

Gender and defaults*

Elena Anagnostopoulou
University of Crete

1 Introduction

Wurmbrand (2017) argues on the basis of several types of mismatches (gender mismatch nouns, *pluralia tantum* nouns, and polite pronouns) that Agree is sensitive to the existence of a dual feature system simultaneously present in the grammar (Pollard & Sag 1994, Wechsler & Zlatic 2000, 2003, Smith 2015, among others). In this proposal, gender and number features come in two versions, interpretable [$i\phi$] and uninterpretable [$u\phi$] ones. The former yield semantic agreement which may apply in syntax or semantics, the latter trigger formal agreement applying in syntax or PF. Syntactic agreement (formal or semantic) is established via Agree. Languages differ in how they split semantic and formal agreement in terms of Corbett's (1979, 2006)'s Agreement Hierarchy in (1a). There is also a predicate hierarchy, illustrated in (1b), which is semi-independent of the agreement hierarchy in the sense that some predicates can be, in principle, ranked higher than relative or personal and others lower.

- (1) a. [formal] \leftarrow attributive – predicate – relative – personal PRON \rightarrow [semantic]
b. T > A > N

In this squib, I discuss the conditions under which predicate APs enter Agree in Greek from this perspective, focusing on gender resolution when the controller is a coordinate DP with nouns that differ in formal gender. In these configurations, formal agreement cannot take place and predicative adjectives are valued as masculine when the coordinate DP involves human nouns and as neuter when it involves inanimates. The fact that the target surfaces with masculine morphology when the controller is human and with neuter morphology when the controller is inanimate suggests that default gender values are relativized to animacy in Greek, contra Kazana (2011), Tsimpli (2013), Paspali (2017), among others, who take neuter to always

* This squib is for Kyle, the most charming person in linguistics who gave me the funniest moment I have ever experienced in a conference, CGSW at the Cornell LSA Summer Institute, July 1997. Kyle's "STOP" sign back then still makes me laugh and reminds me how great it is to meet a brilliant linguist who does not take himself too seriously. I would like to thank Artemis Alexiadou for discussion and Susi Wurmbrand for comments.

be the default gender. I propose that these agreement patterns result from semantic agreement which has to apply syntactically in order for the [*ugender*] features of the adjective to be valued under Agree with the [*igender*] features of the controller. At PF, the value [animate] is spelled out as masculine and the value [inanimate] is spelled out as neuter.

2 Main facts

As in many other languages (Corbett 2000, 2006, Hahm 2010, Wechsler 2011, among others), e.g. Czech (see Wurmbrand 2017: (21)), predicate APs in Greek show formal agreement in gender and number with their subject controller when this is a mismatch noun, as in (2), but semantic agreement when the controller is a polite pronoun, as shown in (3):

- (2) a. To koritsi ine eksipno/*eksipni.
The girl.NEUT.SG is intelligent.NEUT.SG/intelligent.FEM.SG
'The girl is intelligent'
- b. To simvulio ine katapliktiko/*katapliktiki.
The council.NEUT.SG is fantastic.NEUT.SG/fantastic.MASC.PL
'The council is fantastic'
- (3) (Esis) iste toso evgenikos/*evgeniki evgeniki/*evgenikes!
You.2PL are.2PL so polite.MASC.SG/MASC.PL polite.FEM.SG/FEM.PL
'You are so polite!'

Note that polite pronouns trigger obligatory plural agreement on T but singular agreement on predicative adjectives, providing evidence that the same controller triggers different types of agreement on different targets, in this case T and A (see Wurmbrand 2017 for discussion).

Coordinated nouns trigger formal gender agreement on predicative adjectives when they have the same gender, regardless of whether they are human with masculine or feminine gender coinciding with their semantic gender, as in (4), or inanimate with arbitrary masculine or feminine gender as in (5); the same pattern holds (not shown) for inanimate nouns with neuter gender or neuter humans (see Kazana 2011 for discussion).^{1,2}

1 Susi Wurmbrand points out that while gender shows formal agreement, as clearly shown in (5), number is plural which could suggest that it triggers semantic agreement. This could mean that gender and number Agree separately. Alternatively, Agree targets the coordinated phrase as a whole (&P) and that the &P has plural number triggering formal number Agree. For present purposes either approach would work. See Section 3 for gender.

