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CONTENTS

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FOR ALTERNATIVE CLASSIFICATION OF DECLENSION SYSTEM IN MODERN GREEK

Since Antiquity the classification of the declension system in Greek language had been essentially changed. Initially the classification of the declension system in Greek Language (Ancient Greek) was based on the so-called linguistic principle i.e. on the stem endings of the nouns. Later in Modern Greek it was connected to the grammatical category of gender i.e. the linguistical principle of classification has been changed to the mnemotechnical one. The issues related with the classifaction of the declension system in Modern Greek prove quite relevant nowadays. The widespread system of M. Triandafilidis, based on the mnemotechnical principle, is regarded by many scholars as outdated. In their opinion, it does not correspond to the structure of Modern Greek. In contemporary studies, there are a lot of alternative classifications, but none of them is widely accepted today. While classifying any declension system different factors should be taken into account, namely:

a) the grammatical category of gender;

b) the stem ending of the noun;

c) an equal or unequal number of syllables, isosyllabism and anisosyllabism;

d) the number of case endings;

e) the ending of one case, e.g. of Genitive, etc.

The author of the most accepted classification, M. Triandafilidis shares the opinion of the well known scholar of the XIX century, A. Thumb which first offered the classification of the declension system in Modern Greek according to gender.[1] A. Thumb was famous German linguist, researcher of

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[1] Thumb A., Handbuch der Neugriechischen Volkssprache, Verlag von Karl J. Brüner, Strassburg 1910, 39-40.

Ancient and Modern Greek, and while distinguishing the types of the Modern Greek declension, he evidently took as basis the practice of German language. The problem is that in Modern Greek the identification of declension types according to the gender of the nouns, is not relevant. Thus according to M. Triandafilidis' system, the first declension includes many different nouns that decline in absolutely different ways, namely:

a) nouns with endings -ας, -ης and equal number of syllables;
b) nouns with endings -ας, -ης and unequal number of syllables;
c) nouns with endings -ες, -ους and unequal number of syllables;
d) nouns with ending -ος and equal number of syllables;

As mentioned above, these nouns decline differently, and therefore, this classification is too difficult to understand while studying Modern Greek language.

Before I proceed to alternative classifications, I would like to present the declension system of M. Triandafilidis. As mentioned above, this system distinguishes between masculine, feminine and neuter nouns, with equal and unequal number of syllables.

Anisosyllabic nouns differ from isosyllabic ones with an extra syllable in plural a compared to the Nominative singular. In general, the anisosyllabic nouns form their plural by suffix -δες. E.g. ο περιβολάρης – οι περιβολάρηδες.

The nouns of neuter gender have an extra syllable not only in plural, but also in Genitive singular. E.g. το κύμα – του κύματος – τα κύματα.[2]

The first type of the declension includes masculine nouns, which are divided into two groups: first group – masculine nouns with endings -ας, -ης, -ες, -ους, second group – with ending -ος.

The second type of the declension has feminine nouns with endings -α, -η, -ω, -ος, -ου.

While in the third type there are neuter nouns, which are divided into two groups: nouns with equal number of syllables ending with -ο, -ι, -ος and nouns with unequal number of syllables ending with -μα, -σιμο, -ας, -ως.

M. Triandafilidis' system can be presented as the following table:

M. Triandafilidis					
I		**II**		**III**	
Masculine		Feminine		Neuter	
endings		endings		endings	
-ας, -ης, -ες, -ους	-ος	-α, -η, -ω, -ος, -ου		-ο, -ι, -ος	-μα, -σιμο, -ας, -ως

2   Τριανταφυλλίδης Μ., Νεοελληνική γραμματική (της δημοτικής), Ανατύπωση της έκδοσης του ΟΕΣΒ (1941) με διορθώσεις, Αριστοτέλειο Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης, Ινστιτούτο Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών, Ίδρυμα Μανόλη Τριανταφυλλίδη, Θεσσαλονίκη 2002, 225-226.

