Linguistic Terms of Greek Origin in English and Bulgarian

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The Greek language has been the source of linguistic terms for centuries up to the present. Greek word-forming patterns, words and word elements were adopted and adapted into Latin (Neo-Latin) 1,500 years ago, and passed through Latin into many European and other languages, being used in the main for scholarly and technical purposes. The analytical study of language began in the second half of the first millennium BC in both Greece and India. The present day study of grammar descends from the Greek tradition and thus many Greek technical terms were converted into English (via Latin) and into Bulgarian (under more direct Greek influence — for historical and geographical reasons). The corpus of linguistic terms dealt with in this paper contains 696 English words and 248 Bulgarian words. They have been classified according to three criteria: the time they entered the language, the extent of their adaptation and the branches of linguistics they belong to.

Greek loans in English

The influence of classical Greek on English has been largely indirect, through Latin and French, and largely lexical and conceptual, with some orthographic and other effects. For speakers of English, Greek has been traditionally perceived as remote, esoteric and yet worthy of respect: compare the idiom “It’s Greek to me” (I can’t understand it) and the saying “The Greeks had a word for it” (expressing a traditional view of the richness of the language). Greek word-forming patterns, words, and word elements were adopted and adapted into Latin over approximately 1,500 years, and passed through Latin into many European and other languages, being used in the main for scholarly and technical purposes. The flow into English was at first limited and largely religious. The most significant influx was in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Greek words have been filtered into English through Neo-Latin: for example, rhetorical and analytical end with the suffix -al, an adaptation of Latin -alis. The linguist S. Konstantinidi (1993) claims that 12%
of English words are of direct Greek origin and 20% come from Greek but have entered the language through other languages, mainly Latin. According to The Oxford Companion to the English Language (OCEL, 1992) 6% of the new words which entered the English language from 1987 to 1989 are of Greek origin.

Our corpus contains 3,019 linguistic terms excerpted from the OCEL. Of these 696 are either translated or borrowed from Greek, or have as one of their constituents a Greek word or suffix. This number comprises 22% of the linguistic terms. We have classified the terms discussed in this paper according to the branch of linguistics they belong to. They have also been viewed chronologically — when they entered the English language as well as their form and the extent of adaptation to the language. The levels of language study considered are:

- Phonology (the study of sound patterns)
- Morphology and syntax (composition of words and sentences)
- Semantics (the study of meaning)
- Pragmatics (the study of language usage).

**Phonology and phonetics**

This group contains 53 terms.

As a term phonology combines the Greek forms φωνή (“sound”, “voice”), and λόγος. It was adopted in the eighteenth century. The term phonetics entered the English language in the 1830s, meaning the science or study of the sounds of speech. It comes from Neo-Latin phoneticus (1797), Greek φωνητικός, meaning “vocal”, “to be spoken”. The term phone dates from the 1860s from Greek φωνή, “voice” and means “speech sound”. In phonetics it is an elementary spoken sound, the smallest segment of speech recognised by a listener as a complete vowel or consonant. The number of phones is indefinitely large and they are grouped into a small number of phonemes or units of distinctive sound. The term phoneme was adopted in the 1890s from French phonème, Greek φώνημα, “a sound”. In phonetics and linguistics it is the basic theoretical unit of distinctive sound in the description of speech, out of which syllables are formed. Among the oldest terms are syllable (14th c.) from Anglo-Norman sillable, Old French sillabe, Latin syllaba, Greek συλλαβή — “taken”, “brought”, or “put together”, and prosody (15th c.) from French prosodie, Latin prosodia, Greek προσωδία — “relating to song”. This term has two meanings. It relates to the theory and study of versification: rhythm, metre, rhyme and the form of stanzas. In phonetics it belongs to the area of phonology that goes beyond the study of phonemes to deal with such features as length, rhythm, stress, pitch, intonation and loudness of speech.
**Morphology and syntax**

This group of terms is quite numerous: 149 words or phrases.

*Morphology* (19th c.) comes from Greek μορφή, (“shape”, “structure”) and λόγος (“study”). It is the study of the structure and function of words as opposed to *syntax* (16th c.) from Latin *syntaxis*, Greek σύνταξη, (“things drawn up together, arranged in order”), which is the study of the arrangement of words in the higher units of phrases, clauses and sentences. The two major branches of morphology are *inflectional morphology* (the study of inflections) and *lexical morphology* (the study of word-formation). A basic term of morphology is *morpheme* (1890s) from French morphème, coined by analogy with phonème, from Greek μορφή (“shape”, “form”), a minimal unit of form and meaning.

