

LUCIEN VAN BEEK, LUK HUITINK

# Ancient Greek

Morphosyntactic Structures – Part 3: Tense and Aspect



Universiteit  
Leiden

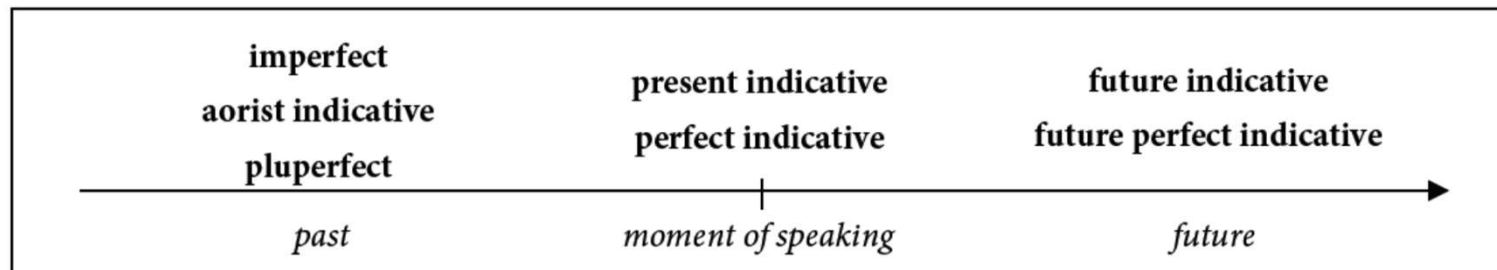


# Roadmap

- Tense and Aspect
- The Seven Indicatives of the Greek Verb
- Tense-Aspect Alternation in Narrative

# Tense

- Present tenses: present and perfect indicative
- Past tenses: imperfect, aorist indicative and pluperfect
- Future tenses: future indicative, future perfect indicative



## Grammatical Aspect

- **Imperfective** aspect: all forms built on a present stem

*An action is presented as incomplete (an action that is ongoing or repeated, that can conceivably be interrupted), with several component parts being envisaged.*

- **Perfective** (aorist) aspect: all forms built on an aorist stem

*An action is presented as a single and complete whole (an action in its entirety), without any separate 'component parts' being envisaged*

- **Perfect** aspect: all forms built on a perfect stem

*An action is presented as a state, resulting from a preceding completed action, and often has in view the effects of that action*

## Lexical Aspect (*Aktionsart*)

- **Telic verbs:** verbs which, inherent in their meaning, are directed towards an end-point: e.g. πείθω *persuade*, δίδωμι *give*, τρέχω εἰς *run towards*
- **Atelic verbs:** verbs which are not inherently directed towards an end-point: γελάω *laugh*, τρέχω ἐν *run (around in)*
- A subset of this class consists of so-called **stative verbs**, verbs which normally have a prolonged duration and in which no change takes place over time: e.g. βασιλεύω *be king*, φιλέω *love*, εἰμί *be*.

## Present and Aorist Aspect

εἶπωμεν [AOR.] ἢ σιγῶμεν [PR.]; (Eur. Ion 758)

Should we speak up or keep silent?

ΣΩ. Καὶ νῦν δὴ τούτων ὁπότερον βούλει ποίει, ἐρώτα [PR.] ἢ ἀποκρίνου [PR.]. ::  
ΠΩΛ. Ἄλλὰ ποιήσω ταῦτα. καὶ μοι ἀπόκριναι [AOR.], ὧ Σώκρατες· ἐπειδὴ Γοργίας  
ἀπορεῖν σοι δοκεῖ περὶ τῆς ῥητορικῆς, σὺ αὐτὴν τίνα φῆς εἶναι; (Pl. *Grg.* 462b)

(Socrates:) So now please do whichever of these you like, either ask the questions or answer them. :: (Polus:) All right, I will. So, answer me, Socrates: Since you think Gorgias is confused about oratory, which craft do you say it is?

# Tense and Aspect Combined

## The Seven Indicatives of Ancient Greek

κτῶμαι 'acquire'

	imperfective aspect (present stem)	perfective aspect (aorist stem)	perfect-stem aspect
<b>present</b>	<i>present indicative</i> κτῶμαι	—	<i>perfect indicative</i> κέκτημαι
<b>past</b>	<i>imperfect</i> ἐκτώμην	<i>aorist indicative</i> ἐκτησάμην	<i>pluperfect</i> ἐκεκτήμην
<b>future</b>	<i>future indicative</i> κθήσομαι		<i>future perfect indicative</i> κεκτήσομαι

## Present Indicative and Imperfect

- κτῶμαι 'I am acquiring', 'I (habitually) acquire'
- ἐκτώμην 'I was acquiring', 'I used to acquire'

τί κάτησθε, ὦ Πέρσαι, ἐνθαῦτα; (Hdt. 3.151.2)

Why are you sitting there, Persians?

δῶρά οἱ ἀνά πᾶν ἔτος ἐδίδου ... καὶ τὴν Βαβύλωνά οἱ ἔδωκε. (Hdt. 3.160.2)

He gave him gifts yearly ... and he gave him Babylon.

τὰ δις πέντε δέκα ἐστιν 'Two times five is ten'.

Νέων δὲ καὶ παρ' Ἀριστάρχου ἄλλοι ἔπειθον ἀποτρέπεσθαι· οἱ δ' οὐχ ὑπήκουον. (Xen. An. 7.3.7)

Neon and others from Aristarchus tried to persuade them to turn back, but they would not listen.



## Aorist Indicative

- ἐκτησάμην ‘I acquired’, ‘I have acquired’

δῶρά οἱ ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος ἐδίδου ... καὶ τὴν Βαβύλωνά οἱ ἔδωκε. (Hdt. 3.160.2)

He gave him gifts yearly ... and he gave him Babylon.

