On the synchrony and diachrony of gender agreement in Pontic Greek: syntactic versus semantic

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Pontic Greek: the language and its speakers
Pontic Greek: the language and its speakers

• A Modern Greek (MGr) dialect cluster comprised of a number of closely related varieties.

• Originally spoken on the southern coast of the Black Sea (today’s Turkey) in the area traditionally known in Greek as Póntos.
Pontic Greek: the language and its speakers

• For the most part, the speaker community is Greek Orthodox, with a considerable number of Muslim speakers, as well.

• In 1923-1924, Greek Orthodox speakers were relocated in Greece (Exchange/Ανταλλαγή/Mübadele).

• Today spoken mainly in
  (a) Greece (Greek Orthodox refugees)
  (b) Turkey (Muslim portion of the speaker community)
  (c) the diaspora (Germany, Belgium, Russia; both religious groups).
• Genetically, it belongs to the Asia Minor Greek (AMGr) dialect group.

(Karatsareas 2011)
Pontic Greek: the language and its speakers

• The AMGr speaker communities, including Pontic, originate in the Byzantine people that populated the whole of Asia Minor prior to the first Turkish invasions (early 11th century) (Vryonis 1971).

• After 1071 AD and the Battle of Manzikert, the Byzantine Empire lost control of the area, whose major part was incorporated into Turkic political entities (Great Seljuq Empire, Seljuq Sultanate of Rûm, Ottoman Empire).
Pontic Greek: the language and its speakers

- Greek in Asia Minor developed for a significant amount of time
  
  (a) in (relative) **linguistic isolation** from that of the contiguous Greek-speaking areas of the west

  (b) in the context of intense **language contact** with the Turkish of Seljuq and Ottoman conquerors.
Pontic Greek: the language and its speakers

• All dialects of the AMGr group present

  i. numerous archaisms reminiscent of earlier stages in the history of Greek, particularly the Late Medieval period (1100–1500 CE)

  ii. a significant number of linguistic innovations that distinguish the AMGr dialects from other MGr dialects

☞ extensive use of neuter forms in gender agreement targets controlled by masculine and feminine nouns
(1)  

a. Phloïtá Cappadocian (Costakis 1962: 114)  
    s’ ena orfano nekliša (cf. SMGr mia, orfani)  

b. Óphis Pontic (Lianidis 2007 [1962]: 238)  
    kan tria liras (cf. SMGr tris)  
    around three.N liras.F

c. Pharasiot (Dawkins 1916: 550-551)  
    adzino o fovēs (cf. SMGr ecinos)  
    that.N the.M coward.M
Pontic Greek: the language and its speakers

(1) a. Phloïtá Cappadocian (Costakis 1962: 114)
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Gender in Modern Greek
Gender in Modern Greek: assignment

- MGr makes a tripartite gender distinction:
  1. masculine
  2. feminine
  3. neuter.

- Nouns are distributed in the three genders on the basis of a formal assignment system that has a semantic core defined primarily by animacy and secondarily by sex.
Gender in Modern Greek: assignment

(2)  MGr, semantic assignment rules:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANIMATE</th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th></th>
<th>MASCULINE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>aďelfos</em> ‘brother’</td>
<td><em>yatos</em> ‘male cat’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>aďelfi</em> ‘sister’</td>
<td><em>yata</em> ‘female cat’</td>
<td>FEMININE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INANIMATE</td>
<td><em>filo</em> ‘leaf’, <em>poďi</em> ‘foot’, <em>kreas</em> ‘meat’, <em>onoma</em> ‘name’, <em>provato</em> ‘sheep’</td>
<td>NEUTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender in Modern Greek: assignment

• Nouns belonging to the semantic residue (Corbett 1991: 13; Dahl 2000: 102) are assigned to the three genders on the basis of a set of morphological assignment rules.

• These rules are based on the correlation between gender and inflectional class that is particularly strong in MGr (Coker 2009: 38; Matasović 2004: 48; Morpurgo-Davies 1968: 14-16, 31).

• The gender of any given noun can be safely inferred from the noun’s inflectional class membership.
Gender in Modern Greek: assignment

