

# Four decades of Greek feminist linguistics: reform, uptake and public attitudes

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“Language and Gender: Research and Desiderata” workshop

31/05/2024



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# Aims

- ▶ To provide a documentation of gender inclusive language reform and its (lack of) uptake in Greece
- ▶ To discuss the attitudes behind said (lack of) uptake
- ▶ To re-raise the intervention/policy vs. practice/actual use debate

# Feminist language reform

- ▶ From *documentation of sexist language* e.g. China, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, Poland and Thailand to *active intervention* e.g. Norway, France, Germany, Spain (Pauwels, 2003: 553)
- ▶ Languages with gender inflected grammar (e.g. French, Spanish, Greek, Arabic) display more examples of lexico-grammatical gender asymmetries - often resistant to reform

# The Greek linguo-cultural context

- ✓ Lack of feminist language policy until 2014
  - ▶ Documentation of sexist language phenomena and proposals for elimination (Tsokalidou, 1996); within feminist linguistics circles research on representation of grammatical gender ((Pavlidou 1985, 2002, 2006, Makri-Tsilipakou 1989 and more recently Alvanoudi 2014 and Pavlidou et al., 2015)
  - ▶ Language policy concentrated on the elimination of diglossia and the transition between *Katharevousa* and *Dhimotiki* (1976 onwards)
  - ▶ *Dhimotiki* still maintains formal and archaic characteristics found in *Katharevousa* (Mackridge, 1987; Christidis, 2001)