The term *grammar* dates from the fourteenth century from Anglo-Norman gramere, Old French gramaire (Modern grammaire), from Latin grammatica, a clipping of *ars grammatica*, a translation from Greek γραμματική (“the craft of letters”), ultimately from γράμμα (“a letter”).

The analytical study of language began in the second half of the first millennium BC in both Greece and India. In Greece it began as the study of written language. The present-day study of grammar descends from the Greek tradition, in which it was linked with logic and rhetoric. Both Plato and Aristotle took a close interest in language and helped provide the foundation for the discussion of the parts of speech. Grammar was first developed by Greek scholars in Alexandria (Egypt). Dionysius Thrax wrote *Η γραμματική τέχνη* (*The Art of Letters*, ca. 100 BC). This was the prototype for grammars of all European and many other languages. The Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro was a contemporary of Thrax’s. He wrote 25 volumes of *De lingua latina* (*On the Latin language*). He and other grammarians converted the technical terms of Greek into Latin and adapted Greek-based rules to serve their own tongue. A great advantage of describing Latin was the similarity of the two languages: both are highly inflected, with complex verb and noun structures.

Most of the writers of grammars of English have been teachers but the earliest was written in 1634 by the playwright Ben Jonson. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries the vast majority of English grammars contained little more than Thrax’s basic formula: lists of letters and syllables with comments on their pronunciation; definitions of the parts of speech; some elementary syntax; and a section on punctuation.

The term *parts of speech* dates from the sixteenth century, being a translation of the Latin phrase pars orationis in turn translated from Greek μέρος της λέξεως (Aristotle) and μέρος λόγου (Dionysius Thrax).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Latin</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>όνομα</td>
<td>Nomen</td>
<td>14c: noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ρήμα</td>
<td>Verbum</td>
<td>14c: verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Adjectivum</td>
<td>14c: adjective</td>
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<tr>
<td>μετοχὴ</td>
<td>Participium</td>
<td>14c: (participle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀρθρο</td>
<td>(articulum)</td>
<td>13c: (article)</td>
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<tr>
<td>αντωνυμία</td>
<td>pronomen</td>
<td>16c: pronoun</td>
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<tr>
<td>πρόθεση</td>
<td>praepositio</td>
<td>14c: preposition</td>
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<tr>
<td>επίρρημα</td>
<td>adverbum</td>
<td>16c: adverb</td>
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<tr>
<td>σύνδεσμος</td>
<td>coniunctio</td>
<td>14c: conjunction</td>
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<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>interiectio</td>
<td>15c: interjection</td>
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</table>

There is no adjective as part of speech in Greek grammar because according to the classical view it was a kind of noun. So the term adjective translates the Greek ὀνόμα επίθετο.

The three oldest terms of this group go back to the twelfth century and are translated from Greek:

- **case** from French *cas*, Latin *casus* (“fall”), translating Greek πτώση;
- **sentence** through Old French from Latin *sententia* (“a way of thinking”, “judgement”), translating Greek δόξα and γνώμη;
- **person** from Old French *persone*, Latin *persona* (“a mask used in drama”, “a character in a play”, “someone who has a role or legal status”, “a human being”; compare personification, a loan translation from Greek προσωποποία (“making a mask, face, person”).

Some terms entered the language in the twentieth century, thus giving evidence that Greek language is still the source of technical terms:

- **grammatology** (late 20th c.): a branch of linguistics which studies the nature of writing and writing systems;
- **etymorphs** (1989): a blend of etymo(logy) and morph(ology). A word game devised by the Australian writer and language teacher Ruth Wajnryb. In it, a series of rare words is listed, each with four multiple-choice definitions and etymologies, only one of which is correct. It is a regular feature of the journal *English Today*. 
**Semantics**

This group consists of 54 terms.

The term *semantics* was adopted in the 1890s from French *sémantique*, Greek σημαντικός (“significant”), from σήμα (“a sign”). Sometimes the term *semasiology* is used. This is the study of the meaning of words and sentences, their denotations, connotations, implications and ambiguities. The three components of a common model of language are phonology, syntax and semantics.

Most of the basic terms of this branch of linguistics are of Greek origin:

- **lexeme** from Greek λέξη (“speech”) and -eme. Also *lexical item, lexical unit*. A unit in the vocabulary of a language. Its form is governed by sound and writing, its contents by meaning and use.

- **antonym** (1860) on the analogy of *synonym*, using the Greek-derived prefix ἀντί- (“against”). Opposite meanings.

