

Lesson Three

Vowels

This week we are moving on to vowels. We have completed a three-week study on the alphabet focussing on both the capital and small letters.

What is a vowel?

Vowels are simply defined as letters that represent an open sound. Rodney J. Decker defines vowels as, “the glue that hold consonants together, enable pronunciation, and distinguish similar words. In Greek they also have a morphological function; they serve to join various parts of a word and to distinguish some forms of a word from other forms.” (Decker 2014:14).

How many vowels does Greek have?

David Holton, Peter Mackridge, and Irene Philippaki-Warbaton argue that, “the Greek sound system has five distinct vowels.” (Holton, Mackridge & Philippaki-Warbaton 2004:3). These five distinct vowels are: **ι, ε, α, ο, υ**. This sounds like the English vowel system or Shona in my native language. However, in essence, Greek has seven vowel systems that represent the Greek sound system. There is a debate as to whether English has five vowels or six because the letter ‘y’ has a double function, for example, in the word **hymn** the ‘y’ serves as a vowel while in the word **Yesterday**, it is a consonant. Therefore some argue that English has six vowels while other it has five and ‘y’ serve as a semi-vowel. The difference lies in the fact that in Greek there are separate letters for the long and short version of the ‘ε’ and ‘ο’. In total, the seven vowels in Greek are; **α, ε, η, ι, ο, υ, ω**.

	Short vowel	Long Vowel	Either short or long
1	ε	η	α
2	ο	ω	ι
3			υ

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