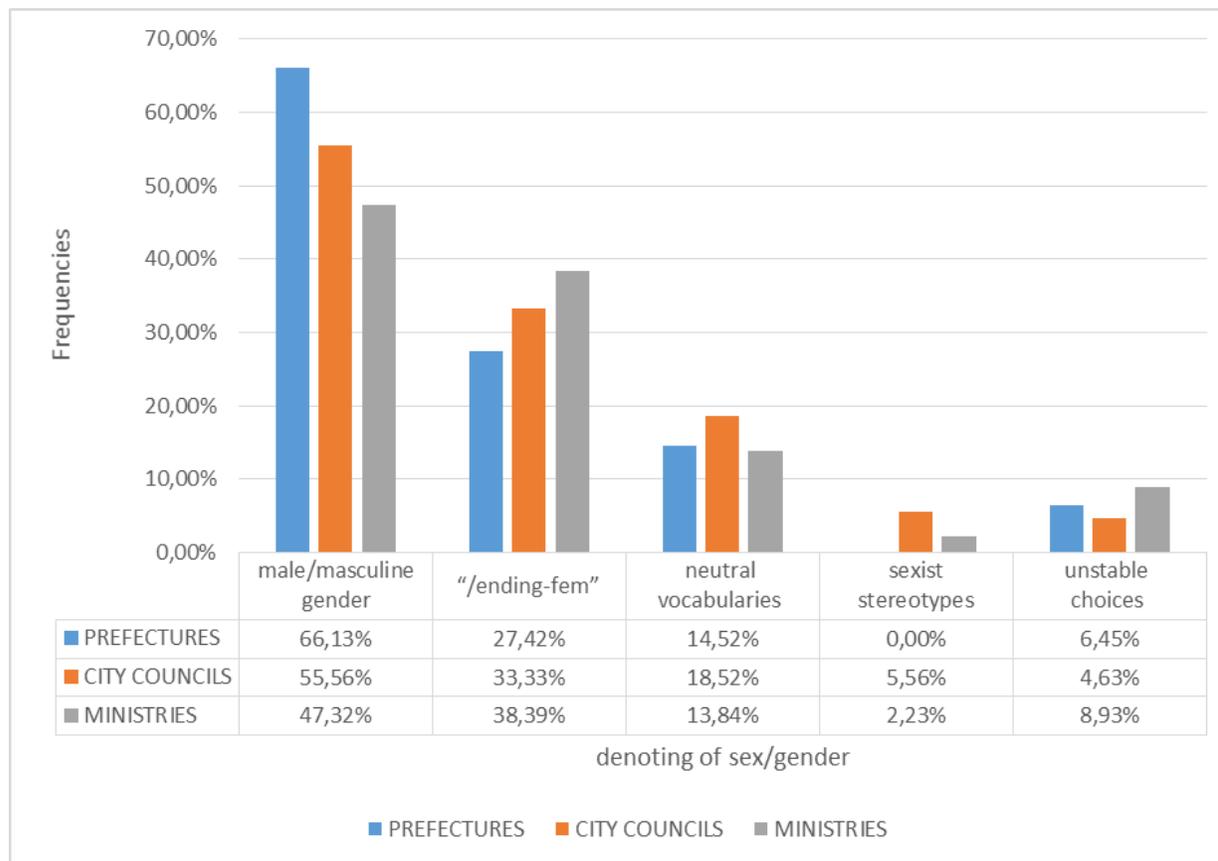
# Greek grammatical gender categories

- ▶ ‘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 especially in formal contexts or when referring to professions of higher social status.
  - ▶ Αρχιτεκτόνισσα/-ας (architect), γιατρίνα/γιατρέσσα/-ος (doctor), Βουλευτίνα/-ης (MP)

# Feminist language reform (1)

- ▶ 2014: calls for a *Guide for the Use of Non-sexist Language in Public Documents* funded by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality
- ▶ 949 public documents that were actively used in a) city councils, b) prefectures and c) ministries
- ▶ Analysis conducted in two stages:
  - ▶ a) qualitative discourse analysis of selected documents that explicitly refer to and/or address group citizens with specific attributes
  - ▶ b) quantitative analysis through the software ATLAS.ti. Coding in terms of:
    - ▶ Exclusive use of the male/masculine gender
    - ▶ Foregrounding of the male/masculine gender and marking of the feminine by means of “/-fem ending”
    - ▶ Use of neutral vocabularies
    - ▶ Use of sexist stereotypes
    - ▶ Inconsistent choices

# Results



# The ‘grammatical correctness’ paradox

(Lampropoulou & Georgalidou, 2017)

- 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

# The Guide: recommendations

- ▶ Double gender marking (see also Abbou, 2010 for French)
- ▶ Alternation in the order of appearance
- ▶ Generic use of feminine forms/ feminization (some more marked than others)
- ✓ Consistency

# Responses and debates in the public sphere

- ▶ Dominant discourses of grammatical correctness undermined any attempt to reflect upon the choices - 'women as trespassers of perceived standardness' (Lampropoulou & Georgalidou, 2017)
- ▶ Recontextualisation of 'grammatical correctness' debate into discourses of feminist/leftist trivial preoccupations - 'gender inclusive language as excessive' (Johnson, 2024)

# Responses and debates in the public sphere (2)

An interview with Christos Chomenidis (Greek novelist, awarded the 2021 European book prize).

Spraining one's tongue with excessive neologisms such as 'η εαυτή μου' / 'myself-FEM'; replacing (...) 'prostitute-FEM' with 'sex worker'; The point is not to give a new name to her who exposes herself to the pool of political correctness. But to efficiently protect her, to secure her free will, to guard her rights (...) What is the benefit of referring to their citizens of colour in America as 'African Americans' instead of 'negroes' when they cram their children in lousy schools and marginalise them in every possible way? Do you self-identify as progressive? Then put your hands in your pocket, pay taxes to strengthen the welfare state. I condemn your ostentatious linguistic sensitivity.

<https://www.capital.gr/xristos-xomenidis/3712850/xudaia-glossa-kai-xudaioi-anthropoi/>

# Feminist language reform - 10 yrs. later

- ▶ 2023: Practical guide of gender inclusive language (Hellenic Open University)
- ▶ Main goal: to eliminate gender inequalities in the HOU community
- ▶ Qualitative analysis of 143 documents (incl. forms and emails) in current use (May-June 2023)

# Results

- Inconsistent use of gender inclusive language
  - ✓ Inconsistent use of double gender marking (but still some)
  - ✓ Occasional use of gender inclusive symbol @ (όλ@ς/ everyone)
  - ✓ Consistent use of masculine forms for professional nouns (*φοιτητής/student-MASC* instead of *φοιτητής-τρια/student-MASC-FEM*)
  - ✓ Predictable use of common gender nouns without marking the feminine form with definite article (*ο διδάκτορας/the-MASC doctorate holder* instead of *ο-η διδάκτορας/the-MASC-FEM doctorate holder*)
- When referring to/addressing women only:
  - ✓ Consistent use of feminine professional nouns with female morphology (*professor-FEM/καθηγήτρια, associate-FEM director-FEM, αναπληρώτρια προϊσταμένη, colleague-FEM/συνεργάτιδα, member of parliament-FEM/υπουργός, employee-FEM/υπάλληλος*)
    - ✓ Rare use of masculine forms