(3) MGr, morphological assignment rules:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MASCULINE</td>
<td>IC1</td>
<td>faros ‘lighthouse’, payos ‘ice’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IC2</td>
<td>kanonas ‘rule’, mezes ‘meze’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMININE</td>
<td>IC3</td>
<td>ora ‘hour’, avli ‘yard’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEUTER</td>
<td>IC5</td>
<td>vuno ‘mountain’, dendro ‘tree’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IC6</td>
<td>spiti ‘house’, koritsi ‘girl’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IC7</td>
<td>onoma ‘name’, yrapsimo ‘writing’, kreas ‘meat’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IC8</td>
<td>dasos ‘forest’, mikos ‘length’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ralli 2005)
### Gender in Modern Greek: assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Semantic/Formal</th>
<th>Formal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MASCULINE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEMANTIC/FORMAL</td>
<td>aδεlfos ‘brother’, γatos ‘male cat’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORMAL</td>
<td>faros ‘lighthouse’, mezes ‘meze’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEMININE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEMANTIC/FORMAL</td>
<td>aδεlfί ‘sister’, γata ‘female cat’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORMAL</td>
<td>bukla ‘curl’, avli ‘yard’, trexala ‘scamper’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NEUTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORMAL</td>
<td>ayori ‘boy’, koritsi ‘girl’, mezeδaki ‘meze.DIM’, buklaki ‘curl.DIM’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Agreement in MGr is **strictly syntactic**.

Targets (adjectives, articles, some numerals, participles, pronouns) agree with the morphological gender of their controllers:

(4) SMGr

Afti i tris tiçi ine vameni kocini.

these.M the.M three.M walls.M are painted.M red.M

‘These four walls have been painted red.’
Gender in Modern Greek: agreement

- Semantic agreement is ungrammatical.

(4’) SMGr
* Afta ta tria tiçi ine vamena kokina.
these.Ν the.Ν three.Ν walls.Μ are painted.Ν red.Ν
‘These four walls have been painted red.’

- Except in...
• ... conjoined nouns denoting inanimate entities.

(5) SMGr

\[O \ tixos \ ce \ i \ karekla \ ine \ vamena \ kocina.\]

the.\textsuperscript{M} wall.\textsuperscript{M} and the.\textsuperscript{F} chair.\textsuperscript{F} are painted.\textsuperscript{N} red.\textsuperscript{N}

‘These four walls have been painted red.’
Gender in Pontic Greek
# Gender in Pontic Greek: assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SEMANTIC/ FORMAL</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MASCULINE</strong></td>
<td>vasileas ‘king’, josmas ‘young man’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>simos ‘winter’, ceros ‘time’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FEMININE</strong></td>
<td>nifæ ‘bride’, yari ‘woman’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>laistera ‘hammock’, læcæ ‘stain’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender in Pontic Greek: agreement

(6) Argyroúpolis Pontic (Papadopoulos 1955: 194)

a. erθan s’ enan tranon mayaran (…)
   they.came to a. N big. N cave. F
   ki ekin’(o) i mayara
   and that. N the. F cave. F

b. sa prota ta cerus
   in.the. N first. N the. N times. M

(7) Chaldía Pontic (Drettas 1997: 531)

i Turk (…) ta yariðas epernane
the Turks the. N women. F they.took
Gender in Pontic Greek: previous accounts

• Early accounts (Oeconomides 1890: 236-239) focused on the co-occurrence of neuter definite articles with feminine, non-human controllers.

• The phenomenon was interpreted as the result of a reanalysis of the accusative form of the feminine definite article *tas* that was triggered by phonetic simplification:

(8)  \( \text{tas stratas ‘the.F ways.F’} \rightarrow \text{tas-stratas} \rightarrow \text{ta stratas} (= \text{ta ‘the.N’}) \)

\( \text{ta stratas :: ta imeras ‘the.N days.F’, ta nixtas ‘the.N nights.F’} \)
This account does not explain
(a) agreement in the neuter on attributive modifiers or adjectival predicates

(9) Kotýora Pontic (Anastasiadis 1995: 86)
    \[i \ sevta-s \ en \ pola \ tranon\]
    the.F love.F-your is very big.N

(b) agreement in the neuter with masculine controllers
To overcome Oeconomides’s shortcomings, Papadopoulos (1955: 45-46; 1958: 191-194) resorted to various types of analogy. In his approach, the use of the neuter form of the definite article with inanimate nouns is due to analogy to morphologically neuter nouns:

(10) a. *ta ḏendra* ‘the.Н trees.Н’ ≠ *i strates* ‘the.F ways.F’
   b. *ta ḏendra* ‘the.Н trees.Н’ = *ta stratas* ‘the.Н ways.Н’
   c. *ta stratas* ‘the.Н ways.Н’ ≠ *i ceri* ‘the.M times.М’
   d. *ta stratas* ‘the.Н ways.Н’ = *ta cerus* ‘the.Н times.М’
Neuter attributive modifiers are accounted for by a series of analogical reanalyses operating on the sentence level:

\[(11)\]

a. \( \text{eçi} \quad \text{lalian} \quad \text{amon} \quad \text{kodınin} \)
   s/he.has voice.\text{F} like bell.\text{N}

b. \( \text{eçi} \quad \text{lalian} \quad \text{kodınin} \)

c. \( \text{eçi} \quad \text{kodınin} \quad \text{lalian} \)

d. \( \text{eçi} \quad \text{emorfon} \quad \text{lalian} \)
   s/he.has beautiful.\text{N} voice.\text{F} (\text{Papadopoulos 1955: 163})
A synchronic analysis of gender agreement in Pontic Greek
Gender in Pontic Greek: synchronic analysis

- Gender agreement in Pontic Greek can be:
  i. syntactic
  ii. semantic
  iii. neuter.

