

LESSON 36

Nominative and Vocative Cases

36.1. Nominative as Subject

The primary function of the Nominative Case is to express the Subject of a finite verb.

ἰδίᾳ γὰρ ταῦτα οἱ Κορίνθιοι ἔπραξαν. (Th. 1.66.)

*For **the Corinthians** did this independently.*

36.2. Nominative as Complement

The Nominative also expresses the Complement of verbs such as ‘to be’, ‘to become’, or ‘to seem (to be)’. The Complement refers back to the Subject.

οὐκ ἦσθ’ ἄρ’ ὀρθῶς τοῦδε σώματος πατήρ; (E. Alc. 636.)

*Were you, then, not genuinely **father** of this person?*

The noun Complement refers back to the Subject contained within the verb ἦσθα.

εἰ γὰρ δόξει δίκαιος εἶναι, ἔσονται αὐτῷ τιμαὶ καὶ δωρεαὶ δοκοῦντι τοιούτῳ εἶναι. (Pl. R. 361 B–C.)

*For if he is going to seem to be **just**, there will be honours and gifts for him as seeming to be such.*

The adjectival Complement refers back to the Subject contained within the verb δόξει.

36.3. Predicate Nominative with Passive Verb

Some verbs in the Active Voice may take a double direct Object, where the second Accusative term is a predicate of the first.

ποῦ χρῆ τίθεσθαι ταῦτα, ποῦ δ' αἰνεῖν, ὅταν
τὰ θεῖ' ἐπαινῶν **τοὺς θεοὺς** εὔρω **κακοῦς**; (S.Ph. 451–452.)

*How should I regard this, and how approve, when
while I praise the <actions> of the gods I find **the gods nasty**?*

κακοῦς (without article) refers back to τοὺς θεοὺς (with article).

If such Active constructions are transposed to the Passive Voice, the first Accusative becomes the Subject and the predicate Accusative becomes a predicate Nominative.

κεῖνος δ' ἀπ' οἴκων εὐθὺς ἐξορμώμενος
ἄνους καλῶς λέγοντος ἠϋρέθη πατρός. (S.Aj. 762–763.)

*But that <man>, as soon as he was setting out from home,
was found <to be> **senseless**, although his father spoke well.*

The Active equivalent of this expression would be: 'they found that <man> <to be> senseless'. In the actual Passive expression, the first Accusative ('that <man>') becomes the Subject; and the predicate Accusative ('senseless') becomes a predicate Nominative (ἄνους).

36.4. Quoted Nominative

A term may be quoted in the Nominative, even if the syntax of its clause requires another Case (usually Acc., in practice). Sometimes, the quoted term appears without introduction, or preceded only by the neuter singular definite article τό (regardless of the Number and Gender of the quoted term itself). Sometimes, a word such as ὄνομα ('term') or σύνθημα ('watchword') introduces the quoted term.

ταῦτ' εἰπὼν καὶ σύνθημα παρεγγυήσας **Ζεὺς σωτὴρ καὶ ἡγεμὼν**
ἐπορεύετο. (X.Cyr. 7.1.10.)

*After saying this and passing along the watchword '**Zeus saviour and leader**', he moved on.*

36.5. Nominative Address

Nominative forms are sometimes used with a Vocative function. (In poetry there may be metrical reasons for this usage.) In the following sentence, *στυγνός* is unambiguously Nominative: the Vocative form is *στυγνέ*. The form *αἰών* in itself may be either Nominative or Vocative; but, following *στυγνός*, it is to be understood as Nominative. The Main verbs of the sentence (*ἔχεις*, *ἀφήκας*) address the ‘life’ (*αἰών*) in the second person singular. The opening phrase *ὦ στυγνὸς αἰών* is, thus, a Nominative address, not an exclamation.

ὦ στυγνὸς αἰών, τί με, τί δῆτ’ ἔχεις ἄνω
βλέποντα, κούκ ἀφήκας εἰς Ἄιδου μολεῖν; (*S.Ph.* 1348–1349.)