2 Regarding example (5a), according to my judgments, neuter on the adjectives is better than expected when the coordinated controllers are inanimate, especially when these are masculine. On the basis of

Gender and defaults

- (4) a. O Petros ke o Kostas ine eksipni
The Peter.MASC.SG and the Kostas.MASC.SG are intelligent.MASC.PL
'Peter and Kostas are intelligent'
- b. I Maria ke i Giota ine eksipnes
The Maria.FEM.SG and the Giota.FEM.SG are intelligent.FEM.PL
'Peter and Kostas are intelligent'
- (5) a. O anaptiras ke o fakos ine
The lighter.MASC.SG and the torch.MASC.SG are
vromiki/??vromika
dirty.MASC.PL/NEUT.PL
'The lighter and the torch are dirty'
- b. I fusta ke i bluza ine vromikes/?*vromika
The skirt.FEM.SG and the t-shirt.FEM.SG are dirty.FEM.PL/NEUT.PL
'The skirt and the t-shirt are dirty'

However, in situations where the two conjuncts differ in formal gender, semantic gender kicks in, guiding agreement resolution. Predicative adjectives surface as masculine when the controller consists of human-denoting nouns, as shown in (6), while they surface as neuter when the nouns denote non-humans (see [Kazana 2011](#) for extensive discussion of these and many more facts, see also footnote 2):

- (6) a. O andras ke i gineka ine eksipni
The man.MASC.SG and the woman.FEM.SG are intelligent.MASC.PL
'The man and the woman are intelligent'
- b. I gineka ke to pedi ine eksipni
The woman.FEM.SG and the child.NEUT.SG are intelligent.MASC.PL
'The woman and the child are intelligent'
- (7) a. O pinakas ke i karekla ine vromika
The blackboard.MASC.SG and the chair.FEM.SG are dirty.NEUT.PL
'The blackboard and the chair are dirty'
- b. I platia ke to pezodromio ine vromika
The square.FEM.SG and the pavement.NEUT.SG are dirty.NEUT.PL
'The square and the pavement are dirty'

a questionnaire study, [Kazana \(2011\)](#) reports that except for the well-formed patterns in (5a) and (5b) and (6) and (7) below, a number of unexpected patterns, in addition to the expected patterns, arise for a group of Greek speakers when inanimates are coordinated, sometimes depending on factors like the singularity or plurality of the coordinated DPs and whether the nouns are abstract or concrete. I am abstracting away from these complications which point to the option of semantic agreement with inanimates even in contexts where formal agreement is possible, as they are not relevant for the present discussion. The examples provided as grammatical in the text are well-formed for all native speakers of Greek.

These facts suggest that default gender values are relativized to humanness in Greek. Masculine is the default gender for humans and neuter is the default gender for inanimates (as in other languages, e.g., Latin, Corbett 1983, 1991). Speakers vary a lot when it comes to non-human animates. According to my intuitions, both masculine and neuter gender on the adjective are, in principle, possible in contexts involving non-human animates with different genders, like *o skilos* ‘the dog-masc’ and *i gata* ‘the cat-fem’:

- (8) O skilos ke i gata ine agrii/agria
 The dog.MASC.SG and the cat.FEM.SG are wild.MASC.PL/NEUT.PL
 ‘The dog and the cat are wild’

This suggests to me that the basic semantic gender distinction drawn in Greek is between human vs. non-human rather than animate vs. inanimate, and non-human animates are treated by speakers as falling under either category. Languages differ in whether they single out humans or animates in their grammars, for example Romanian does not mark with *pe* non-human animates under Differential Object Marking while Spanish marks them with *a*, and the same variation characterizes the distribution of 1/2 noun class gender in different Bantu languages (see Anagnostopoulou 2016, 2017 for discussion).

