

INTRODUCTION

§1. The Greek Language and Its Dialects

The Greek language belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. The name “Indo-European” indicates the geographic area where these languages were originally spoken. The family includes most of the languages spoken in Europe, as well as those spoken as far east as ancient Persia, Afghanistan, and India. By the careful comparison of vocabulary, morphology, and syntax, scholars have shown that all these languages descended from a common ancestor that is called either **Indo-European (IE)** or **Proto-Indo-European (PIE)**, which was probably spoken some time in the third millennium b.c.e. (see figure 1). The people who spoke this original language are supposed to have gradually dispersed throughout Europe, Asia, and India, and the language over time changed differently in different places until the variety of languages belonging to this family gradually appeared.

No direct evidence, written or archaeological, survives either for PIE or for the people who spoke it. What is known of the language comes from the comparative study of the languages that descended from it. The study of these languages began at the end of the eighteenth century when Sir William Jones, a lawyer and student of eastern languages, first asserted publicly that Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, the language of ancient India, were descended from a common source. The scientific study of the Indo-European languages began in the early part of the nineteenth century when Franz Bopp compared the forms of the verb in Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, ancient Persian, and the Germanic languages, of which English is one.

The Indo-European languages have been analyzed and divided into various subgroups, and Greek belongs to the subgroup called **Hellenic**. Hellenic comprises many varieties of ancient Greek, which are called *dialects*, for which written evidence has survived. The earliest Greek dialect for which there is surviving written evidence is **Mycenean**, which was written in a script called **Linear B**. Evidence for this language and this script has been found in several sites in mainland Greece and on Crete and dates from as early as the late thirteenth century b.c.e. For reasons that are still uncertain, Mycenean culture had experienced a sharp decline by the end of the thirteenth century b.c.e., and the Linear B script in which the Mycenean dialect was written ceased to be used.

No Greek writing survives from the next several centuries, but by the beginning of the eighth century b.c.e. a new alphabet was being used, and various forms of writing from this period onward are extant. Linguists now identify about two dozen dialects of Greek (see figure 2 for their geographical distribution), which are known from the thousands of inscriptions that survive, and al-

Uppercase	Lowercase	Name	Pronunciation
A	α	alpha	α (short) as the <i>rst</i> a of await (or as the u of cup) ā (long) as the a of father
B	β	beta	as b
Γ	γ	gamma	as the g of get as the n of bank before γ, κ, ξ, or χ
Δ	δ	delta	as d
E	ε	epsilon	as the e of pet
Z	ζ	zeta	as the sd of wisdom
H	η	eta	as the a of late
Θ	θ	theta	as the t of top or as the th of theater
I	ι	iota	ι (short) as the i of bit ī (long) as the ee of feet
K	κ	kappa	as k
Λ	λ	la(m)bda	as l
M	μ	mu	as m
N	ν	nu	as n
Ξ	ξ	xi	as the x of ax
O	ο	omicron	as the o of so
Π	π	pi	as the p of top
P	ρ	rho	as a rolled r
Σ, C	σ, ς, c	sigma	as the s of so as z before β, γ, or μ
T	τ	tau	as the t of coat
Υ	υ	upsilon	υ (short) as the u of put ū (long) as the oo of fool
Φ	φ	phi	as the p of people or as the f of feel
X	χ	chi	as the c of cat or as the ch of loch
Ψ	ψ	psi	as the ps of apse
Ω	ω	omega	as the aw of saw or as the o of hope

Observations

1. Although in the most ancient manuscripts only the uppercase letters were used, modern editions of ancient works use the lowercase letters developed in the Middle Ages. Capital letters are used, however, for the first letters of proper names, the first letters of direct quotations with the exception of drama, and sometimes for the first letters of paragraphs.
2. Most of the Greek alphabet was derived from the Phoenician alphabet, and many of the names given to the Greek letters are derived from the Phoenician names for their letters. The names *epsilon*, *omicron*, *upsilon*, and *omega* were developed in the Middle Ages as the sounds they represented changed.³
3. The name for λ in common use today is *lambda*, but the classical name appears to have been *labda*.
4. The pronunciations given for long and short upsilon do *not* represent the sound of original At-

3. *Epsilon* and *upsilon* mean, respectively, “ε written simply” and “υ written simply” (< ε or υ + ψῖλον, “simple”). By the Byzantine period certain diphthongs (see below) were pronounced in the same way as these vowels, and *epsilon* and *upsilon* were developed to refer to the simple vowels. *Omicron* means “little o” (< ο + μικρόν), and *omega* means “big o” (< ο + μέγα). These terms also arose in the Byzantine period.