O hateful life, why, why indeed do you keep me up here seeing <the light of day>, and <why> did you not allow me to go to <the house> of Hades?

36.6. Nominative Exclamation

In the following quotation, there is no Main verb. In the long opening phrase, all nouns and adjectives, except one, are unambiguously Nominative. The form *νυμφεῖον*, therefore, which could in itself be either Nominative or Vocative, should be understood as Nominative. The opening phrase is thus a Nominative exclamation.

*ὦ τύμβος, ὦ νυμφεῖον, ὦ κατασκαφῆς
οἴκησις αἰείφρουρος*, οἱ πορεύομαι
πρὸς τοὺς ἑμαυτῆς, ὧν ἀριθμὸν ἐν νεκροῖς
πλεῖστον δέδεκται Φερσέφασσ’ ὀλωλότων· (*S.Ant.* 891–894.)

O tomb, O bridal chamber, O deep-hollowed dwelling ever-guarding, to where I am going to my own <relatives>, the largest number of whom, having perished, Persephone has received among the dead.

36.7. Vocative

The Vocative Case is used to address someone or something. It is isolated from the syntax of the sentence in which it occurs. Hence, it has sometimes been regarded as ‘not really a case’. However, the forms of the Vocative are just as much a part of the inflexion of nouns and adjectives as the other Cases. But again, the Vocative uses the shortest form of the stem of nouns and adjectives. And, although some subtypes of the three main declensions have separate forms for the Vocative, other subtypes use the same form as the Nominative. For example, ἄνθρωπε (2nd declension masc. sg. Voc.) is distinguished from ἄνθρωπος (Nom.); but τέκνον (2nd declension neut. sg.) serves both as Nominative and as Vocative.

Vocative forms are frequently preceded by ὦ. (Conventionally, ὦ is used with Vocatives, and ὦ with exclamations. But this convention is not consistently observed in manuscripts and printed texts.) Especially where there are not separate forms for Nominative and Vocative, a preceding ὦ helps to indicate the function of a Vocative phrase.

Typically, a Vocative is placed after the opening phrase of a sentence in order to catch the addressee’s attention. However, since the positions of primary and secondary emphasis in a sentence are the beginning and the end, a Vocative may occur first or even last. When a Vocative phrase is placed first in a sentence, a connective particle may be delayed until after the Vocative.

In addition to its basic function, a Vocative phrase may mark the beginning of a new paragraph in speeches. For example, ὦ ἄνδρες is used after the opening phrase at Andocides 1.1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, etc.

παῦσαι δέ, **πρέσβυ**, παῖδα σὸν κακοροθῶν. (E.Alc. 707.)
*And stop, **old man**, abusing your son.*

Simple Voc. after opening phrase.

ὦ **τόνδε μὲν σώσασ’, ἀναστήσασα δὲ**
ἡμᾶς πίτνοντας, χαῖρε, κἄν Ἄιδου δόμοις
 εὖ σοι γένοιτο. (E.Alc. 625–627.)

*O you who saved this <man>, and raised us up
 when we were falling, farewell, and may it go well for you
 in the house of Hades.*

Elaborate Voc. with ὦ and Participial phrases at beginning of sentence.

γυνὴ μὲν οὖν ὄλωλεν Ἀδμήτου, **ξένε**. (E.Alc. 821.)
No, <it is> the wife of Admetus <who> has perished, friend.

Simple Voc. at end of sentence (in stichomythia).

ὦ παῖ, σὺ **δ'** ἡμᾶς ἄπαγε πρὸς δόμους, ἵνα
 τὸν θυμὸν οὗτος ἐς νεωτέρους ἀφῆ... (S.Ant. 1087–1088.)

*But you, O <my> boy, lead us away to our home, so that
 this man may vent his anger on younger people ...*

Connective particle **δέ** delayed until after opening Voc.

