

## Nouns

Consider a sentence in English:

*The **boy** went to the **store** and bought his **father** a **gift**.*

Each of the **nouns** has a different function in the sentence:

- **Boy** – the subject of the sentence, the one who is doing the action.
- **Store** – the object of the preposition “to” – where he went.
- **Father** – indirect object, who the action was for.
- **Gift** – direct object, what the action did, what “received” the action (the gift was bought).

In English, the *form* of the nouns is usually independent of the *function* in a sentence.<sup>1</sup> Nouns can be moved around to completely change the meaning:

*The **father** went to the **store** and bought his **boy** a **gift**.*

Now **father** is the subject and **boy** is the indirect object, but the form of each word has not changed. English is usually dependent on word order to determine meaning.

Greek is a very inflected language, meaning that words usually change *form* for different *functions*. Generally the ending of the word changes, while the root or stem remains the same (see the examples of λόγος below). Nouns have a quality called case in which the *function* of the word in a sentence is indicated by its *form*. Note that there is not an exact, one-for-one correlation between the English and Greek functions. Greek noun cases often have a much broader application than the simplified English examples above.

Case	Function	Example
Nominative	Subject	Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ <b>λόγος</b> In the beginning was the <b>word</b> John 1:1 – subject, what was in the beginning; note the subject is at the end of the sentence, probably for emphasis!
Genitive	Definition or description	ὡς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ <b>λόγων</b> Ἰσαΐου τοῦ <b>προφήτου</b> · as it has been written in [the] book of <b>words</b> of <b>Isaiah</b> the <b>prophet</b> Luke 3:4 – describing which book, by whom, his credentials
Dative <sup>2</sup>	Indirect object, means, location	Τεκνία, μὴ ἀγαπῶμεν <b>λόγον</b> μηδὲ τῆ <b>γλώσση</b> ἀλλὰ ἐν <b>ἔργῳ</b> καὶ <b>ἀληθείᾳ</b> . Little children, do not love <b>in word</b> nor <b>with the tongue</b> but <b>by works</b> and <b>in truth</b> . 1 John 3:18 – means, how to love (and how not to)
Accusative	Direct object	Ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με τὸν <b>λόγον</b> μου τηρήσει If anyone loves me he will keep my <b>word</b> John 14:23 direct object – what is kept
Vocative	Direct address	Θάρσει, <b>θύγατερ</b> Be of good cheer, <b>daughter</b> . Matthew 9:22

<sup>1</sup> There are a few exceptions in English, particularly with pronouns. “I go to the store” is correct. “Me go to the store” is hardly ever correct. “I” is the nominative form, “me” is the objective form: “They helped me at the store.”

<sup>2</sup> Some grammars, especially older texts like Dana and Mantey, include “Locative” and “Instrumental” as additional cases. The forms are identical to Dative but the functions are specified as location and means, respectively. More recent grammars treat all as functions of Dative case. If a commentary mentions Locative or Instrumental, think Dative.

In addition to nouns, other parts of speech also have the quality of case: articles, adjectives, participles, etc. Case endings vary by gender (masculine, feminine, neuter) and number (singular or plural). Words that are associated with each other match in case (as well as gender and number). Consider an article “the” and a noun “word”, ὁ λόγος [nominative case] or τὸν λόγον [accusative case]. Or look at the example “book of **words** of **Isaiah** the **prophet**.” It is the book “of Isaiah” or Isaiah’s book (genitive case). Isaiah is described as “the prophet” so “the prophet” has to match the genitive case of Isaiah.

For our purposes we will **not** be trying to memorize case endings, since that information is available in resources like BibleHub or Miklal Software Solutions’ *Greek New Testament*, or numerous other online or mobile tools. Even without memorizing endings, hopefully you will soon begin to recognize them. If you are familiar with the definite article forms, you can often figure out the noun case, gender, and number, even for irregular nouns. The following table<sup>3</sup> summarizes the Greek definite article forms:

		Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
<b>S I N G U L A R</b>	<b>Nominative</b>	ὁ	ἡ	τό
	<b>Accusative</b>	τόν	τήν	τό
	<b>Genitive</b>	τοῦ	τῆς	τοῦ
	<b>Dative</b>	τῷ	τῇ	τῷ
<b>P L U R A L</b>	<b>Nominative</b>	οἱ	αἱ	τά
	<b>Accusative</b>	τούς	τάς	τά
	<b>Genitive</b>	τῶν	τῶν	τῶν
	<b>Dative</b>	τοῖς	ταῖς	τοῖς

Consider a clause from John 7:1b: ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἀποκτεῖναι. Following the word order would read “seeking him the Jews to kill” which would be awkward and possibly confusing English. But αὐτὸν is accusative case, and οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι is nominative case, so there is no confusion in Greek. The Jews are doing the seeking and “Him” (Jesus) is their target.

Note that the functions described above are only the general tendency of the Greek cases. Prepositions (in, over, upon, beside, etc., etc.) affect the significance of the case of a noun in a particular context. For now, understand the general case functions. As you are looking at a text (in BibleHub, etc.), pay attention to what preposition (if any) is used with the noun you are interested in. Note if the translation with the preposition varies from the general function of the case.

<sup>3</sup> [http://nrmount.blogspot.com/2012/01/article\\_25.html](http://nrmount.blogspot.com/2012/01/article_25.html), accessed September 18, 2017.