M. Triandafilidis' system had been found successful because of its simplicity. There are three types, which are differentiated through their genders. However, closer study shows that the simplicity is apparent as each type includes a lot of different subcategories. Therefore, M. Triandafilidis' system has a large number of opponents that prefer to turn to alternative classifications. Out of them, the one be mentioned in the first place is that of M. Filintas presented in the book "Grammar of Greek Language" ("Γραμματική της Ρωμαϊκής γλώσσας"). He offers two types of declension based on the opposition of equal and unequal number of syllables and distinguished also a group of nouns with so-called dual declension.[3]

Another noteworthy alternative is the one suggested by A. Mirambel. He based his classification on cases marks and proposed three types of declension: 1. four endings declension; 2. three endings declension; 3. two endings declension. Nouns ending with -o (masculine, singular) belong to the first declension. According to A. Mirambel, personal pronouns, articles and nouns ending with -o (masculine, plural) belong to the second declension. All other nouns belong to the third one, including nouns ending with: -ας and -ης (masculine), -α and -η (feminine) and -ι, -o, -μα (neuter).[4]

The system of A. Mirambel can not be considered successful because:

a) It is not correct to group nouns ending with -ος in the first declension – that is, in the declension with four endings. It should be remembered that -ε of Vocative is the stage of -o stem ablaut, and it can not be considered as a declensional ending.

b) The third declension unites nouns of different types only because they have two declensional endings. These nouns are declined differently, both in singular and plural. As an example, let us consider nouns ο άντρας (masculine) and το γράμμα (neuter).

	Singular		Plural	
Nom.	ο άντρας	το γράμμα	οι άντρες	τα γράμματα
Gen.	του άντρα	του γράμματος	των αντρών	των γραμμάτων
Acc.	τον άντρα	το γράμμα	τους άντρες	τα γράμματα
Voc.	-- άντρα	-- γράμμα	-- άντρες	-- γράμματα

It is true that these words have two endings in both numbers, but they differ from each other by the number of syllables. Also, if the word άντρας has

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3   Τσοπανάκης Α., Νεοελληνική γραμματική, Εκδοτικός Οίκος Αδελφών Κυριακίδη, Βιβλιοπωλείον της Εστίας Ι. Δ. Κολλέρου & Σ^{ιας}, Θεσσαλονίκη-Αθήνα 1994, 209.
4   Mirambel A., Η Νέα Ελληνική Γλώσσα, περιγραφή και ανάλυση, μετάφραση Κάρτζα Κ., Έκδοση Αριστοτέλειου Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης, Θεσσαλονίκη 1988, 89-97.

one form for all indirect cases (άντρα), the other one, the word γράμμα is changed only in Genitive (γράμματος). It can be added as well that the endings of cases are definitely different from one another.

It could be correct to mark out separate types of declension or at least some subcategories.

P. Mackridge distinguishes three categories of nouns. The nouns with two case endings belong to the first category. It is divided into two subcategories: masculine and feminine nouns. Nouns with ending -ου in Genitive belong to the second category, which has three subcategories: masculine (and some feminine) nouns with ending -ος, neuter nouns with ending -ο, neuter nouns with ending -ι. In the third category there are some different groups of the neuter nouns, which are divided, mainly, into two subgroups: isosyllabic and anisosyllabic nouns.[5]

The system suggested by P. Mackridge is acceptable because of its usefulness for practical purposes, but there is one weak point: the classification is not based on one principle. Namely, the number of cases, the ending of the Genitive or the gender category is used as a basis for defining the types of declension. It would be better to distinguish the types of declension according to the form of Genitive or to the gender category or to the case numbers.

G. Zoukis in his work "The Grammar of New Dimotiki" ("Γραμματική της Νεοδημοτικής") distinguishes three types of declension. The masculine nouns with endings -ας, -ης, -ες and feminine nouns with endings -α, -η belong to the first declension. Masculine nouns with endings -ος, -ους, feminine nouns with endings -ος, -ους, -ω and neuter nouns with endings -ο, -ι belong to the second declension, while the nouns of all genders – which historically have been among the nouns of the third declension in Ancient Greek – are united in the third one.[6]

G. Zoukis' classification can not be accepted as it is based on an incorrect linguistic principle and on the outdated patterns of noun declension. Without knowing Ancient Greek it's impossible to be guided by this system.

We can present the three classifications discussed above in the following scheme:

[5]   Mackridge P., Η Νεοελληνική γλώσσα, Εκδόσεις Πατάκη, Αθήνα 1990, 215-219.
[6]   Ζούκης Α., Γραμματική της Νεοδημοτικής, Βιβλιοπωλείον της "Εστίας", Αθήνα 1963, 47-73.