3 Analysis

Following Wurmbrand (2017) I assume that predicative adjectives in Greek bear uninterpretable number [*number*] and gender [*gender*] features which must be valued via reverse Agree with the subject. Agreement targets can, in principle, copy either the *u* ϕ -features or the *i* ϕ -features of the controller. In the first case, the result is formal agreement, in the latter the result is semantic agreement. For coordinate DPs I will assume that the [*gender*] and the [*gender*] features of the conjuncts percolate up to the &P level, provided that they match (see also footnote 1).

The facts discussed in the previous section suggest that Greek predicative adjective constructions with coordinate subjects have a preference for formal gender agreement and resort to semantic gender agreement only when formal agreement is impossible (see the Agreement Marking Principle, Wechsler 2011, Wechsler & Hahm 2011). This means that Agree copies the *u*-features of the subject on the adjective when possible, resorting to *i*-features only when necessary. In (5a) and (5b), for example, the coordinated subject consists of inanimate nouns bearing [*uMASC*] and [*uFEM*], respectively. These features value the gender features of adjectives, as depicted in (9):

Gender and defaults

- (9) a. o anaptiras [*u*MASC] & o fakos [*u*MASC] ↔ vromik-i [val:MASC]
the lighter.MASC the torch.MASC dirty.MASC
b. i fusta [*u*FEM] & i bluza [*u*FEM] ↔ vromik-es [val: FEM]
the skirt.FEM the t-shirt.FEM dirty.FEM

On the other hand, in (6) and (7) formal agreement cannot take place because the [*u*gender] features of the coordinated nouns do not match. Semantic agreement must take place and the [*i*gender] features of the subject are copied on the adjective via Agree leading to valuation of its [*u*gender] features, as shown in (10):

- (10) a. i ginēka [*i*animate] & to pedi [*i*animate] ↔
the woman.FEM the child.NEUT
eksipn-i [val:ANIMATE]
intelligent.MASC
b. o pinakas [*i*inanimate] & i karekla [*i*inanimate] ↔
the blackboard.MASC the chair.FEM
vromik-a [val:INANIMATE]
dirty.NEUTER

At PF, the value animate on the adjective in (10a) is spelled out as masculine because masculine is the default gender for animates in Greek, and inanimate in (10b) is spelled out as neuter because neuter is the default gender for inanimates.

It is necessary to assume that this is how Agree and choice of default gender work in Greek, because not all languages behave alike and we need to be able to express the relevant differences. For example, gender resolution under coordination in French is much simpler than in Greek. As shown in (11), default masculine is always selected in mismatch configurations, regardless of the animacy of the coordinated nouns [Corbett \(1991: 279\)](#), a fact suggesting that there is no relativization of default gender to animacy in this language:

- (11) a. un père et une mère excellent-s
a father.MASC and a mother.FEM excellent.MASC.PL
‘an excellent father and mother’
b. un savoir et une adresse merveilleux
a knoweldege.MASC and a skill.FEM marvelous.MASC.PL
‘a marvelous knowledge and skill’

According to [Corbett \(1991\)](#), Spanish, Modern Hebrew, Hindi, Panjabi and Latvian work like French, while Latin, Polish and Romanian work like Greek. There are also languages that make an animacy distinction, like Greek, but do not employ neuter as the default realization of inanimate gender. Such a language is, e.g., Czech

(discussed in [Corbett 1983](#): 191–193) which uses the plural masculine animate form when animates are coordinated and the plural masculine inanimate/feminine form when inanimates are coordinated (Corbett’s 1983 examples (43) and (47); I am retaining his style of glossing in (12)):

- (12) a. bratr (masc anim) a sestra (fem) přišli (masc anim)
 brother and sister came
 ‘The brother and the sister came’
- b. města (neut pl) a jejich okolí (neut sg) nám byly (masc inan/fem)
 the towns and their surrounding to us were
 dobře známe (masc inan/fem)
 well known
 ‘The towns and their surroundings were well known to us’

I propose that in these Czech examples, valuation works as in Greek (10), except that the default gender for inanimate inserted at PF is masculine inanimate/feminine and not neuter. More generally, even though Slavic languages have neuter gender they do not use it as default, resorting to (versions of) masculine instead, depending on how many distinctions plurals make and whether gender resolution is sensitive to animacy or not (see [Corbett 1983](#) for a comprehensive picture of Slavic languages and the role of animacy in gender resolution in some Slavic languages but not others).