- The distribution of the three agreement patterns is conditioned by a variety of factors:
  i. animacy
  ii. morphological gender
  iii. controller type
  iv. number
Gender in Pontic Greek: synchronic analysis

1. Animacy Hierarchy (adapted from Dahl 2000: 99)
   HUMAN > NON-HUMAN ANIMATE > INANIMATE

2. Morphological gender
   {MASCULINE, FEMININE, NEUTER}

3. Agreement Hierarchy (adapted from Corbett 1991, 2006)
   ATTRIBUTIVE > PREDICATE > PERSONAL PRONOUN

4. Number
   {SINGULAR, PLURAL}
A. Human nouns generally exhibit syntactic/semantic agreement:

(12) Chaldía Pontic (Drettas 1997: 531, 684)

i mikresa i nifæ eton
the.F young.F the.F daughter-in-law.F she.was
ci allo poniresa
more crafty.F

!! (13) i Turk (...) ta yariðas epernane
the Turks the.N women.F they.took
B. Inanimate nouns trigger predominantly semantic agreement on all targets except the definite article in the singular when it immediately precedes the noun:

(14) Oenóe Pontic (Lianidis 2007 [1962]: 228)
    
    \[ t'(o) \text{ asimenion} o \text{ mastrapas pali kremet \_the.N silver.N \_the.M tankard.M \_again it.is.hanging } \]

(15) Argyroúpolis Pontic (Papadopoulos 1955: 194)
    
    \[ i \text{ porta}_i \text{ mono imson oran esteknen anixton}_i \text{ the.F door.F only half.N hour.F it.stayed open.N } \]
C. The agreement patterns triggered by non-human animate nouns illustrate the combined effect of animacy and morphological gender:

a. masculine nouns of this type trigger syntactic agreement

(16) Soúrmena Pontic (Papadopoulos 1955: 226)

.epire  ton  petino  ke  ksomoloγα-τόνα
he.took  the.Μ  cockerel.Μ  and  he.shroves-him

ke  lei-άτωνα  ke  efαγεν-άτων
and  he.says-him  and  he.ate-him
C. The agreement patterns triggered by non-human animate nouns illustrate the combined effect of animacy and morphological gender:

b. feminine nouns of this type trigger semantic agreement

(17) Soúrmena Pontic (Papadopoulos 1955: 226)

epire tin papi ke ksomóloγa-to
he.took the.\text{F} duck.\text{F} and he.shroves-it

ke lei-ato ke efajen-ato
and he.says-it and he.ate-it
Gender in Pontic Greek: synchronic analysis

- The distribution of agreement patterns wrt gender and animacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>human</td>
<td>non-human animate</td>
<td>inanimate</td>
<td>syntactic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>human</td>
<td>non-human animate</td>
<td>inanimate</td>
<td>syntactic/neuter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The distribution of syntactic and semantic agreement wrt targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agreement Hierarchy</th>
<th>attributive</th>
<th>predicate</th>
<th>personal pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>prenominal</td>
<td>adjectival</td>
<td>pre-adj</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definite article</td>
<td>modifiers</td>
<td>actival</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>article</td>
<td></td>
<td>definite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG: syntactic</td>
<td></td>
<td>semantic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL: semantic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A diachronic analysis of gender agreement in Pontic Greek
Gender in Pontic Greek: diachronic analysis

• When novel semantic distinctions are introduced into an existing gender agreement system, they are first expressed on the personal pronoun.

• After their introduction, their subsequent development follows the path defined by the Agreement Hierarchy (Corbett 1991, 2006):

  ATTRIBUTIVE > PREDICATE > PERSONAL PRONOUN

• When a novel distinction is expressed on all possible targets for a given noun, then that noun undergoes gender shift.
Novel distinctions that are most often introduced to existing gender systems generally refer to common semantic oppositions (human vs. non-human, animate vs. inanimate, count vs. mass).

In languages with formal assignment systems, such as MGr, oppositions of this type normally play no role in gender agreement that is typically syntactic.
• Cross-linguistic evidence supporting this trajectory of developments is very robust:
  i. English dialects (Siemund 2002a, b, 2005, 2008)
  iii. Swedish (Enger 2004)
  iv. Danish (Fernández-Ordóñez 2009)
  v. Spanish dialects (Fernández-Ordóñez 2006, 2007a, b, 2009)
  vi. Bantu languages (Wald 1975)
In the case of languages that have a neuter gender (Dutch, Swedish, Danish, Spanish), it is the one that is always associated with the part of the novel semantic opposition found at the lowest end of the animacy hierarchy (see Matasović 2004: 134).