36.8. Hanging Vocative

Some Vocative phrases are left ‘hanging’ without a proper Main clause. This may happen when an opening Vocative phrase is immediately followed either by an explanatory clause with **γάρ**, or by an adjectival or adverbial clause.

Ἀχελώου θύγατερ,
πότνι' εὐπάρθενε Δίρκα,
 σὺ **γάρ** ἐν σαῖς ποτε παγαῖς
 τὸ Διὸς βρέφος ἔλαβες,
 ὅτε μηρῷ πυρὸς ἐξ ἀθανάτου Ζεὺς
 ὁ τεκῶν ἤρπασέ νιν, τὰδ' ἀναβοάσας·
 ἴθι, Διθύραμβ', ἐμὰν ἄρ-
 σενα τάνδε βᾶθι νηδύν·
 ἀναφαίνω σε τόδ', ὦ **Βάκ-**
 χιε, **Θήβαις** ὀνομάζειν.
 σὺ δέ μ', ὦ **μάκαιρα Δίρκα,**
 στεφανηφόρους ἀπωθῆ
 θιάσους ἔχουσαν ἐν σοί. (E.Ba. 519–532.)

Achelous's daughter,
virgin queen Dirce, <I invoke you>;
for you once received in your waters
the infant-child of Zeus,
when Zeus who begot him snatched him
from the immortal fire <and put him> in his thigh, letting out this cry:
'Come, Dithyrambos, enter this

*male womb of mine;
I proclaim to Thebes, O Bacchius,
that I call you by this name'.
But you thrust me away from yourself,
O blessed Dirce, when I hold
my garlanded celebrations on you<r banks>.*

In this passage, the Chorus of Bacchantes address the river Dirce and then immediately explain why they are invoking the addressee. The construction drifts away from the Vocative by way of the explanatory clause with γάρ, a Temporal clause with ὅτε and direct quotation of the cry of Zeus. At this point, the Chorus state their complaint against Dirce ('But you thrust me away ...') and renew the Vocative in briefer form ('O blessed Dirce').

ὦ δαῖμον,
μόνον ὅς με κασίγνητον συλᾶς
Ἄϊδα πέμψας, ᾧ τάσδε χοᾶς
μέλλω κρατῆρά τε τὸν φθιμένων
ὑδραίνειν γαίας ἐν νότοις
πηγᾶς τ' οὐρείων ἐκ μόσχων
Βάκχου τ' οἴνηρὰς λιβὰς
ξουθᾶν τε πόνημα μελισσᾶν,
ἃ νεκροῖς θελκτήρια κέϊται. (E.IT 157–166.)

*Ah, deity,
who, by sending <him> to Hades, rob<bed> me
of my only brother, for whom I am going to sprinkle
on the surface of the earth this
bowl of liquid-offerings for the departed:
streams from the mountain heifers
and libations of the wine of Bacchus
and produce of the busy bees,
which are appointed as charms for the dead.*

Hanging Vocative with adjectival clause.

Ἀσιάτιδος γῆς **σχῆμα**, **Θηβαία πόλι**,
ὄθεν ποθ' ἔδνων σὺν πολυχρύσῳ χλιδῆ
 Πριάμου τύραννον ἐστίαν ἀφικόμην
 δάμαρ δοθεῖσα παιδοποιὸς Ἕκτορι,
 ζῆλωτὸς ἔν γε τῷ πρὶν Ἀνδρομάχῃ χρόνῳ,
 νῦν δ', εἴ τις ἄλλη, δυστυχεστάτη γυνή· (E.Andr. 1–6.)

*Form of the Asian land, city of Thebe,
 from where once with the glory of my dowry rich-in-gold
 I came to the royal hearth of Priam
 given as wife to produce children for Hector,
 Andromache, to be envied at least in that early time,
 but now, if anyone else <is>, a most unfortunate woman.*

Hanging Vocative with adverbial clause.