Returning to Greek, the analysis sketched in (9) and (10) leads to the prediction that when an animate and an inanimate with the same gender are coordinated, the structure will be well-formed under formal agreement (their common formal gender will percolate up to the &P and will value the [*ugender*] feature of the adjective). On the other hand, when an animate and an inanimate with different genders are coordinated, the result is expected to be ill-formed, as neither their formal nor their semantic gender match making valuation of the gender feature of the adjective impossible. These predictions are indeed borne out, as illustrated in (13a) and (13b) (example (13b) is from [Kazana 2011](#)):³

³ [Kazana \(2011\)](#) does not discuss examples like (13a) and assumes that the reason why (13b) is ill-formed is because Greek does not allow coordination of an animate with an inanimate. I disagree with her because for me the example in (i) (a minimal pair with (13b)) is perfect. This means that the problem with (13b) is agreement and not coordination per se, i.e., the fact that valuation under semantic Agree is impossible.

- (i) O kleftis ke to diamanti eksafanistikan
 The thief and the diamond disappeared.PL
 ‘The thief and the diamond disappeared’

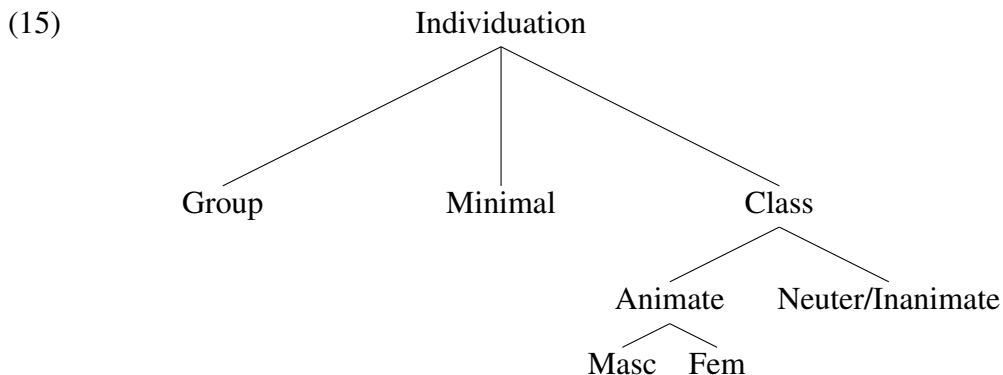
Gender and defaults

- (13) a. O kleftis ke o pinakas ine afanti
 The thief.MASC and the painting.MASC are gone.MASC
 ‘The thief and the painting are gone’
 b. O kleftis ke to diamanti ine *afanti/*afanta
 The thief.MASC and the diamond.NEUT are gone.*MASC/*NEUT
 ‘The thief and the diamond are gone’

There is a final question that needs to be addressed before closing this discussion. What happens in cases of coordination between a feminine animate noun and a neuter mismatch animate noun the semantic gender of which is feminine? Does the adjective show masculine default agreement as in (6b) or does it show feminine agreement, given that both nouns are semantically feminine? As (14a) shows, the latter is correct leading to the conclusion that semantic Agree in this case works as in (14b):

- (14) a. I gineka ke to koritsi ine
 The woman.FEM.SG and the girl.NEUT.SG are
 eksipnes/*eksipni
 intelligent.FEM.PL/*MASC.PL
 ‘The woman and the girl are intelligent’
 b. i gineka [*FEM*] & to koritsi [*FEM*] ↔ eksipn-**es** [val:**FEM**]
 the woman.FEM the girl.NEUT intelligent.FEM

In order to account for this pattern, I will adopt the hypothesis that uninterpretable and interpretable gender features are organized in terms of the feature geometry in (15) (Harley & Ritter 2002) where [ANIMATE] dominates [FEM]:



When there is a choice between a more specified and a more general gender value, Agree targets the more specified one, explaining why [FEM] is preferred over [ANIMATE] in (14).