ἔδοξε τῇ βούλῃ ... (many inscribed Athenian decrees)

The council has resolved ...

ἀποβάντες τοὺς ἀντιστάνας μάχῃ νικήσαντες τὴν πόλιν ἔσχον. (Thuc. 8.23.3)

They disembarked, defeated those who met them in battle, and gained possession of the city.

## Aorist Indicative

- ἐκτησάμην ‘I acquired’, ‘I have acquired’

καὶ σώφρων ἤμαρτε. (Thgn. 665)  
Even a wise man makes mistakes.

ἐγημάμεσθ', ὦ ξεῖνε, θανάσιμον γάμον. | :: ὤμωξ' ἀδελφὸν σόν. (Eur. El. 247–8)  
I have entered into a deathly marriage, stranger. :: I lament your brother!

## Perfect Indicative, Pluperfect, Future Perfect

- κέκτημαι 'I have acquired', 'I possess'
- ἐκεκτήμην 'I possessed' (< 'I had acquired')
- κεκθήσομαι 'I shall possess' (< 'I shall have acquired')

κεῖνος μὲν οὖν δέδωκε σὺν θεοῖς δίκην. (Eur. *Tro.* 867)

That man [Paris], with the gods' help, has paid the penalty

οἱ τῶν Ἀρκάδων ὀπλίται παντάπασιν οὐκ ἀντεξῆσαν· οὕτω τοὺς πελταστὰς ἐπεφόβηντο.

The Arcadian hoplites did not come out to meet them at all. Such overwhelming fear did they feel for the peltasts. (Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.16)

σὲ δ' ἄλλη τις γυνὴ κεκτήσεται. (Eur. *Alc.* 181)

Some other woman will have you (<will have acquired).

## Future Indicative

- κτήσομαι ‘I shall acquire’

τήνδε δείξω μὴ λέγουσαν ἔνδικα. (Eur. *Tro.* 970)

I will show that this woman is not speaking justly. *Announcement.*

οὔτοι καταπρόξει ... τοῦτο δρῶν. (Ar. *Vesp.* 1366)

You won't get away with this behaviour. *Threat.*

## The Imperfect, Aorist and Present in Narrative

καὶ ὅτε δὴ ἦν δεκαέτης ὁ παῖς, πρῆγμα ἐς αὐτὸν τοιόνδε γενόμενον ἐξέφηνέ μιν·  
ἔπαιζε [IPF.] ἐν τῇ κώμῃ ... μετ' ἄλλων ἡλικίων ἐν ὁδῷ. καὶ οἱ παῖδες παίζοντες  
[IPF.] εἶλοντο [AOR.] ἐωυτῶν βασιλέα εἶναι τοῦτον δὴ τὸν τοῦ βουκόλου ἐπὶ κλησιν  
παῖδα. ὁ δὲ αὐτῶν διέταξε [AOR.] τοὺς μὲν οἰκίας οἰκοδομέειν ... (Hdt. 1.114.1–2)

Now when the boy (Cyrus) was ten years old, the following occurrence revealed him for what he was. He was playing outdoors in the village with others of his age. The boys in their games chose to be their king this one who was supposed to be the son of the cowherd. Then he assigned some of them to the building of houses.

## The Imperfect, Aorist and Present in Narrative

ἐκεῖθεν δὲ τῆ ὑστεραία ἔπλεον [IPF.] οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἐπὶ Κύζικον. οἱ δὲ Κυζικηνοὶ τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Φαρναβάζου ἐκλιπόντων αὐτὴν ἐδέχοντο [IPF.] τοὺς Ἀθηναίους· Ἀλκιβιάδης δὲ μείνας αὐτοῦ εἴκοσιν ἡμέρας καὶ χρήματα πολλὰ λαβὼν παρὰ τῶν Κυζικηνῶν, οὐδὲν ἄλλο κακὸν ἐργασάμενος ἐν τῇ πόλει ἀπέπλευσεν [AOR.] εἰς Προκόννησον. (Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.18–20)

From there (Proconnesus) the Athenians (with Alcibiades) sailed on the next day against Cyzicus. The Cyzicenes, now that the Peloponnesians and Pharnabazus had evacuated the city, admitted them. There Alcibiades stayed for twenty days, and obtained a great deal of money from the Cyzicenes, but without doing any further harm in the city, he sailed back to Proconnesus.

## The ‘Historical Present’

παρῆν καὶ ἡ γυνή. ἐσελθοῦσαν δὲ καὶ τιθεῖσαν τὰ εἴματα ἐθηεῖτο ὁ  
Γύγης. ὡς δὲ κατὰ νώτου ἐγένετο ἰούσης τῆς γυναικὸς ἐς τὴν κοίτην,  
ὑπεκδὺς ἐχώρεε ἔξω, καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἐπορᾶ μιν ἐξιόντα. (Hdt. 1.10.1–2)

The woman appeared as well. Gyges saw her come in and undress. And, as the woman was getting in bed and her back was turned to him, he slipped away and was on his way out, and the woman spotted him leaving.

## The ‘Historical Present’

Κῦρος ... ὠρμᾶτο ἀπὸ Σάρδεων· καὶ ἐξελαύνει διὰ τῆς Λυδίας. ...  
ἐξελαύνει διὰ Φρυγίας ... ἐντεῦθεν ἐξελαύνει ... εἰς Κελαινάς  
(Xen. An. 1.2.5, 1.2.6, 1.2.7, etc.)

Cyrus set forth from Sardis; and he marched through Lydia ... He  
marched through Phrygia ... From there he marched to Celaena.