

Greek Sounds and Transliteration, Words from Greek History and Philosophy, Greek Bases and Prefixes, Base Combinations

GREEK LESSONS II-IV

Linguistics 1010

April 13, 2005

I. Greek Sounds and Transliteration

A. What is transliteration?

1. The procedure by which words spelled in one writing system are rendered in another writing system.
2. Sometimes this is a matter of a simple letter-to-letter mapping, as when Greek Σωκράτης become *Socrates* in English, and sometimes it involves sound substitution, as when Hebrew שַׁבָּת becomes *Sabbath* in English.

B. Why do Greek words have altered spellings in English?

1. English doesn't have some of the sounds the Greek does:
 - [y] for υ
 - [e] for both η and ε
 - [o] for both ω and ο
 - [ch] for χ
 - [rrh] for ρρ (as in e.g., Pyrrhus)
2. English simplified a diphthong [double vowel] from Greek: *phenomenon* [phainomenon], *economics* [oikonomia], *edema* [oidema], *icon* [eikon], *chimera* [chimaira], *music* [mousike], *hemo-* [haima].
3. Latin substituted a native sound for the Greek one in its transliteration, and English borrowed the Latin version:
 - When the Greek word contained a **diphthong** [double vowel] whose second vowel is iota, Latin turned that iota into an [e]: *aesthetic* [aisthetikos], *paean* [paian], *aegis* [aigis], *Oedipus* [Oidipos], *Boeotia* [Boiotia], *amoeba* [amoiba].
 - Latin has no letter [k], and so it used the letter [c] to spell all Greek words containing kappa: *cycle* [kyklos], *canon* [kanon], *cardiac* [kardia] *calligraphy* [kalos 'beautiful'].

C. English sometimes transliterates from Greek accurately but substitutes another sound anyway:

1. *psychiatrist* (we pronounce the [ps] as [s])
2. *xenophobic* (we pronounce the [x] as [z])
3. *mnemonic* (we pronounce the [mn] as [n])

4. *pterodactyl* (we pronounce the [pt] as [t])
 5. *pseudo-* (we pronounce the [eu] as [u])

D. The Greek alphabet is shown in Table 1. Can you transliterate and guess the meanings of the Greek words shown in the far right column?

Greek letter	Name of Greek letter	Greek word containing letter
α [a]	alpha	αγω
β [b]	beta	βιον
γ [g]	gamma	γενος
δ [δ]	delta	δρακων
ε [e as in pet]	epsilon	εγω
ζ [dz as in fads]	zeta	ζωον
η [ey]	eta	ηθος
θ [t ^h]	theta	θεος
ι [ee, as in meet]	iota	ιατρος
κ [k]	kappa	καλος
λ [l]	lambda	λαμπρος
μ [m]	mu	μακρος
ν [v]	nu	νομος
ξ [xs as in fox]	xi	ξενος
ο [o as in boat]	omicron	ολιγος
π [p]	pi	πατρις
ρ [r]	rho	Ροδιος
σ ς [s]	sigma	σοφος
τ [t]	tau	τυραννος
υ [ü]	upsilon	'υβρις
φ [p ^h]	phi	φιλος
χ [ch as in German <i>ich</i>]	chi	χειρ
ψ [ps as in tops]	psi	ψυξη
ω [o as in boat]	omega	'ωρα

Table 1. The Greek alphabet

(NB: ', called a 'rough breathing' mark, indicates a [h] sound)

II. English words from Greek History and Philosophy

A. Words from Greek philosophy. Try to explain the relationship between the word's original reference and the meaning of the word in English:

1. **Cynic** (κυνικός 'doglike'). Member of a minor Greek philosophical school which held that living an autonomous life in accord with nature was the key to happiness. Cynicism is epitomized by Diogenes (4th c. BC).
2. **Stoic**. A follower of Stoicism, an Athenian philosophical school which gets its name from the place where it was taught, the Painted Stoa. The theory holds that the unfolding of God's providential plan is rational, and therefore what happens to each being is appropriate to that being.
3. **Epicurean**. A disciple of Epicurus, who established his school of philosophy in 306 BC in his garden in Athens. According to his teachings, pain and fear of pain are the cause of our greatest evils; therefore, we cultivate virtue by seeking pleasure, since sensation is the only reliable indicator that one is on the right path.