- **homonym** (17th c.) from Latin homonymum, Greek ομώνυμος (“a word having the same name”). Words identical in sound and spelling but different in meaning.

- **hyponym** (1960s) on the model of *homonym, synonym*, using the Greek prefix hypo- (“under”). A word, phrase, or lexeme of narrower or more specific meaning (e.g. rose under flower).

- **homophone** (17th c.) Greek-derived homo (“same”), phone (“sound”). Words identical in sound but different in spelling and meaning.

- **onomatics** (1930s) from Greek ονοματικός (“related to names and naming”). The study of proper names.

- **polysemy** (1890) from Neo-Latin polysemia, from Greek πολύσημος (“having many meanings”). A term for words or other items of language with two or more senses.

- **synonym** (15th c.) from Latin synonymum, Greek συνώνυμο, neuter of συνώνυμος (“having the same name”), from συν (“together”) and όνομα (“name”). A word that means the same as another.

**Pragmatics**

This group of terms is the largest, containing more than 340 words and expressions.

The term *pragmatics* derives from Greek πραγματικός from πράγμα (“matter in hand”, “action”), on the analogy of *linguistics*. It dates from the 1930s and is usually attributed to the American philosopher Charles Morris (*The Foundations of the Theory of Signs, 1938*), who distinguished between syntax (the relation of signs to
one another), semantics (the relation of signs to objects), and pragmatics (the relation of signs to interpretations). Recently this branch has expanded and includes: discourse analysis; sociolinguistics (the study of the relationship between language and society); psycholinguistics (language and the mind); neurolinguistics (language and the brain); linguistic typology (the grouping of languages into types); computational linguistics (the use of computers to stimulate language processes); stylistics (linguistic analysis applied to literature and style); applied linguistics (linguistics in relation to such practical activities as teaching, lexicography, and speech therapy).

The terms in the field of stylistics are the most numerous, 154. This branch studies style, especially in works of literature. It developed in continental Europe in the late nineteenth century out of comparative philology. In UK it became established in the 1960s.

Most of the literary genres of the Western world were invented or formalised by the Greeks and many of the names they used have passed with only minor adaptation to many successor languages:

- **drama** (16th c.) through Latin from Greek δράμα (“action”, “play”).
- **comedy** (14th c.) from French comédie, Latin comoedia, Greek κωμωδία from komos (“merry-making”).
- **tragedy** (14th c.) from Latin tragoedia, tragedia, Greek τραγωδία (“goat song”). The connection with goats is obscure. The term denotes drama dealing with serious themes, ending in suffering or death of one or more of the principal characters. The tragic hero, according to Aristotle, should be of high worth or standing, but not perfect. The effect on his spectators is the catharsis (purging) of the emotions of pity and terror through what they have seen.
- **epic** (16th c.) from Greek επικός, from ἐπος (“speech”, “tale”, “song”, “epic poem”). Sometimes the term epos is used in English. Originally a long narrative poem of great actions and events often a national epic, such as Homer’s Iliad in Greece, Milton’s Paradise Lost (17th c.). By extension, a novel, and more recently, a motion picture created on a comparable scale, such as Tolstoy’s epic War and Peace. The adjective meaning “heroic”, “majestic” (an epic poem, novel, film, events) is now in frequent use.
- **lyric** (16th c.) From Latin lyricus, Greek λυρικός (“of the lyre”), referring to a poem sung to its accompaniment, especially as composed by Sappho, Pindar and other poets. Usually a short poem that expresses personal feelings.
The terms in this category are very numerous. Other examples include: metaphor, hymn, metre, iamb, irony, pantomime, parody, anecdote, aphorism, character, chorus, fantasy, dialogue, epitaph, epithet, allegory, analogy, monologue, muse, myth, pamphlet, pathos, theatre, personification (loan-translation), rhyme, rhythm, satire, epilogue.

Another key area of pragmatics is rhetoric (14th c.), Old French rethorique (Modern rhétorique), Latin rhetorica, from Greek ρητορική τέχνη (“the craft of speaking”) from ρήτορας (“a speaker”, “orator”). It covers the study and art of communication, the art of persuasion and insincere eloquence. In the fifth century BC rhetoric became the foundation of education in city states like Athens and Sparta. Of the rhetorical works only Plato’s Phaedrus and Aristotle’s Rhetoric have survived.