Dactylic Hexameter	$- \overline{\overline{\quad}} - \overline{\overline{\quad}} - \overline{\overline{\quad}} - \overline{\overline{\quad}} - \overline{\overline{\quad}} - -$
Dactylic Pentameter	$- \overline{\overline{\quad}} - \overline{\overline{\quad}} - - \overline{\overline{\quad}} - \overline{\overline{\quad}} -$
	$1 \qquad 2 \qquad 2\frac{1}{2} \qquad 3\frac{1}{2} \qquad 4\frac{1}{2} \qquad 5$
$\begin{array}{cccccccccccc} - & - & - & - & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & - & - & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & - \\ \text{Ζεὺς} & \text{κύκ} & & \text{νος,} & \text{ταῦ} & & \text{ρος,} & & \text{σάτυ} & & \text{ρος,} & \text{χρῦ} & & \text{σὸς} & \text{δι' ἔ} & & \text{ρωτα} \end{array}$	
$\begin{array}{cccccccccccc} - & - & - & - & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & - \\ \text{Λήδης,} & & \text{Εὐρώ} & & \text{πης,} & & \text{Ἀντιό} & & \text{πης,} & \text{Δανά} & & \text{ης.} \end{array}$	
$\begin{array}{cccccccccccc} - & - & - & - & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & - \\ \text{πολλοὶ} & & \text{γὰρ} & \text{πλου} & & \text{τέουσι} & \text{κα} & & \text{κοί,} & & \text{ἀγα} & & \text{θοὶ} & \text{δὲ} & \text{πέ} & & \text{νονται.} \end{array}$	
$\begin{array}{cccccccccccc} - & - & - & - & - & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & - \\ \text{ἀλλ' ἦ} & & \text{μεις} & \text{αὐ} & & \text{τοῖς} & & \text{οὐ} & \text{δια} & & \text{μειψόμε} & & \text{θα} \end{array}$	

Observations

1. Each of the first five feet in a dactylic hexameter line may be a dactyl (— ~ ~) or a spondee (— —). The sixth foot, however, is rarely a spondee. The sixth foot is always treated as a spondee, even if the last syllable is short.
2. The principal caesura in a dactylic hexameter line is often where a word ends within the third foot, either after the long first syllable (called a **strong caesura**) or after the first short syllable (called a **weak caesura**). It is also possible to have balancing principal caesurae in the second and fourth feet. In the first couplet, the principal caesura in the dactylic hexameter line is strong and falls in the third foot. In the second couplet, the principal caesura in the dactylic hexameter line is strong and falls in the fourth foot even though there is no balancing caesura in the second foot.
3. The dactylic pentameter line is always indented several spaces. It is made up of two segments of two and a half feet each. Each segment is called a **hemiepes** (— ~ ~ — ~ ~ —). The principal caesura in the dactylic pentameter line occurs after the first hemiepes. In the first two feet of the first hemiepes, dactyls or spondees may appear, but in the second hemiepes, the feet are almost always dactyls. The last syllable in the pentameter line always counts as long, even if it is short.
4. In the first line of the second couplet, the antepenult and penult of *πλουτέουσι* (-εου) are pronounced and scanned as a single long syllable. The pronunciation of two successive vowels or diphthongs in separate syllables as a single, long syllable is called **synizesis** (συνίζησις, “sitting together”).

The dactylic hexameter line (without alternation with the dactylic pentameter line) is the meter of epic poetry. Thus, every line of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is a dactylic hexameter.

Μῆνιν ἄ		ειδε,	θε		ἄ,		Πη		ληιά		δεω,	Ἄχι		λῆος	(<i>Iliad</i> I.1)
$\begin{array}{cccccccccccc} - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & \overline{\overline{\quad}} & - & - \\ \text{Ἄνδρα} & \text{μοι} & & \text{ἔννεπε,} & & \text{Μοῦσα,} & & \text{πο} & & \text{λύτροπον,} & & \text{ὄς} & \text{μάλα} & & \text{πολλά} & \text{(Odyssey i.1)} \end{array}$															

