

26. Liquid Verbs

Lesson in a Nutshell

Liquid verbs have stems that end in λ , μ , ν or ρ . When these consonants combine with σ , the sigma drops. This oddity occurs in the future and aorist tense.

A Liquid Form: $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omega$

Liquid verbs are verbs whose root ends in λ , μ , ν or ρ .

These letters are called “liquids.” They are called this because of the way air flows over the tongue (λ and ρ) or through the nose (μ and ν) when they are pronounced. But no need to worry about those details.

For now, it is elementary to remember these four letters. That’s:

elementary

or

Imnr_y

if you like.

λ , μ , ν and ρ

The quirk of these letters is that they do not like to be followed by σ , so when a personal ending uses a σ after these letters it simply drops.

QUICK QUIZ

Which tenses use a σ ?

(Turn the page for the exciting answer.)

Future and Aorist!

Tense	Clues
Future / λυ <u>σ</u> ω	σ before primary endings
Aorist ἔλυ <u>σ</u> α	augment, σ α, secondary endings

So liquid forms affect only the future and aorist tenses.

On your master chart, you will see that I have listed the liquid forms for the verb μένω.

Notice that μένω has a stem that ends in a liquid consonant, ν. We could not use λύω as an example of a liquid verb. Why? Because its stem does not end in a liquid consonant. On all of the shaded verbs on the chart, notice that we had to use a different verb (typed vertically in the bubble). λύω won't work because λύω is perfectly regular.

In this chapter, I will give you a detailed explanation for how liquid verbs behave. Please don't get lost in the details. Remember the big picture!

The only thing you need to remember about a liquid verb is that it drops the sigma in the future and aorist tense because σ does not like to follow λ, μ, ν and ρ.

It's **elementary**, remember?

Let's zoom in and look at μένω, a great example of a liquid future.

Μένω: A Sweet Liquid Future

If μένω were not a liquid verb, we would expect the future to look like this:

Future	
σ before primary endings	
Active	Middle
"I will stay"	"I will stay for self"
μένσω	μένσομαι
μένσεις	μένση
μένσει	μένσεται
μένσομεν	μένσόμεθα
μένσετε	μένσεσθε
μένσουσιν	μένσονται

future
2. μένω

Do you see the problem? In each form we have a liquid (ν) followed by a σ.

But Greeks do not like liquids consonants to be followed by sigmas!

So they drop the sigma. The result looks like this:

Liquid Future	
λ, μ, ν ρ, no σ, primary endings	
Active	Middle
"I will stay"	"I will stay for self"
μενῶ	μενούμαι
μενείς	μενή
μενεί	μενείται
μενούμεν	μενούμεθα
μενείτε	μενείσθε
μενούσιν	μενούνται

future
2. μένω

Why the strange augmented vowels with the circumflexes? Here is the full explanation just in case you want to know. (Don't get hung up on it.)

The actual tense formative for liquid futures is not σ but ες. Here is what happens, taking the first person plural as an example.

ΜΕΝ + ΕΣ + ΟΜΕΝ

becomes

ΜΕΝΕΣΟΜΕΝ

But Greeks did not like sigmas to stand between two vowels
(They had issues with sigmas. I think they needed counseling.)

So they dropped the sigma

ΜΕΝΕΟΜΕΝ

Do you remember the vowel contraction chart?

ΕΟ becomes ΟΥ.

The result is

ΜΕΝΟΥ̃ΜΕΝ

Too much information? Probably.

You do not need to remember all that. There are only two things you need to remember to identify a liquid future.

- 1. After the liquid consonant (λ, μ, ν, or ρ), the sigma is not used.**
- 2. The endings of the liquid futures wind up looking just like epsilon contract verbs.**

On the next page,
compare the liquid verb μένω
with the contract verb ποιέω.

μένω	ποιέω
με <u>ν</u> ῶ	ποι <u>ῶ</u>
με <u>ν</u> εῖς	ποι <u>ε</u> ῖς
με <u>ν</u> εῖ	ποι <u>ε</u> ῖ
με <u>ν</u> οῦ <u>μ</u> εν	ποι <u>ο</u> ῦ <u>μ</u> εν
με <u>ν</u> εῖ <u>τ</u> ε	ποι <u>ε</u> ῖ <u>τ</u> ε
με <u>ν</u> οῦ <u>σ</u> ιν	ποι <u>ο</u> ῦ <u>σ</u> ιν

How will you be able to tell the liquid futures apart from the epsilon contract verbs?

There are two ways.

1. A liquid consonant will precede the personal ending if it is a liquid future. Notice that this is not the case with ποιέω. λ, μ, ν and ρ are your friends! Learn to spot them!
2. When you learn the verb, you will learn that it is not an epsilon contract. The lexical form is μένω, not μενέω.

Μένω: A Liquid Aorist

Since σα is used in the aorist tense, we have a similar collision between a liquid consonant and a sigma.

We would expect this.

Aorist	
augment, σα , secondary endings	
Active	Middle
"I stayed"	"I stayed for self"
ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> α	ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> ά <u>μ</u> ην
ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> ας	ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> ω
ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> εν	ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> α <u>τ</u> ο
ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> α <u>μ</u> εν	ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> ά <u>μ</u> ε <u>θ</u> α
ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> α <u>τ</u> ε	ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> α <u>σ</u> θ <u>ε</u>
ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> α <u>ν</u>	ἔ <u>μ</u> εν <u>σ</u> α <u>ν</u> τ <u>ο</u>

αοριστᾶς
3. ἔμμενσα



See the problem?

In each form we have a liquid (ν) followed by a σ.

But Greeks do not like liquids to be followed by sigmas!

So they drop the sigma.

So instead, the liquid aorist looks like this.

Liquid Aorist		μένω	augment, λ, μ, ν, ρ, no σ, secondary endings	
Active	Middle		Active	Middle
"I stayed"	"I stayed for self"			
ἔμεινα	ἔμεινάμην		ἔμεινάμην	
ἔμεινας	ἔμεινω		ἔμεινω	
ἔμεινεν	ἔμεινᾶτο		ἔμεινᾶτο	
ἐμείναμεν	ἐμεινάμεθα		ἐμεινάμεθα	
ἐμείνατε	ἐμείνασθε		ἐμείνασθε	
ἔμειναν	ἔμειναντο		ἔμειναντο	

αοριστὸν ἔμεινα

Do you see how the sigma dropped out, leaving just the alpha? In the liquid aorists there are no strange vowel contractions, just a missing sigma.

Instead of

σα
σας
σεν
σαμεν
σατε
σαν

We have

α
ας
εν
αμεν
ατε
α

But there is one other difference that you might notice.

The vowel in $\mu\epsilon\nu$ became $\mu\epsilon\iota\nu$

Why?

Here is an answer you need to get used to:

It just does!

There are many things in language that just happen. I suppose there is a long historical explanation of why. But it is best to just accept it.

As we will see,

*Often with the liquid verbs,
there is some sort of vowel change.*

No big deal!

We will still be able to recognize them.

Look for basic shapes. Do not insist on exact forms. We are learning to recognize general patterns. This is the key to the Greek verbal system.

To Summarize

Liquid verbs are verbs whose stem ends in a λ , μ , ν , or ρ .

When the sigma of a future or aorist tense formative comes into contact with these letters,

1. The sigma drops.
2. The vowels can do funny things.

That is all there is to the liquid verbs.