Neuter Kinship and Ellipsis in Greek: On Gender, Number and Ellipsis Licensing

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Problem: Ellipsis licensing has recently played a role in the development of the theory of how grammatical gender categories like feminine (F) and masculine (M) are represented (Bobaljik and Zocca 2011 and subsequent work). In Greek (Merchant 2014; Alexiadou 2017; Sudo and Spathas 2020), some nouns are 'asymmetric' for ellipsis: their M variant may appear in the antecedent when the ellipsis site contains what would be an F noun (if overtly realized) (1), but the opposite is not allowed (2). According to one view, this asymmetry stems from interpretive markedness: the F noun has a gender inference (i.e. FEMALE) whereas the M noun lacks gender inferences. Any (assertive) gender inference in the antecedent must be carried over to the ellipsis site, and therefore an M gender-neutral antecedent tolerates mismatch while an F antecedent is not. On the other hand, some nouns show symmetric behavior in ellipsis, with mismatch tolerated in neither direction (1)-(2), providing evidence that both F and M nouns of this type have gender inferences (the latter being MALE).

(1) O Petros ine kalos {dhaskalos /#ksaderfos}, ala i Maria ine mia kakia.
the Petros is good.M {teacher.M /sibling.M} but the Maria is a.F bad.F
'Petros is a good teacher/sibling, but Maria is a bad one.' (Sudo and Spathas 2020)

(2) #I Maria ine kali {dhaskala /dhaskali}, ala o Petros ine enas kakos.
the Maria is good.F {teacher.F /sibling.F} but the Petros is a.M bad.M
'Maria is a good teacher/sibling, but Petros is a bad one.'

We provide novel evidence from neuter kinship terms in Greek that presents a puzzle for this view. These kinship terms have a masculine variant with a MALE inference and a feminine variant with a FEMALE inference, and they have a gender-neutral variant in the plural with neuter (N) gender (AUTHORS; Adamson and Anagnostopoulou 2024) (3). Under the aforementioned view, the N noun is predicted to be able to serve as an antecedent with mismatch in ellipsis (comparable to (1)), but in fact cannot (4)-(5) (gender-matching between antecedent and ellipsis site is allowed, but not shown).

(3) i ksáderfi mu /i ksadérfes mu /ta ksadérfia mu
the.M.PL cousin 1SG.GEN /the.F.PL cousin 1SG.GEN /the.N.PL cousin 1SG.GEN
'my cousins' M = all male; F = all female; N = gender-neutral

(4) O Petros ke i Maria ine ta kala mu ksaderfia...
the.M.SG Petros and the.F.SG Maria are the.N.PL nice.N.PL cousin my
'Petros and Maria are my nice cousins...

(5) {...*ke i Christina ke i Anastasia ine i kakes mu /
and the.F.SG Christina and the.F.SG Anastasia are the.F.PL mean.F.PL my /
...*ke o Christos ke o Giorgos ine i kaki mu}
and the.M.SG Christos and the.M.SG Giorgos are the.M.PL mean.M.PL my
'...and {Christina and Anastasia/Christos and Giorgos} are my mean cousins.'

Proposal: We propose that neuter kinship terms in Greek are formed only with 'lexical number' via derivational morphology (see Acquaviva 2008; Alexiadou 2011, among others on 'lexical plurals'). Following Bobaljik and Zocca 2011, derivational morphology cannot be ignored in ellipsis licensing; thus the ellipsis in (5) fails. Our findings support the view that ellipsis licensing is not reducible to semantic identity and have implications for the representation of interactions between gender and number.

Data: Greek has three gender categories – F, M, and N – which induce agreement alternations on adjectives (both attributive and predicative), determiners, among others. Among nouns denoting humans, F nouns typically refer to women while M nouns vary by noun, either referring exclusively to men (e.g.*ksaderfos* in (1)) or allowing gender-neutral reference (e.g.

dhaskalos in (1)). The status of any given M noun can be inferred from pluralization (6) or from focus-sensitive environments (see e.g. Sudo and Spathas 2020).