(18) South Cantabrian Spanish (Fernández-Ordóñez 2006: 89)

\begin{verbatim}
salía la miel pero ahora sale
it.came.up the.F honey.F but now it.comes.up
limpio, una miel buenísimo, buenísimo
\end{verbatim}
Gender in Pontic Greek: diachronic analysis

- Synchronic evidence in Pontic suggests that the development of semantic agreement in the dialect followed this cross-linguistically common path:

  (a) the only target to preserve syntactic agreement with inanimate nouns is the singular definite article when it immediately precedes the noun

  (19) Matsoúka Pontic

  piason  tin  akran  ti  scini, ḍeson-ato  sa  mesa-s
  you.grab  the.ʃ  end.ʃ  the  rope  you.tie-it  at.the  waist-
(b) the only target with which semantic agreement is possible when controlled by a masculine noun denoting a non-human animate entity is the personal pronoun

(20) Nikópolis Pontic (Lianidis 2007 [1962]: 208)

eskotsen ton skorpon (...) eksiven

he.killed this.M scorpion.M it.came.out

all’ enan, eino pa eskotsen

another one.N that.N PART he.killed
The distribution of agreement patterns in nouns denoting animals suggests that the semantic distinction that first became operative in agreement was animate *versus* inanimate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MAN</th>
<th>WOMAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>human</td>
<td>MASCULINE</td>
<td>FEMININE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-human animate</td>
<td>syntactic</td>
<td>non-human animate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inanimate</td>
<td>semantic</td>
<td>semantic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gender in Pontic Greek: diachronic analysis

- Semantic agreement emerged when the animate versus inanimate distinction was extended from the gender assignment to the gender agreement system in Pontic Greek.

- It was first expressed on personal pronouns, the targets found farther away from their controllers.

- It was gradually extended to other controllers that were found closer to their controllers (predicate, attributive modifiers) without ever reaching immediately prenominal definite articles.
Gender in Pontic Greek: diachronic analysis

- The advancement of semantic agreement was not uniform:

  (a) **ANIMACY**
      inanimate   >   non-human animate   (>   human)

  (b) **GENDER**
      feminine     >     masculine

  (c) **NUMBER**
      plural       >     singular
The trigger for the emergence of semantic agreement were non-prototypical masculine and feminine nouns denoting inanimate entities, nouns that were found in the right gender for their morphology but the wrong gender for their semantics (Anastassiadis-Symeonidis & Chila-Markopoulou 2003; see also Audring 2009: 156, Corbett 1991: 256).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>simos ‘winter’, ceros ‘time’</th>
<th>laistera ‘hammock’, læcæ ‘stain’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MORPHOLOGY</td>
<td>MASCULINE</td>
<td>FEMININE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEMANTICS</td>
<td></td>
<td>NEUTER</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The genders are of three kinds: masculine, feminine and neuter (...) Gender does not always correspond to the nature of beings, for example ο ουρανον [the sky] is masculine when it should be neuter; ι πετρα [the stone] is feminine when it too should be neuter.’

(Topcharas 1998 [1932]: 12)
The research reported here was conducted with the financial support of the Greek State Scholarships Foundation (Ιδρυμα Κρατικών Υποτροφιών), of the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, and of the George and Marie Vergottis Fund of the Cambridge European Trust, all of which are hereby gratefully acknowledged.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Director of the Research Centre for Modern Greek Dialects of the Academy of Athens, Dr Christina Basea-Bezantakou, for granting me access to the Centre’s manuscript archive.
The *Trebizond Almanac*, written in Trebizond in 1336 (Lamprou 1916)

(21) a. ἔσται υγρὸν καὶ χαροποιὸν καιρὸς
   it.will.be wet.N and gladdening.N weather.M

   b. φῆμαι δὲ τινὰ ἀληθεῖ
   rumours.F and some.N true.N
Appendix B

• The connection with the total loss of grammatical gender distinctions and agreement in Cappadocian.

\[(22)\]  
\[a.\] Chaldía Pontic (Papadopoulos 1928: 196)  
\[eðevan \ xronæ \ ce \ cerus\] (cf. SMGr 
they.passed \ years \ and \ times.\text{NOM} \ cerus \ ‘times.\text{ACC}')

\[b.\] Axó Cappadocian (Mavrochalyvidis & Kesisoglou 1960)  
\[ta \ dixus \ exne \ aftça\] (cf. SMGr \ tixus 
the \ walls.\text{NOM} \ they.have \ ears \ ‘walls.\text{ACC}’)

• The completion of the change in the Pontic variety of Ukraine.

(23) Rumeic (Symeonidis & Tompaidis 1999: 54)

\textit{tu ko mas to fumos en xlitsku} \\
the.N our.N our the.N winter.M is tepid.N


References


Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 55-68.


References


References