A. Mirambel			P. Mackridge			G. Zoukis		
I	**II**	**III**	**I**	**II**	**III**	**I**	**II**	**III**
with 4 case endings	with 3 case endings	with 2 case endings	with 2 case endings	with ending -ου in Genitive	Neuter nouns.	-ας, -ης, -ες; -α, -η	-ος, -ους, -ω, -ο,-ι	nouns of the third declension in Ancient Greek
-ος singular	-ος plural	-ας, -ης, -α, -η, -ι, -ο, -μα	-ας, -ης, -α, -η	-ος, -ο, -ι	-μα, -σιμο, -ας			

Alternative classifications are given by A. Tsopanakis as well. He mentions that the declension system of Greek language can not be connected to the gender category. While identifying the declension types he considers not the gender, but the common case endings in different cases.

In the book published in 1956 "Our Declension System" ("Το κλιτικό μας σύστημα") he distinguished six types of declension: first declension – isosyllabic nouns ending with -ας, -ης (masculine), -α, -η, -ω (feminine); second declension – nouns ending with -ος (masculine and feminine) and -ο, -ι (neuter); third declension – anisosyllabic nouns ending with -ς, -ας, -ης (masculine), -α, -η, -ω (feminine); fourth declension – nouns ending with -ς, -ον, -ο, -α (neuter); fifth declension – nouns ending with -εας, -ης (masculine), -η (feminine); sixth declension – nouns ending with -ος (neuter).[7]

Later in "Modern Greek Grammar", 1994 A. Tsopanakis has changed his opinion and have proposed three declensions based on isosyllabism of the nouns: first declension – isosyllabic nouns ending with -ας, -ης (masculine) and -α, -η, -ω (feminine); second declension – isosyllabic nouns ending with -ος (masculine, feminine and neuter) and -ο, -ι (neuter); third declension – anisosyllabic nouns.[8]

This classification can be presented as follows:

[7] Τσοπανάκης Α., Το κλιτικό μας σύστημα, Έκδοση Αριστοτέλειου Πανεπιστημίου Θεσσαλονίκης, Θεσσαλονίκη 1956, 123.

[8] Τσοπανάκης Α., op. cit., 213-241.

A. Tsopanakis								
Old Classification (1956)						New Classification (1994)		
Isosyllabic		Anisosyllabic		Archaic		Isosyllabic		Aniso-syllabic
Masc. Fem.	Masc. Neut.	Masc. Fem.	Neut.	Masc. Fem.	Neut.	Masc. Fem.	Masc. Fem. Neut.	Masc. Fem. Neut.
-ας, -ης, -α, -η, -ω	-ος, -ο, -ι	-ς, -ης, -ας, -α, -ου, -ε	-ς, -ον, -ο, -α	-εας, -ης, -η	-ος	-ας, -ης, -α, -η, -ω	-ος, -ο, -ι	-ας, -ης, -ες, -ους, -α, -ου, -ε, -μα, -σιμο, -ας, -ον

The author himself understood the shortcoming of his first system (1956) – absence of common principle – and therefore, he proposed a new one, based on isosyllabism and anisosyllabism of nouns. However, neither this one had the linguistic basis. A. Tsopanakis did not take into consideration the stem endings of the nouns and, accordingly, it can not be understood the presence of nouns with ending -ω in the first declension.

Kh. Kleris and G. Babiniotis, linguists of the Athens Univeristy have also proposed an alternative classification. They decided on case endings as the basis for the declension system, correspondingly, proposed two types: with two endings and with three endings. The first one is divided into two subcategories – isosyllabic and anisosyllabic. To the first subcategory belong nouns ending with -ας, -ης, -εας (masculine), -α, -η, -ος (feminine) and -ο, -ι (neuter) and to the second one – nouns ending with -ας, -ης, -ες, -ους (masculine), -α, -ου, -η (feminine) and -μα, -εας, -ον, -σιμο (neuter). As concerns the three endings declension type, it includs only isosyllabic nouns ending with -ος (masculine and feminine).[9]

This classification can be shown in the following way:

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9   Κλαίρης Χ., Μπαμπινιώτης Γ., Γραμματική της Νέας Ελληνικής, Ι. Το Όνομα, αναφορά στον κόσμο της πραγματικότητας, Εκδόσεις «Ελληνικά γράμματα», Αθήνα 1998, 15-17.

