

**Conference / Workshop 1:**

**"Language and Gender: Achieving Conceptual Clarity"**

**Friday 19th January 2024**

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International Research Networking Project

**"Language and Gender:  
Academic Research  
and Practical  
Implementation"**

2023/2024

**Greek language and gender: Achieving conceptual clarity**

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## A few words on Greek terminology:

- The Greek equivalent term of the English ‘gender’ is *γένος* [genos] = ‘a general concept in whose extension specific concepts are contained’, ‘a group of people with common descent’, ‘ethnic group’, and the grammatical category of gender: *γραμματικό γένος* [gramatiko genos]
- Sex and social gender are denoted in Greek by the term *φύλο* [fílo], which is the equivalent of the English term ‘sex’
  - *αρσενικό φύλο* [arseniko filo] ‘male sex’ and *θηλυκό φύλο* [thiliko filo] ‘female sex’ refer to the biological classification of humans as male or female
  - *κοινωνικό φύλο* [cironiko filo] ‘social gender’ refers to the social norms and ideologies associated with this biological classification

(see Pavlidou 2000 for a useful discussion)

- *μη σεξιστική χρήση της γλώσσας*

‘anti- / non-sexist language use’

(widely used in public/academic discourse; informed by 2<sup>nd</sup> wave feminism)

Different conceptual baggage

- *γλώσσα ουδέτερη ως προς το φύλο*

‘gender-neutral language use’

(more recent terms; + non-binary, trans, gender fluid)

*μη έμφυλος λόγος*

‘non-gendered discourse’

- *συμπεριληπτική γλώσσα / γλώσσα της συμπερίληψης*

‘inclusive language’

(generic; ‘less aggressive’; deradicalized ?)

**Gender-inclusive Greek: the limits of grammar**

## The linguistic profile of Modern Greek:

- Indo-European group of languages
- Fusional, highly inflecting language in which several grammatical categories are marked morphologically, e.g. nouns inflect for **gender**, number and case
- Post-diglossic language: Standard Modern Greek refers to the present state of Dimotiki ('low' variety), that still keeps certain more formal and archaic characteristics found in Katharevousa ('high' variety)

(Holton et al. 2012; Horrocks 2010; Mackridg 1985)

**In Greek** the semantic information of sex is grammaticized or is part of the noun's lexical meaning.

- The formal properties of the referential indexes of gender (Ochs 1992) in Greek
- Their implications for the way in which the sociocultural world is represented and reproduced through language

# 1. Grammatical gender and lexical gender in Greek

The examples provided in this section can be found in Alvanoudi, in press, *Gender: Modern Greek*, Brill Encyclopedia of Greek Language and Linguistics

**Grammatical gender in Greek** is a noun class system of three distinctions, which include the masculine, the feminine and the neuter, i.e. a grammaticalized agreement system, which correlates with the semantic characteristic of sex and is realized outside the noun itself (Aikhenvald 2000).

(1) (cf. Triantafyllidis 2005)

Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
ουρανός	θάλασσα	βουνό
<i>uranós</i>	<i>thalasa</i>	<i>vunó</i>
'sky'	'sea'	'mountain'

- All nouns, adjectives, articles and passive participles, and certain pronouns and numerals are inflected for gender
- Gender is inflected in the SG and PL and across all cases (NOM, GEN, ACC, VOC)

The gender of the NOUN controls agreement with other elements in the NP:

(2)

αυτή	η	καλή	γυναίκα
<i>aftí</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>kalí</i>	<i>jinéka</i>
this.nom.fem.sg.	def.nom.fem.sg.	good.nom.fem.sg.	woman(fem).nom.sg.
'this good woman'			

In Greek, nouns are assigned to specific genders according to **semantic** and **morphological principles**.



- In **person reference** gender assignment is semantically motivated/**sex-based**.
- In general, nouns denoting male human beings are grammatically masculine and nouns denoting female human beings are grammatically feminine (almost perfect match between grammatical gender and referent sex, Pavlidou, Alvanoudi & Karafoti 2004).