4 Summary

I explored gender agreement in Greek predicative AP constructions with coordinated subjects. I argued that the distribution of gender on adjectives and the resolution principles at work when the genders of the coordinated nouns do not match support a dual system of uninterpretable and interpretable features which trigger formal or semantic Agree in syntax along the lines proposed in Wurmbrand 2017. There is a preference for formal Agree which leads to valuation of the [*ugender*] features of the adjectives by the [*ugender*] features of the subject. When this is not possible, however, gender on the adjective is valued by the [ANIMATE] or [INANIMATE] features of the &P. At PF, the value [ANIMATE] is spelled out as masculine and the value [INANIMATE] as neuter, providing evidence that default gender is relativized to animacy in Greek, similarly to Latin, Romanian, Polish, Czech and unlike French, Modern Hebrew, Spanish and Hindi. When there is a choice between [*iFEM*], [*iMASC*] and [ANIMATE], then the more specified features are preferred over the less specified one, leading to semantic agreement that is spelled out as feminine/masculine rather than with default gender.

References

- Anagnostopoulou, Elena. 2016. Clitic Doubling and Object Agreement. In Susann Fischer and Mario Navarro (ed.), *Arbeitspapier No. 128. Proceedings of the VII Nereus International Workshop: Clitic Doubling and other issues of the syntax/semantic interface in Romance DPs*, 11–42. Universität Konstanz.
- Anagnostopoulou, Elena. 2017. Clitic doubling. In Martin Everaert and Henk van Riemsdijk (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Syntax* Second Edition, Blackwell Publishing.
- Corbett, Greville. 1979. Agreement Hierarchy. *Journal of Linguistics* 15. 203–224.
- Corbett, Greville. 1983. *Hierarchies, Targets and Controllers: Agreement Patterns in Slavic*. London: Croom Helm.
- Corbett, Greville. 1991. *Gender*. Cambridge University Press.
- Corbett, Greville. 2000. *Number*. Cambridge University Press.
- Corbett, Greville. 2006. *Agreement*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hahm, Hyun-Jong. 2010. *A Cross-linguistic Study of Syntactic and Semantic Agreement: Polite Plural Pronouns and Other Issues*: University of Texas dissertation.
- Harley, Heidi & Elizabeth Ritter. 2002. Person and number in pronouns: A feature geometric analysis. *Language* 78. 482—526.
- Kazana, Despina. 2011. *Agreement in Modern Greek Coordinate Noun Phrases*: University of Essex dissertation.

- Paspali, Anastasia. 2017. Processing gender agreement: an attraction study in native & heritage Greek. Paper presented at the workshop Heritage languages in children and adults, Leibniz-ZAS, January 27.
- Pollard, Carl & Ivan Sag. 1994. *Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar*. Chicago: CSLI/University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, Peter. 2015. *Feature Mismatches: Consequences for Syntax, Morphology, and Semantics*: University of Connecticut dissertation.
- Tsimpli, Ianthi-Maria and Aafke Hulk. 2013. Grammatical gender and the notion of default: Insights from language Acquisition. *Lingua* 137. 128–144.
- Wechsler, Stephen. 2011. Mixed Agreement, the Person Feature, and the Index/Concord Distinction. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 29. 999–1031.
- Wechsler, Stephen & Hyun-Jong Hahm. 2011. Polite Plurals and Adjective Agreement. *Morphology* 21. 247–281.
- Wechsler, Stephen & Larisa Zlatić. 2000. A Theory of Agreement and its Application to Serbo-Croatian. *Language* 76. 799–832.
- Wechsler, Stephen & Larisa Zlatić. 2003. *The many faces of agreement*. Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications.
- Wurmbrand, Susi. 2017. Formal and Semantic Agreement in Syntax: A Dual Feature Approach. In *Proceedings of the Olomouc Linguistics Colloquium 2016: Language Use and Linguistic Structure*, Olomouc: Palacký University.