



**GENDER AND LANGUAGE ΓΛ4-440 | INSTRUCTOR: ANGELIKI ALVANOUDI**

**ASSIGNMENT TITLE:**

**“NONBINARY PRONOUNS AND GENDER-NEUTRAL TERMS: A  
COMPARISON BETWEEN MODERN GREEK AND MODERN  
ENGLISH”**

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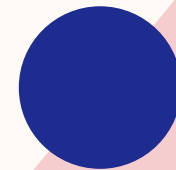
# AIM OF THE STUDY

This study investigates:

- Whether nonbinary speakers of Modern Greek appreciate the use of nonbinary personal pronouns
- Which nonbinary personal pronouns emerge in MG
- If English affects upon these choices

# OUTLINE

- Introduction
- Literature review
- Data and method
- Data analysis and interpretation
- Conclusions





# **GENDER & LANGUAGE**

Literature review

## **SOCIAL VS GRAMMATICAL GENDER**

Gender is a spectrum; it is not a dichotomy of *male and female* as it is usually viewed  
(Talbot, 2003)

Distinction: social vs grammatical gender (Alvanoudi 2020)

These two are interdependent

**GRAMMATICAL GENDER CONTRIBUTES TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIOCULTURAL GENDER IN INTERACTION AS AN EVERYDAY ROUTINE ACTIVITY OR AS A PRODUCT OF REITERATED PERFORMATIVE PRACTICES. THE CATEGORISATION OF REFERENTS AS WOMEN OR MEN VIA GRAMMATICAL GENDER IS AN ASPECT OF THE SOCIOCULTURAL WORLD, WHICH IS ACCOMPLISHED IN THE COURSE OF VARIOUS SOCIAL ACTIONS**

Alvanoudi (2015)

# **GENDER SYSTEMS IN LANGUAGES**

Languages around the world have simple or complex gender systems in their grammar; some languages do not have gender systems at all (Alvanoudi, 2016).

# **GENDER SYSTEMS IN LANGUAGES- CLASSIFICATION**

- Gendered (e.g. Greek, German)
  - Notionally Gendered (e.g. English, Swedish)
  - Genderless (e.g. Finnish, Estonian)
- (Hekanaho, 2020)

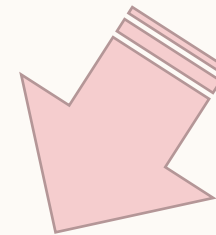
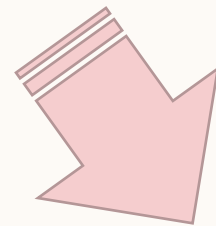


## GENDERED

- Everything must follow a grammatical gender system where parts of speech must agree in gender with a noun (Pavlidou, as cited in Alvanoudi, 2015)

## NOTIONAL GENDER

- Gendered third person pronouns



Gender assumption



# **NONBINARY PRONOUNS:**

A way to address/refer to people without assigning  
a gender to them

## ENGLISH

- Singular *they* is the most common (Hekanaho, 2020)
- Also used as generic in place of *he* (or *she*)
- *It*
- Neopronouns *xe, ze* etc

## GREEK

- No officially recognized nonbinary pronouns
- *Αυτό/το/του*

## GENDER-NEUTRAL TERMS

Τα φοιτητά  
(‘university students’  
– NEUT. PL.)

Τα φίλα (‘friends’-  
NEUT. PL.)

@ sign / όλ@ μας  
(‘all of us’)

## OTHER ISSUES

- Masculine as the standard of reference when the gender of the person is unknown → sexist use of language (Alvanoudi, 2015; Keener & Kotvas, 2022)
- Not only women suffer from this sexist use of language, but also nonbinary individuals
- In studies about modern Greek the neuter grammatical gender tends to not be connected to a social gender



# **DATA AND METHOD**

# RESEARCH

To discuss further about the use of nonbinary pronouns in the context of this paper, and taking into consideration the above-mentioned studies, a small sample of data has been gathered

## PARTICIPANTS

- 5 non-binary individuals
- Ages 19-26 years old
- Greek native speakers that also use English daily to communicate

## DATA

- Online real-time interviews through text messages on the platform of Instagram
- Sum of text messages originally in Greek that were translated into English

## METHOD

- Content analysis method
- Non-probability sampling, meaning that the results cannot be generalized, and it only refers to this specific research.

# DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Participants	Greek pronouns	English pronouns	Most preferred pronoun(s) of both languages
1	Αυτός/ο/του	He/him, <b>they/them</b>	he/him/αυτός /του
2	Αυτός/ο/του, αυτοί/οι/των	<b>They/them</b> , he/him	they/them
3	Αυτή/η/της, Αυτό/το/του	<b>They/them</b> , she/her	They/them, she/her
4	Αυτό/το/του, Αυτή/η/της	<b>They/them</b> , she/her	Αυτό/το/του
5	Any	Any, <b>they/them</b> , it/its	They/them

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## EQUIVALENT OF SINGULAR *THEY* IN GREEK

The participants were asked whether they believe there is an equivalent of *they* in Greek:

- most of them replied negatively
- *Αυτό/ το* (NEUT. SG.) can be considered an equivalent.

→ the Greek neuter pronouns are still controversial as standard nonbinary pronouns

Some people find them degrading. Why?

- The reason might be the grammatical use of the neuter in Greek: mostly assigned to objects, or it is used as a diminutive

# EQUIVALENT OF SINGULAR *THEY* IN GREEK

## DO THE PARTICIPANTS FIND THE GREEK NEUTER PRONOUNS TO BE EFFICIENT?

- Degrading
- Totally acceptable
- Using them
- “languages are shifting all the time, and everything is a matter of habit”

## HOW DO THEY FEEL ABOUT THE ENGLISH *IT/ITS* PRONOUNS?

- Weird
- Degrading
- Totally acceptable
- Using them

## WHAT’S THEIR VIEW ON NEO-PRONOUNS OF ENGLISH?

- Totally acceptable
- Hard to pronounce

! All the participants stated that they respect other people’s choices to use any pronouns and find all of them valid.

## Their view on gender-neutral terms in Greek:

- Inclusive
- Support their use
- One of them reported finding them needless

## Their view on the '@' sign:

- Dislike
- Don't use it
- Hard to use
- Cannot relate it to a sound
- Useful
- Inclusive and briefness in typing

Τα φοιτητά ('university students' – NEUT. PL.)

Τα φίλα ('friends'- NEUT. PL.)

@ sign / όλ@ μας ('all of us')

Would the participants be open to neo-pronouns in Greek or new genderless suffixes in words?


- All positive

Would they prefer the neuter grammatical gender as a default in generic use?

- Most preferred
- Most inclusive
- Least sexist
- Also fine with the generic forms as they are

# CONCLUSIONS

- Grammar plays a critical role in how the social gender will be viewed as.
- Nonbinary pronouns are still a relatively new concept in both English and Greek and are not yet widely accepted or used in either language.
- More and more organizations and individuals are beginning to explore the idea of gender-neutral pronouns in both languages.
- It seems that nonbinary individuals tend to be even more derogated than women in language use.
- There is no standard pronoun assigned to nonbinary people in Greek , such as *they* in English.
- They are often treated as a non-existent aspect of gender and are forcefully placed in the binary male-female.



We understand that personal pronouns are of great importance, as they have a social impact.

# **THANK YOU**

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