(6) {I thii tu Jani / i dhaskali ine ne-i.
the.M.PL aunt/uncle.M.PL the.GEN Janis.GEN / the.M.PL teacher.PL} are young-M.PL
'Janis's {uncles/*aunts and uncles} are young.' (only men) / 'The teachers are young.' (all men or gender-mixed group)

Neutrality for human-denoting nouns expressed with the N gender is restricted to a handful of nouns whose M variant asserts maleness, many of which are kinship terms, e.g. *ksaderfia* 'cousin.N.PL'; *aderfia* 'sibling.N.PL'; *anipsia* 'nephews/nieces/niblings'; *petherika* 'in-laws.N.PL'; and *simbetheria* 'co-parents-in-law.N.PL'. Greek locally restricts the use of N neutrality to the specific nouns themselves; N neutrality is unavailable e.g. for coordination resolution (7).

(7) O ksadelfos ke i ksadelfi ine {eksipni /*eksipna}.
the.M.SG cousin and the.F.SG cousin are intelligent.M.PL /intelligent.N.PL
'The male cousin and the female cousin are intelligent.'

Analysis: We assume a complex DP structure whereby a head Num carrying number features is distinct from the nominal head *n* which carries gender features. We propose that the use of neuter gender with specific kinship terms in Greek is encoded via the exceptional bundling of both gender and number features on *n*, i.e. with 'lexical number'. That neuter kinship terms should be derivationally exceptional is consistent both with i) the language-internal fact that N is not productively associated with gender neutrality in the language (e.g. (7)) and ii) the general cross-linguistic fact that kinship terms are frequently subject to lexical exceptionality, being subject to restrictions on inalienable nouns in many languages (e.g. Adamson 2024). Support in favor of the bundling analysis comes from the following (cf. Acquaviva 2008): i) lexical gaps among several of these kinship nouns, where there is either no corresponding singular (for at least some speakers) or it has a different expressive interpretation, e.g. #*to ksaderfi* 'the cousin.N.SG'; **to petheriko* 'the in-law'; *to simbatheri* 'the co-parent-in-law'; and ii) irregular plural semantics for several such nouns, as evidenced by their incompatibility with numerals, e.g. **dyo petherika* 'two in-laws'; **dyo simbetheria* 'two co-parents-in-law'.

For the licensing of ellipsis, we assume that the features of inflectional morphemes are ignored for identity calculations, whereas those of derivational morphemes are considered (see especially Bobaljik and Zocca 2011). In the case of (1), gender and number appear on separate nodes (the normal case), and the gender-neutral interpretation of the masculine feature of *n* is compatible licenses ellipsis (a), but the feminine feature of *n* bears an interpretation that does not license ellipsis in the opposite direction (b). In the case of (4)-(5), the neuter antecedent bears a gender-neutral interpretation that is indeed compatible with ellipsis licensing, but it also bears a lexical plural feature on *n* that cannot be ignored and which cannot be licensed with the M or F gender features in the ellipsis site. In our talk, we also explore predictions for non-neuter lexical plurals (such as *papudhes* 'ancestors'), and show how our analysis can capture cases of number mismatch with ellipsis. We also evaluate other potentially relevant factors, such as declension and type of kinship relation.

Implications: This study provides support for morphosyntactic restrictions on ellipsis licensing and shows how gender exceptionality is encoded with respect to number. We suggest that the exceptionality of neuter gender-neutrality in Greek should be contrasted with e.g. Icelandic, which allows gender-neutral neuter more robustly (Adamson and Anagnostopoulou 2024), and therefore may pattern differently with respect to ellipsis.

Select References: Acquaviva, P. 2008. Lexical plurals: A morphosemantic approach. Alexiadou, A. 2011. Plural mass nouns and the morpho-syntax of number. Alexiadou, A. 2017. Gender and nominal ellipsis. Adamson, L. and E. Anagnostopoulou. 2024. Gender features and coordination resolution in Greek and other three-

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