# GIL: (non)use in popular culture

- ▶ Two popular TV lifestyle shows: 'Shopping Star' and 'My style rocks' broadcast in the afternoon (popular slots).
- ▶ Participants, apart from judges, include women from working class/lower middle-class backgrounds.
  - ▶ Low economic budget available to style themselves
  - ▶ Low socioeconomic profile of the neighbourhoods where clothes shopping takes place
  - ▶ Occasions assigned to make stylistic choices (ex. Dinner with ex-husband)

# GIL: (non) use in popular culture

1. Consistent use of masculine forms when referring to women
  - ▶ My style rocks, 12-19/02/24:
    - ▶ Male judge addressing female contestant: “*Professionals-MASC / Ένας επαγγελματίας do not go to work like this*”
    - ▶ Male judge addressing female contestant: “*Whoever-MASC / Όποιος doesn't want to, [they] go*”
    - ▶ Male judge addressing female judge: “*I agree with the perspective of the- MASC other-MASC judge-MASC / του άλλου κριτή*”
    - ▶ Female contestant: “I will be the mirror of my *teammates-MASC / των συμπαικτών μου*”.

# GIL: (non) use in popular culture

## 2. (In)consistent use of masculine forms in women's self-references

- ▶ Shopping Star, 28/03/24, female contestant: “We keep going *unscathed-MASC/ ακάθεκτοι*”
- ▶ My style rocks, 11/03/24, female contestant “I’m a *hero-MASC/ ήρωας*”
- ▶ Shopping Star, 07/03/24, female contestant: “I’m *skint-MASC/ μπατίρης today*”
- ▶ My style rocks, 19/02/24, female contestant: “I’m a *stylist-FEM/ στυλίστρια*, I’m not a *director-MASC/ διευθυντής*”

# University student union practices

- ▶ Use of @
  - ▶ Fb post Uni. of the Peloponnese, 16/03/22: «LiLA PaUSE is a unifying initiative of student@/ φοιτητ@ and graduat@/ αποφοίτ@ of the Uni of the Peloponnese» (ανάρτηση FB)
- ▶ Replacement of @ with neuter (neutralisation)
  - ▶ Banner by Athens School of Fine Arts, 02-03/24: «COPS AND PROFS HANDS OFF *THE-NEUT STUDENTS-NEUT/ΤΑ ΦΟΙΤΗΤΑ*»
- ▶ Selective/inconsistent use of GIL
  - ▶ Poster by Uni of Macedonia, 08/03/22: “the team of volunteer-*MASC/εθελοντών student@/φοιτητ@*”

# University student Union practices

- ▶ Feminist linguistic activism (and its opposition) can be deeply intertwined with other kinds of social activism (Burnett and Pozniak, 2021).
- ▶ GIL as identity construction: opposition to pro-institutional or most popular choices of double gender marking.
- ▶ Students possessing attitudes toward gender equality also expressed greater favourability towards GIL use (Douglas & Sutton, 2014).

# Main points

- ▶ Generic masculine as the dominant/exclusive choice in popular TV shows
  - ▶ Inconsistent use of feminine grammatical gender even when feminine suffixes are available, widely used and unmarked.
- ▶ GIL shaped and reflected by social class, educational background & political orientation (Formanowicz et al. 2013)
  - ▶ GIL use is politicised and ideologised (Burnett & Pozniak, 2021; Johnson, 2024)
    - ▶ Differences in “gender belief systems” i.e. gender role identity associated with GIL (Sczesny *et. al.*, 2015)

# Conclusions

- ▶ Current feminist language reform in Greece attempts to *contain* linguistic androcentrism rather than reverse it i.e. implement neologisms (through feminization) to make women more visible
  - ▶ Backwards not forward - GIL is 'officially' growing but 'publicly' fading
  - ▶ Users' chronic, undebated exposure to linguistic androcentrism due to the complexity of the linguo-cultural landscape in Greece
- ▶ Resistance comes from practices, and, by extension, gender beliefs as there is a correlation between speakers' attitudes towards GIL and their ability to recognise sexism (Sarrasin *et. al*, 2012)