Kh. Kleris, G. Babiniotis							
With Two Endings						With Three Endings	
Isosyllabic			Anisosyllabic			Isosyllabic	
masc.	fem.	neut.	masc.	fem.	neut.	masc.	fem.
-ας	-α	-ο	-ας	-α	-μα	-ος	-ος
-ης	-η	-ι	-ης	-ου	- εας		
-εας	-ος		-ες	-η	-ον		
			-ους		-σιμο		

The classification proposed by Kh. Kleris and G. Babiniotis can be re-garded as a logical system, which takes into account all factors for indentify-ing declension types, namely, the number of case endings, isosyllabism and anisosyllabism of nouns, the category of grammatical gender. From the lin-guistic point of view, this classification is absolutely accurate, but when con-sidered from the practical point of view, it seems somehow confusing and difficult to be understood by students and foreigners.

Another noteworthy classification is the one proposed by Georgian scho-lars – R. Gordeziani, I. Darchia and S. Shamanidi. It is presented in the grammar book "Ancient and Modern Greek. Comparative Grammar" pub-lished in 2001. They believe the classification of Modern Greek declension system requires the use of the linguistic principle which scholars in different European countries widely apply for the identification of Ancient Greek dec-lension types. Thus in Modern Greek, four declensions can be distinguished.

The first declension is characterized by -ας or -α, -ης or -η endings in Ge-nitive singular, the second declension – by -ου ending and the third one – by -ος, -ους endings, while nouns with two possible stem forms – extended and non-extended – belong to the forth declension.[10]

Accordingly, the nouns (both masculine and feminine) with -α stem of Ancient Greek first declension (e. g. η χώρα, ο ναύτης), the nouns historically belonging to the Ancient Greek third declension, the stem of which are pre-served in Modern Greek, but the Nominative is formed and declined accord-ing to the first declension of Ancient Greek (e. g. η γυναίκα, ο άντρας), the nouns with -ι and -ευ stem historically belonging to the third declension in Ancient Greek, but declining nowadays in singular according to the Ancient Greek first declension and in plural – according to the Ancient Greek third declension (e. g. η απόφαση, ο ιερέας) belong to the first type.

The nouns (masculine, feminine and neuter) with -ο stem of Ancient Greek second declension (e. g. ο ουρανός, η τροφός, το δέντρο), the nouns

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[10]   Gordeziani R., Darchia I., Shamanidi S., Ancient and Modern Greek (Comparative Grammar), Logos Publishers, Tbilisi 2001, 58 (in Georgian).

historically ending with -ιον (-ιν of the Middle Ages) and having the ending -ι in Modern Greek (e. g. το καλοκαίρι), the nouns historically belonging to Ancient Greek third declension, the stem of which is preserved in Modern Greek, but the Nominative of which is formed and declined according to the second declension of Ancient Greek (e. g. το γόνατο) belong to the second type of Georgian scholars' classification.

Neuter nouns with different stems of Ancient Greek third declension (e. g. το φως, το χρώμα), and the ones derived from verbs in the Middle Ages and declining according to the Ancient Greek third declension (e. g. το ντύσιμο) belong to the third type of classification.

And the nouns that decline in singular according to the first declension and in plural extend their stem with -δ- suffix, belong to the forth or the mixed declension of the system discussed above (e. g. ο μανάβης).[11]

This classification can be presented as follows:

R. Gordeziani, I. Darchia, S. Shamanidi			
I	II	III	IV
nouns with α stem	nouns with o stem	neuter nouns of the III declension	nouns extended by -δ- in plural
historically the nouns of III declension, declining according to the I declension of Ancient Greek	nouns historically with -ιον ending	nouns composed from verbs and ending with -σιμο	
nouns with -ι and -ευ stems	historically the nouns of III declension, declining according to the II declension of Ancient Greek		

In my opinion, this classification is based on the correct linguistic principle, that is, on the stem ending, but it is not quite convenient when used for teaching purposes as it is difficult to understand without knowing Ancient Greek and its declension principles.

