefix. Usually the sense of a word makes it clear whether *an-* means "up" or "not." "Not" words tend to jump out at you, for example, *an*archy ("the state of *no* government"), *an*emic ("having *no* blood"). The "up" prefix is harder to see. To the Greeks "up" could have a number of connotations: "up" physically, as in "move up"; "up" backwards or again as in "back up"; and also "up" uncertain as in "up in the air," which Ayers does not include here, so you should add the meaning "upside down" to this prefix. An "anachronism," for instance, is a mistake in time, literally "the process of turning time upside down." A picture in which ancient Greeks are driving cars or talking on cell phones would be an anachronism.

Note that I skipped the prefix *amphi-* because I have nothing to say about it. All the same, you need to learn it.

Moving to the top of the next page, note that the Greek prefix *anti-* ("against") is quite unlike its cognate, the Latin prefix *ante-* ("before"). These forms may be related linguistically but the Romans and Greeks applied different senses to them. Standing *anti-* meant to the Greeks to oppose it and thus be "opposite, against" it. To the Romans, *ante-* meant just to be "in front of" it. Note, too, that Greek *anti-* does not always undergo degeneration ─ if you don't remember what the term degeneration refers to, go look it up! ─ sometimes *anti-* is used in reference to things which stand opposite each other but work together, as in "antiphonal choruses," where

two choruses are situated across from each other and sing back and forth in response. So add to *anti-* the meaning "in answer to."

To *apo-*, the next prefix, add the sense "away from." An apostle is someone who's sent to preach "away from" … home, presumably.

Cata- ("down") is the opposite of *ana-* ("up"). Thus, batteries have cathodes ("roads down") and anodes ("roads up"), in relation to which way the electricity is flowing. Degeneration plays a role here too. Since "down" often implies "bad" ─ think "catastrophe," literally a "downturn" ─ you should add that sense ("down"). Also, note that *cata-* does what so many Latin prefixes do. It can just intensify a base, adding only a sense of "very, completely." That is, words with *cata-* underwent weakening, another term you've learned and must not forget.

Finally, *dia-* ("through, across, between") has other senses as well: "throughout, apart." Please add those meanings to this prefix. Also, *dia-* sometimes loses its final *-a* and becomes just *di-*, particularly when the base it's attached to starts with a vowel or h-, as in diocese, diode. I should have noted that this is also true of *anti-* (anthem), *apo-* (aphesis) and *cata-* (catholic). The rule is: any Greek prefix that ends in *-a* can lose it.

To end this presentation, let's look at the bases in this lesson, starting with ALG- ("pain"). Just for the record, this is not where we get the word algae. Algae does not cause you pain, even if it does. "Algae" comes from the Latin base for "seaweed." From the Greek base ALG- we get words like analgesic ("removing pain") and nostalgia ("the pain you feel when you miss being home").

Be careful not to confuse the base CHRON- ("time") with another Greek base that looks a lot like it, CHROM- ("color"). We'll learn that base in Lesson 8.

To LOG- ("speech, word, proportion, reasoning") could be added a number of other meanings: "thought, the study of, the theory of, a gathering of." Its basic sense is "an expressed thought," which to the Greeks necessarily involved speaking and studying, and that explains all the corollary connotations. Let's make this easy. Put three stars next to this base. You're going to see it in many, many Greek-based words. It's associated with talking, thinking and writing, three things ancient Greeks did a lot of.

The next base LY- ("loosen") has a variant LYS- ─ please add that! ─ and another connotation you should note too: "destroy." A lysosome is an organelle inside a cell that "loosens" ─ that is, breaks up and destroys ─ molecules.

POD-, the base meaning "foot," has another variant, too, PUS-, seen in octopus ("a creature with eight feet") and Oedipus, a character in Greek myth who was so named because he was lame (OED-) in his feet (-PUS). As a baby, he was hung up in a tree by his foot which left him lame.

The next-to-last base in this canon is THE- ("god"). In Lesson 10 we'll see there's another THE- base in Greek which means "put" and is seen in words like thesis ("the act/result of putting down ideas on paper") or synthetic ("pertaining to being put together," that is "artificially assembled").

When you see THE-, you'll just have to guess whether it means "god" or "put." I'll never take off points if you choose the wrong option because you did the etymology right, but you should always remember to try both. To make matters only worse, there is a third Greek base that looks like this too, THE(A)- ("see"), the basis of words like theater ("a place for viewing [plays]") and theory ("a conclusion based on observation"). By the way, the ancient Greeks had little trouble distinguishes all these THE-'s because the one that means "god" (the one in this lesson) has a short -e (pronounced "eh"), whereas the "put" THE- more often used a long -e (an -ee- sound), meaning the ancient Greeks could usually hear the difference. But when -e- is used in the spelling of both bases as we do, the potential for confusion grows.

Finally, note that the last base on this list, TROPH- ("nourish, grow"), has a close analogue too, TROP- ("turn") which we'll encounter in Lesson 12. TROPH- "grow"; TROP- "turn." Learn it.

And that's it for this audio presentation of Greek Lessons 3 and 4.

Happy Etymologizing!