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International Research Networking Project “Language and Gender:
Academic Research and Practical Implementation”

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Background

- English department, University of Liverpool
- How language reproduces social, gender and race inequalities
- Gender inclusive language
 - 'Language Sexism in Greek public documents', funded by the Greek Ministry of Internal Affairs, General Secretariat for Gender Equality (Dr Maria Gasouka & Prof Marianthi Georgalidou)

Project scope

- To document and raise awareness of sexist language in Greek public documents
- To develop a systematic and elaborate version of the Guide for the Use of Non-sexist Language in Public Documents
 - First version published by the non-governmental organisation Union of Greek Women Scientists (Tsokalidou, 1996)

Academic outputs

- Lampropoulou, S., and Georgalidou, M. (2017) Sexist language in Greek public discourse: when gender exclusive forms become a matter of grammatical correctness. *Women Studies International Forum*, 60: 49-57. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.12.002>

The Greek linguo-cultural context

- Lack of non-sexist language policy until 2014
- Language policy concentrated on the elimination of diglossia and the transition between *Katharevousa* and *Dhimotiki* (1976 onwards)
 - The close to classical Greek 'high' variety compared to Standard Modern Greek once considered as 'low' variety
- Dhimotiki still maintains formal and archaic characteristics found in *Katharevousa* (Mackridge, 1987; Christidis, 2001)

Greek grammatical gender categories

- ‘Professional nouns’: nouns denoting occupation or other attributes of the persons they refer to.
 - δάσκαλος ‘teacher-MASC’-δασκάλα ‘teacher-FEM’ or the suffixes –tria (-τρια), -tra (-τρα), -issa (-ισσα), -ina (-ινα) and –ida (-ιδα)
- ‘Common gender’: nouns following the declension patterns of the masculine
 - ο/η εισαγγελέας / δικηγόρος / πρύτανης ‘the-MASC/the-FEM district attorney / lawyer / rector-MASC/FEM’
- The ‘common’ or ‘inclusive’ gender is the preferred choice of the speakers of Greek, especially when professions of higher social status are concerned.

The unique case of Greek

- Properties and historical status of modern Greek
- Grammatical paradox where masculine forms are used even when women are meant to be exclusively addressed.

An example

Αυτό το φυλλάδιο στοχεύει στις εργαζόμενες γυναίκες, στους εκπρόσωπους των εργαζομένων και στους εργοδότες.

[...]

Κάντε το απρόσμενο: Ονομάστε τη συμπεριφορά. Ο,τιδήποτε μόλις έκανε πείτε το και γίνετε συγκεκριμένοι.

Να είστε σοβαροί, άμεσοι και να μιλάτε απερίφραστα.

Βρείτε έναν μάρτυρα συμπεριφοράς

Ενημερώστε έναν έμπιστο συνάδελφο και προσπαθήστε να διασφαλίσετε ότι είναι αυτόπτης ή αυτήκοος μάρτυρας σε κάποια κατάσταση όπου παρενοχλείστε σεξουαλικά.

[...]

This booklet addresses working-FEM women, employee-MASC representatives-MASC and employers-MASC.

[...]

Do the unexpected: Name the behaviour. Whatever ((he)) just did, say it and be specific-MASC.

Be serious-MASC, direct-MASC and speak unequivocally.

Find an eye-witness-MASC.

Inform a-MASC trustworthy-MASC colleague-MASC and try to make sure that ((he)) is eye- or ear-witness-MASC in a situation in which you are being sexually harassed.

[...]

The debate: the case of greek parliament

1 ΔΤζ: Σταμπούλη Αφροδίτη
2 ΑΣ: Πα//[ρούσα]
3 ΔΤζ: //[Παρών]
4 ΑΣ: να γράψετε κύριε Πρόεδρε //[μας έχετε αλλάξει φύλο σε όλες]
5 ΔΤζ: //[Μπόλαρης Μάρκος]
6 ΜΜπ: [Παρών]
7 ΔΤζ: Να μάθετε γραμματική. Μπόλαρης Μάρκος.
8 ΜΜπ: Παρών

1 DTz: Stambouli Afroditi
2 AS: Pre //[sent-FEM]
3 DTz: //[Present-MASC]
4 AS: write down your Honor //[you have changed the sex to all of us]
5 DTz: //[Bolaris Markos]
6 MB: [Present-MASC]
7 DTz: Learn grammar Bolaris Markos.
8 MB: Present-MASC

Conclusions

- a) the pervasiveness of the grammatical standard of the generic use of the masculine
- b) the super-standard extension of its application in cases where the referents are exclusively female
- c) the emergence of indirect sexism through face threats to women who are presented as “trespassers” of perceived standardness.