(3)

ο	μαθητής
ο	<i>maθitís</i>
def.masc.nom.sg.	student(masc).nom.sg.
'the male student'	

(4)

η	μαθήτρια
ι	<i>maθítρια</i>
def.fem.nom.sg.	student(fem).nom.sg.
'the female student'	

In Greek, the semantic distinction between female and male sex is also codified lexically - **lexical gender**

(5a) *άντρας* ádras ‘man(masc)’      *πατέρας* patéras ‘father(masc)’

(5b) *γυναίκα* yinéka ‘woman(fem)’      *μητέρα* mitéra ‘mother(fem)’

\* The grammatical gender of each noun in (5a, b) corresponds to its lexical specification

(6) *αγόρι* ‘boy(neut)’

*κορίτσι* ‘girl.(neut)’

**Grammatical gender in Greek** is associated with specific suffixes in nouns.

**Overt gender marking** is shown in the NOM SG

- Masculine nouns end in -ας as, -ης -is, -ες es, -ος -os, and in -ους -us.
- Feminine nouns end in -α -a, -η -i, -ου -u, -ος -os and -ω -o.
- Neuter nouns end in -ο -o, -ι -i, -ος -os, -μα -ma, -ς -s, -ν -n, and less often also in consonants other than -ν -n or -ς -s.
- **Covert gender marking** is found e.g. in a number of nouns, usually occupational terms, denoting persons, which have the same form for both male and female referents; nouns of ‘common gender’; their gender is distinguished by the article or other modifiers.

(7) *ο δικηγόρος* ‘def.masc.nom.sg. lawyer(masc).nom.sg.’

*η δικηγόρος* ‘def.fem.nom.sg. lawyer(fem).nom.sg.’

Grammatical gender is used for solving reference problems:

### A. Generic reference (MASC functionally unmarked)

(8)

οι	δάσκαλοι	έχουν	συνάντηση
<i>i</i>	<i>ḡáskali</i>	<i>éxun</i>	<i>sinádisi</i>
def.masc.nom.pl.	teacher(masc).nom.pl.	have.3pl.pres.	meeting(fem).acc.sg.

‘The professors of the department have a meeting.’

### B. Solving coordination problems

(9)

ο	αθλητής	και	
<i>o</i>	<i>aθlitís</i>	<i>ce</i>	
def.masc.nom.sg.	athlete(masc).nom.sg.	and	
η	αθλήτρια	είναι	έτοιμοι
<i>i</i>	<i>aθlítρια</i>	<i>íne</i>	<i>étimi</i>
def.fem.nom.sg.	athlete(fem).nom.sg.	cop.3pl.pres.	ready.masc.nom.pl.

‘The male athlete and the female athlete are ready.’

## C. Anaphora

(10)

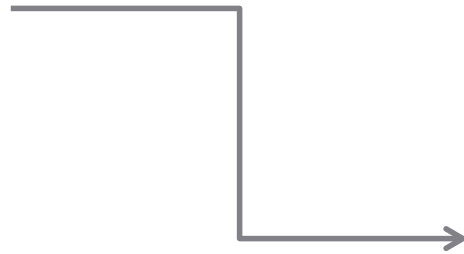
η	Μαρία	οδηγεί
<i>i</i>	<i>María</i>	<i>oðíí</i>
def.fem.nom.sg.	Maria(fem).nom.sg.	drive.3sg.pres.

το	αυτοκίνητό	της
<i>to</i>	<i>aftocínito</i>	<i>tis</i>
def.neut.acc.sg.	car(neut).acc.sg.	her

'Maria drives her car.'

The use of gendered terms communicates meanings related to social gender / enacts cultural schemas:

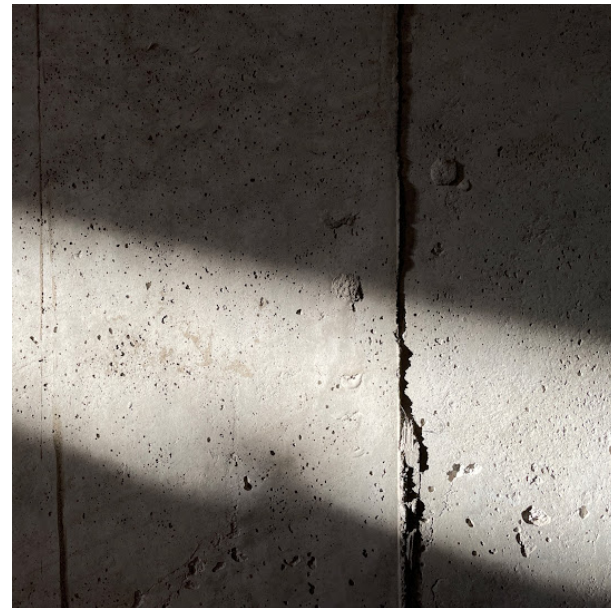
- ① MAN AS NORM + the generic use of the masculine
- ② WOMAN AS DEVIANT OTHER + the semantic derogation of grammatically feminine (occupational) terms
- ③ GENDER BINARY + feminine / masculine grammatical genders



Language reform agenda

## **2. The generic use of the masculine: MAN AS NORM**

- The generic use of the masculine discloses the **tacit and routine ways** in which **power** works in Greek discourse.
- **Gender hierarchy** passes **unremarkable** by speakers as part of our taken-for-granted knowledge about the world, it 'is there' when nothing special is happening in talk-in-interaction.





**Excerpt 1**

1 Polikseni: pos ta páte peǰjá me ton ǰeró?=  
 'Guys how do you cope with the weather?'

2 Vasilis: =ti na ta páme. na. eǰó:, ímasthan ap to  
 'So and so. We have been here since'

3 Sávato[: e:]  
 'Saturday eh.'

4 Natasa: [apokli]zmé[:ni, ]  
blocked.M.PART.NOM.PL  
 'Blocked.M.'

5 Vasilis: [apo]klizméni, >méxri  
blocked.M.PART.NOM.PL until  
 'Blocked.M, until'

6 tin Detárti to vráǰi.<  
 'Wednesday night.'

Line 1: wh-question; speaker selects Vasilis & Natasa as next speakers

Lines 2-6: Vasilis & Natasa respond in a collaborative manner

MAN AS NORM = routine meaning

Source: Alvanoudi (2018)

Metonymy



= human

### **3. The semantic derogation of feminine occupational terms: WOMAN AS THE DEVIANT OTHER**

Dual or multiple forms for feminine occupational terms in Standard Modern Greek stemming from the two post-diglossic varieties (Pavlidou 1985; Alvanoudi & Adaloglou 2022):

- a) +‘high’ variety: women in occupations are denoted by nouns of common gender, e.g. *ο/η φιλόλογος* [o/i filóloyos] ‘philologist’, *ο/η δημοσιογράφος* [o/i dimosioyrafos] ‘journalist’, and by masculine nouns with the feminine article, e.g. *η ταμίας* [i tamias] ‘cashier’, *η βουλευτής* [i vuleftis] ‘member of the parliament’ (preferred by women for self-reference)
- b) +‘low’ variety: nouns with **explicit feminine demotic endings**, e.g. *-ινα* [ina] and *-ισα* [isa], e.g. *βουλευτίνα* [vuleftina] ‘female member of the parliament’ (**semantic derogation**)

The different variants index social meanings of first- and second-order indexicality and constitute an indexical field (Eckert 2008)

## Gender-inclusive Greek: the limits of grammar & speakers as agents

Greek feminist initiatives on language reform:

- **Gender-specification**, i.e. adding the feminine gender whenever the masculine gender is used for generic reference; reclaiming the use of occupational terms with explicit feminine endings
- **Gender-neutralization**, i.e. avoiding denoting male or female sex and minimizing the linguistic expression of gender in relation to human referents
- **Linguistic creativity/ breaking grammatical conventions**: the generic use of the feminine gender (preference for minimization/ economy in communication, metonymic inference ‘female is human/universal’)

More soon...