During and after the Renaissance, rhetoric dominated education in the humanities in England, Scotland, and France, remaining little changed until the later nineteenth century. Until now, the terms may not be known, but the tools continue to be used in journalism and publishing, on radio and television, in the theatre and cinema:

- **aporia** (16th c.) απορία, “difficulty in passing”, “puzzle”;
- **aposiopesis** (16th c.) αποσιώπηση, “becoming silent”;
- **antonomasia** (16th c.) αντονομασία, “a naming instead”;
- **anticlimax** (18th c.) αντικλίμαξ, “down a ladder”;
- **anadiplosis** (16th c.) αναδίπλωση, “doubling up”;
- **chiasmus** (19th c.) χιασμός, “crossing”;
- **climax** (16th c.) κλίμαξ, “a ladder”;
- **ellipsis** (16th c.) έλλειψη, “coming short”;
- **euphemism** (17th c.) ευφημισμός, “speaking well”;
- **hyperbole** (16th c.) υπερβολή, “flung too far”;
- **laconic** (16th c.) λακωνικός, “Laconia” (“Sparta”, the Spartans being known for their terse speech);
- **litotes** (17th c.) λιτότητα, “plain”, “meagre”;
- **meiosis** (16th c.) μείωση, “lessen”;
- **mimesis** (17th c.) μίμηση, “imitation”;
- **oxymoron** (17th c.) οξύμωρος, a term in rhetoric for bringing opposites together in a compact paradoxical word or phrase;
- **paradox** (16th c.) παράδοξο, “contrary opinion”;
- **periphrasis** (16th c.) περίφραση, “talking around”;
- **sarcasm** (16th c.) σαρκασμός, “tearing flesh”, “speaking bitterly”;
- **sophist** (14th c.) σοφιστής, “a wise person”;


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synecdoche (14th c.) συνεκδοχή, “gathering together”;
tautology (16th c.) ταυτολογία, “repeating what has been said”;
thesis (14th c.) θέση, “something set down or put in place”;
trope (16th c.) τρόπος, “a turn”, “manner”, “style”.

Nouns make up the highest proportion of transfers, followed by adjectives. Verbs are few, and there are a number of phrases, as well as word-formation elements.

Greek loans in Bulgarian

The corpus of Bulgarian linguistic terms is 750 words and expressions, of which 248 (33%) are related to the Greek language.

The Bulgarian words of Greek origin date back to the settlement of the Slavs in the Balkan Peninsula when the Bulgarians were under the direct cultural influence of their Greek neighbours. The oldest loan words are кораб from καράβι (“ship”), колиба from καλύβα (“hut”). When the Bulgarians accepted the Christian religion in the ninth century many religious words of Greek origin entered the Bulgarian language while many administrative terms were accepted during the Byzantine invasion. During the Turkish domination the church, led by the Greek patriarch, played an important role in Bulgarian spiritual identity, and many Greek words were introduced. The linguistic terms which have been adopted in the Bulgarian language through written documents have undergone insignificant changes.

The majority of terms are nouns. Greek masculine nouns have the same gender in Bulgarian but they drop the Greek ending -os: αόριστος becomes аорист in Bulgarian, апостроф, λάρυγγος: аринк, критикос: критик, диалогос: диалог, лексикологос: лексиколог. Some Greek feminine nouns ending in -os become masculine in Bulgarian by analogy: μέθοδος becomes метод, παράγραφος: параграф, περίοδος: период.

Greek feminine nouns ending in -a preserve their gender in Bulgarian because the feminine ending in Bulgarian is the same but the stress in the Bulgarian words is changed: φωνολογία: фонология, φωνομέτρια: фонометрия, τυπολογία: типология, πρόσωπια: прошло, морфология: морфология, лексикология: лексикология, графология: графология, каллиграфия: калиграфия.

Some Greek feminine words ending in -η become masculine: ανάλυση: аналис, μορφοσύνταξη: морфосинтаксис, while others substitute the Greek feminine ending with -a or -я, the Bulgarian ending for the feminine gender: οντογένεση (της γλώσσας): онтогенеза, έλλειψη: елипса, φράση: фраза, σχολή: школа, χρονολόγηση: хронология.


It is interesting to note that some Greek suffixes and prefixes have been accepted in the Bulgarian word-formation patterns. For example the suffix -ισμος: -изъм as in νεολογισμός: неологизъм; the prefix α- as in αθεϊστής: атеист.

It would be interesting to compare the English and Bulgarian linguistic terms of Greek origin according to their forms and the extent to which they have preserved their Greek forms and meaning as well as the periods and circumstances in which they were accepted in the two languages. That could be the task of later research.

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