References

Denniston (1954), *The Greek particles*, pp. lx, 189 (on postponement of connective particles in sentences beginning with a Vocative, exclamation or oath); 60 (γάρ clauses explaining what has just been said, including hanging Vocatives).

Smyth (1956), *Greek grammar*, §§907, 917–918, 927, 938–945, 973–974 (Nominative); 949–972 (variations of agreement in Number between Subject and Predicate); 1283–1288 (Vocative).

EXERCISE 36

1. Translate the following passages.
2. Indicate for each term or phrase printed in **bold type**:
 - whether it is Nominative or Vocative in function
 - whether, if Nominative (except Nom. Address), it is Subject, Complement, predicative Nominative or quoted Nominative, and with which verb (citing the form in the text) it is constructed
 - whether, if Vocative, it is a particular usage (hanging Voc., initial Voc. with delayed connective particle, etc.)
 - whether there are contextual grounds for deciding the *function* of any examples which are ambiguous in *form*.

Example

ἀφικόμενος προπέρυσιν εἰς τὴν πόλιν, οὐπω δύο μῆνας ἐπιδεδημηκῶς κατέλεγην **στρατιώτης**. (Lys. 9.4.)

Having arrived the year before last in the city, when I had not yet been in residence for two months I was enlisted <as> a soldier.

Predicate Nominative with Passive verb κατέλεγην.

1. ὁ δὲ **πρεσβύτης** ἀκούσας ἔδεισέ τε καὶ ἀπήει σιγῇ...

πρεσβύτης, -ου, ὁ	<i>old man</i>
δεῖσαι (Aor.)	<i>to become afraid</i>

2. ἐδόκει γὰρ αὐτοῖς ... **πολὺς** ὁ παράλογος εἶναι ...

παράλογος, -ου, ὁ	<i>uncertain element (adj. as noun)</i>
-------------------	---

3. αὐτὸς δὲ δοκῶν εὐνούστατος εἶναι ... **στρατηγὸς** ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἠρέθη.

4. ἕως δ' ἔτι ἔξω βελῶν ἦσαν, παρηγγύα ὁ Κῦρος σύνθημα **Ζεὺς σύμμαχος καὶ ἡγεμών**.

ἔξω	<i>outside <the range of></i>
-----	-------------------------------------

5. ψυχὴ γὰρ ἤδα πολλά μοι μυθουμένη
τάλας, τί χωρεῖς οἱ μολῶν δώσεις δίκην;

αὐδᾶν	<i>to speak out (here Intr.)</i>
μυθεῖσθαι (Mid.)	<i>to converse (+ internal Acc. and Dat.)</i>

6. φέρε δὴ, **ὦ ἄνδρες**, μετὰ ταῦτα τί ἐγένετο;

φέρε δὴ	<i>well now (+ rhetorical question)</i>
---------	---

7. **ὦ γῆς μέγιστα τῆσδ' αἰὲ τιμώμενοι**,
οἱ ἔργ' ἀκούσεσθ', οἶα δ' εἰσόψεσθ', ὅσον
δ' ἀρεῖσθε πένθος ...

αἶρεσθαι (Mid.)	<i>to take upon oneself</i>
-----------------	-----------------------------

8. ἤκω κακοῖσι σοῖσι συγκάμων, **τέκνον**.

9. **ἰήϊε Φοῖβε**, σοὶ **δὲ**
ταῦτ' ἀρέστ' εἶη.

ἰήϊος, (-α,) -ον

healing

ἀρεστός, -ά, -όν

pleasing (accent affected by elision)

10. **ὦ παγκάκιστε**, τοῦτο **γάρ** σ' εἶπεῖν ἔχω
γλώσση μέγιστον εἰς ἀνανδρίαν κακόν.

This text is taken from *Intermediate Ancient Greek Language*,
by Darryl Palmer, published 2021 by ANU Press, The Australian
National University, Canberra, Australia.