Workshop 2 ‘Language and Gender: Research and Desiderata’

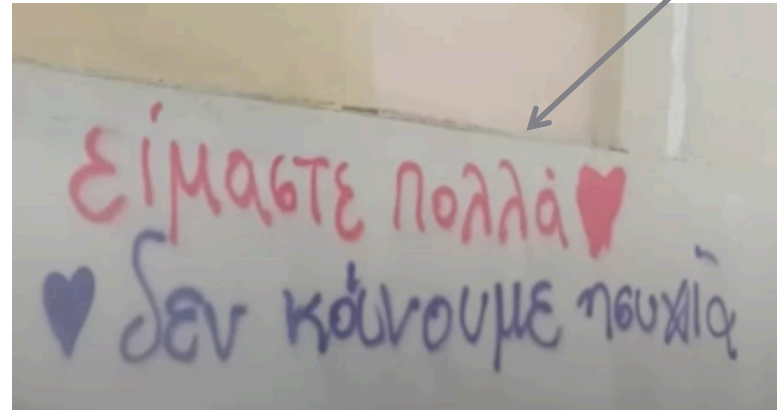
## **4. GENDER BINARY**

- Referential indexes of gender “ascribe” female or male sex to referent (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 65) and invoke common knowledge about the **binary gender order**.
- The information of referent gender is part of the routine meanings communicated in interaction (cf. Enfield 2007) and encompasses gender ideologies/heteronormativity.
- In order to transgress the binary gender order, Greek trans and non-binary groups have started using the **neuter grammatical gender in person reference** as a gender inclusive linguistic disruption strategy.



## Gender neutralization:

- the use of @ in informal digital written discourse
- the use of the noun *atomo* ‘person/individual(neut)’ (note: *anθropos* ‘human, human being’ is grammatically masculine)
- The use of neologisms, e.g. *fitita* ‘students(neut)’, *kalitexna* ‘artists(neut)’



We are many(neut)  
We are not quiet/docile

**Bakaliou (2023):** fieldwork notes & interviews with members a feminist activist group in Thessaloniki

*Να συμμετέχετε **όλες** και **όλα** δυναμικά στη συζήτηση.*

‘You should **all(fem).nom.pl.** and **all(neut).nom.pl.** participate actively in the discussion.’

*Είμαστε **συμφοιτητά.***

‘We are **classmates(neut).nom.** (in college)’ (neologism)



- S1 ‘We commonly use the neuter gender because I think it is more **economical**, instead of saying “**all(masc).nom.pl., all(fem).nom.pl., all(neut).nom.pl.**” (0.5) which, in spoken discourse is a bit long, in written discourse it is more feasible, but we usually deploy the **neuter**, both in spoken and written discourse.’
- S2 ‘But of course (.) when a **safe space** is created, where the people who do not identify with one of the two genders feel **safe** to be open about who they are, (1.2) well creating this **safe space in society** requires creating the necessary circumstances to welcome these people as active members of the society, that is we cannot tell them you are **safe to express yourself**, but then forget about them when we speak >because it is as if we do not refer to them.< That’s why in this case, yes, in some way **the neuter gender solves everything.**’

Source: Bakaliou (2023)

## Suggested readings

**Alvanoudi, A. (2015)** *Grammatical Gender in Interaction: Cultural and Cognitive Aspects*. Leiden: Brill.

**Canakis, C. (2018)** Categorization and indexicality in language and sexuality research. In K. Hall and R. Barrett (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality* 1–23. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Makri-Tsilipakou, M. (1989)** The gender of άνθρωπος: an exercise in false generics. In *Proceedings of the 3rd Symposium on the Description and/or Comparison of English and Greek, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of English, Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics* 61–83. Thessaloniki: University Studio Press.

**Pavlidou, T. (2003)** Women, gender and Modern Greek. In M. Hellinger and H. Bussmann (eds) *Gender across Languages: The Linguistic Representation of Women and Men*, Volume 3 175–99. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

**Pavlidou, T. (2006)** Γλώσσα-γένος-φύλο: προβλήματα, αναζητήσεις και ελληνική γλώσσα (Language-grammatical gender-social gender: problems, queries and the Greek language). In Th.-S. Pavlidou (ed.) *Language-Grammatical Gender-Social Gender* 15–64. Thessaloniki: Institute of Modern Greek Studies.

**Pavlidou, Th.-S. (ed.) (2015)** Special issue: Gender and the Greek Language. *Gender and Language* 9(1).