B. Words from Greek history. Try to explain the relationship between the historical reference and the meaning of the word in English:

1. **Sword of Damocles**. Damocles praised the power and happiness of Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse. In order to show the precariousness of rank and power, Dionysius gave a banquet and had a sword suspended above the head of Damocles by a single hair.
2. **Cutting the Gordian knot**. King Gordius created this challenge: a knot so intricate that whoever could untie it was a genius, worthy of ruling Asia. The young Alexander got frustrated trying to untie it and used his sword.
3. **Marathon**. In 490 BC the Persian king Darius landed 20,000 troops on the Plain of Marathon, from which he intended conquer Athens. The Greek general Miltiades charged his troops across the plain and caught the Persians by surprise. A Greek soldier, Phidippides, ran the 26.2 miles from the Plain of Marathon to Athens, where he announced the Greek victory before dying.
4. **Sophistry**. The sophists were a group of traveling teachers who trained young people in rhetorical strategy. Plato, among others, attacked the Sophists as teachers of demagoguery.
5. **Spartan**. Relating to the citizens of Sparta, who were trained from childhood to endure the rigors of military service.
6. **Laconic**. Relating to the district of Laconia, whose capital was Sparta.
7. **Ostracism**. The practice by which a citizen who became a threat to Athenian democracy was exiled from the polis. Ostracism took place by vote. Votes were cast using a pottery shard (*ostrakon*). Anyone with over 6,000 votes was required to leave Athens.
8. **Draconian**. Pertaining to Draco, an Athenian lawyer of the 7th c. BC, who was given the authority to create a new penal code. This code contained only one punishment: death.
9. **Pyrrhic victory**. The Greek leader Pyrrhus (King of Epirus) was victorious over the Romans at Asculum (Southern Italy) in 279 BC, but lost most of his soldiers in the process.

10. **Sybaritic.** Sybaris was a Greek colony in Southern Italy (*Magna Graecia*) famed for its luxurious living standard.
11. **Solecism.** A form found in the substandard Greek dialect of inhabitants of Sole, a Greek colony in Cilicia (Southern Turkey).

III. Greek Bases and Prefixes

A. Greek bases: The first Greek bases are introduced in Lesson III. Here are the bases from Lessons III-IV:

1. BIBLI (βιβλιον)
2. CANON (κανων)
3. CRYPT (κρυπτειν)
4. CYCL
5. GLOSS, GLOTT
6. ICON
7. MIM (μιμεσθαι)
8. OD (ωδη)
9. PYR (πυρ)
10. TOM
11. ALG
12. BI (βιος)
13. CHRON (χρονος)
14. D(A)EMON
15. GE (γη, γαια)
16. LOG (LOGUE)
17. LY (λυο)
18. MNE
19. PAN(T)
20. POD
21. THE (θεος)
22. TROPH (τρεφειν)

B. Greek prefixes. The first Greek prefixes are introduced in Lesson IV. Here are the prefixes from Lesson IV:

1. A-, AN-
2. AMPHI-
3. ANA-
4. ANTI-
5. APO-
6. CATA- (κατα)
7. DIA-

IV. Base Combinations

A. Recall that in Latin the vowel [i] is often appended to the end of the first base in a compound base: *artifact*, *aquifer*, *terrific*.

B. In Greek, the connecting vowel used to form compound bases is [o].

C. Give the meanings of the bases in each compound:

1. psychoanalysis
2. apotheosis
3. psychosomatic
4. bibliography
5. cryptogram
6. iconography
7. chronograph
8. hematology
9. biological
10. geological
11. pantomime
12. euthanasia
13. amnesia
14. ephemeral
15. exogamy