To my mind, identification of Modern Greek declension types, alongside the linguistic ones, requires as well consideration of practical purposes. So,

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[11] Gordeziani R., Darchia I., Shamanidi S., op. cit., 58-59.

the classification that will facilitate understanding and learning of Modern Greek declension system must be considered the best one.

For this purpose I carried out an experiment: while teaching Modern Greek grammar, I tried to use several systems, namely, the traditional system of M. Triandafilidis, the classifications of Kh. Kleris, G. Babiniotis and the one of R. Gordeziani, I. Darchia and S. Shamanidi. Taking into account the results of the experiment, I can conclude:

a) The students study the declension types easier using the system of Trianda-filidis while declining the isosyllabic nouns with -ος, -ας, -ης (masculine), the isosyllabic nouns with -α, -η (feminine) and the isosyllabic nouns with -ι, -ο- endings (neuter). But at the following stage of studies, while declining the nouns of different categories – such as, nouns with -ος (feminine), anisosyllabic nouns with -ας, -ης (masculine), nouns with -εας (masculine), nouns with -ση, -ξη, -ψη (feminine) endings and the nouns with different neutural stems (neuter) – the students have difficulties in perception of this system.

b) The experiment revealed that in spite of the accurate, logical character of Kh. Kleris and G. Babiniotis system, in contrast to the classification of M. Trian-dafilidis, it is very difficult to remember. It is easy to study the so-called second declension because only the nouns with -ος ending (masculine and feminine) belong to it, but the so-called first declension proves quite a problem. As mentioned above, it is divided into two groups: isosyllabic and anisosyllabic nouns. The nouns with -ας, -ης, -εας (masculine), with -α, -η (feminine) and with -o, -ι, -ος (neuter) endings declining in quite a different way are grouped together, which is difficult for students to understand and learn by.

In my opinion, the classification of R. Gordeziani, I. Darchia and S. Sha-manidi can be considered as the best one, because:

1) It is based on linguistic principle and on the stem ending, which is the characteristic for Indo-European languages and thus it is acceptable for Greek as well.

2) Some forms of Modern Greek language are explained by the data of Ancient Greek, which makes them easy to understand and learn. E. g. the nouns historically belonging to the third declension of Ancient Greek and having -ι and -ευ stems, can be used as an example of so-called mixed declension. In singular they are declining according to the first declension of Ancient Greek and in plural – according to the third one. Without knowing Ancient Greek it is difficult to understand the appearance of -εις in plural in place of the usual -ες ending.

3) It distinguishes the so-called mixed declension which includes nouns extending with -δ- suffix.

Despite these positive characteristics, the teaching process exposed certain disadvantages of the system, as students faced some difficulties while studying it.

Namely, the separation of the so-called mixed declension, which I consider as a very good and correct solution, appeared difficult for students to understand and remember. Besides, they were confused by the variety of nouns belonging to the first declension. It promts to suppose that it would be better devide this so-called first declension into subcategories.

Taking into consideration my teaching experience, I would like to propose my own system, which in general follows the classification proposed by R. Gordeziani, I. Darchia and S. Shamanidi. In my opinion, for practical purposes it would be better to distinguish five types of declension.

The first declension: nouns with α stem, with -ας, -ης (masculine), -α, -η (feminine) and -εας, -η endings, which show their old forms in plural; the second declension: nouns with α stem, the isosyllabic nouns with -ας, -ης, -ες endings; the third declension: nouns with o stem (masculine, feminine and neuter) with -ος, -ο, -ι endings; the forth declension: isosyllabic neuter nouns of different stems with -ους ending in Genitive; the fifth declension: anisosyllabic nouns of different stems (neuter) having -ος ending in Genitive.

My classification can be presented in the following way:

S. Berikashvili						
I			II	III	IV	V
Isosyllabic nouns with α stem			Anisosyllabic nouns with α stem	Nouns with o stem	Isosyllabic nouns of different stems	Anisosyllabic nouns of different stems
Masc.	Fem.	Masc. Fem.	Masc.	Masc. Fem. Neut.	Neut.	Neut.
-ας, -ης	-α, -η	-εας, -η	-ας, -ης, -ες	-ος, -ο, -ι	-ος	-μα, -εας, -ον, -σιμο

In the paper, I tried to present all existig alternative classifications of Modern Greek declension system, to state the results of my experiment, to identify the most acceptable system for practical, that is, teaching purposes, and to propose my own classifiaction.