1 Introduction

A subset of the world’s languages exhibit obligatory nominal agreement whereby different nouns require different forms of items like adjectives, determiners, and verbs that bear certain syntactic relations with them. This phenomenon is widely called gender. Let us illustrate the phenomenon with (Modern) Greek. A noun like kipos ‘garden’ can be modified by one form of the adjective for ‘small’, mikros, but not by other related forms like mikri and mikro. Similarly, it can occur with one form of the singular nominative definite article o but not with other forms like i and to. On the other hand, avlî ‘backyard’ can cooccur with mikri and i, but not with other related forms of these items.

In the case of Greek the gender is often predictable from the inflectional class of the noun, except for some exceptions. In French, the gender is largely predictable from the final segments of the noun, although there are also many unpredictable cases (see Corbett 1991, Lowenstamm 2012, Fathi & Lowenstamm 2016). In (Standard) Dutch, on the other hand, there does not seem to be any reliable morphological or phonological cue as to which gender a given noun has. For this reason, we define gender in terms of agreement here, and regard inflectional classes as a separate, though potentially related, phenomenon.

This agreement phenomenon is called ‘gender’ and terms like ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are widely used, largely because languages like Greek are rife with cases where relevant agreement appears to correlate with gender-related interpretations. For instance, the noun jatros ‘doctor’ can agree in ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’, and when agreeing in masculine the noun is used to describe a male individual while when agreeing in feminine it is used to describe a female individual. Greek has a number of such nouns that can agree in masculine or feminine, which we call epicene nouns here, following Merchant (2014).

In addition to epicene nouns, Greek also has many morphologically related masculine-feminine pairs, e.g. athlitis and athlitria, both of which mean ‘athlete’ but differ in gender inferences. Roughly, the masculine form is typically used for describing male individuals and the feminine form for describing female individuals, although there are some complications, as we will discuss in more detail later. In some cases the two nouns that describe male and female versions of the same concept do not bear obvious morphological similarity, e.g. pateras ‘father’ and

1 Specifically, nouns that end in -os in nominative singular and -oi in nominative plural can be masculine (e.g. xronos ‘time’), feminine (e.g. periodos ‘period’), or ‘epicene’ (e.g. jatros ‘doctor’; see below). See Ralli 2000, Alexiadou 2004 for details and Corbett (2000:§3.1.1) for similar facts about nominal inflection and gender in Russian.
mitera ‘mother’. Although the genders of these nouns are as expected from their meanings—i.e. pateras is masculine and mitera is feminine—it is a theoretical question whether or not such pairs should be treated on a par with morphologically related pairs like athlitis-athlitria.

As is sometimes remarked, ‘gender’ is arguably a sometimes misleading term. For example, Greek is said to have three genders, standardly called masculine, feminine and neuter, but the semantic effect of neuter, if anything, has to do with inanimacy, rather than gender in the non-technical sense of the term. There are also languages that are described as having gender categories like non-fresh food (see Corbett 2000 and references therein), which one might hesitate to call genders. Also, there are examples of morphologically related pairs of nouns that semantically differ along dimensions other than what one usually means by ‘gender’. For example, in Spanish the feminine noun naranja means the orange fruit while its morphologically related masculine form naranjo means the orange tree. Similarly in Breton (Stump 2005) and Ojibwe (Mathieu 2012), gender marking on certain nouns shows interpretative effects that have to do with mass/count. Nonetheless, we will stick to the standard terminology here and call the relevant phenomenon gender.

Important for the present paper is the fact that there are many cases of gender agreement that arguably have no semantic correlate. For example, thalasa ‘sea’ in Greek is a feminine noun, but this gender specification has no semantic motivation. Such examples are not necessarily confined to inanimate nouns. For instance, nouns like agori ‘boy’ and koritsi ‘girl’ in Greek trigger neuter agreement, but this gender marking has no semantic import. An extreme case of this is perhaps Modern Standard Dutch, where gender is only loosely, if at all, related to interpretation.

Thus, there are cases where gender seems to have some semantic effects and cases where it doesn’t. Following the standard terminological convention, we will call the former cases natural genders and the latter cases grammatical genders. The main concern of the present paper is the syntax and semantics of these two types of gender. In particular, we will closely examine properties of nouns that describe animals, or animal nouns, which have been largely neglected in the theoretical literature (limited discussion can be found in Corbett 1991, Comrie 1999, Bobaljik & Zocca 2011, Yanovich 2012, Kramer 2015). Taking Greek as a case study, we will argue that both natural gender and grammatical gender can be found among animal nouns, and to this extent they are similar to nouns that describe humans, or human nouns. However, we will observe several crucial differences between these two classes of nouns. To see this, we first need to introduce the idea of markedness.

2 Markedness and Interpretation of Gendered Human Nouns

Interpretation of gender on human nouns is a well discussed topic. In the case of Greek the vast majority of them have natural gender (Merchant 2014, Sudo & Spathas 2019), and all cases of grammatical gender are neuter nouns like the ones in (1), or nouns involving a diminutive suffix like -aki, which turns any noun into a neuter noun.

(1) koritsi ‘girl’ agori ‘boy’ pedhi ‘child’ melos ‘member’

Previous studies, in particular Sudo & Spathas 2019 (see also Merchant 2014, Bobaljik & Zocca 2011), have identified three ways in which natural gender manifests itself in the interpretation of human nouns. One is as a presupposition, another is as part of the assertion (and presumably simultaneously as part of the presupposition), and finally via competition with the other gender. The following examples illustrate their analysis. From now on, the gender (in the
sense of agreement) of each noun is indicated by a subscript,² and non-gender presuppositions (number, animacy, etc.) are simply ignored.

(2) \[ jatros_f = \lambda x : x \text{ is female. } x \text{ is a doctor} \]

(3) a. \[ vasilias_M = \lambda x : x \text{ is male. } x \text{ is a male monarch} \]
b. \[ dhaskala_f = \lambda x : x \text{ is female. } x \text{ is a female teacher} \]

(4) a. \[ jatros_M = \lambda x : x \text{ is a doctor} \]
b. \[ dhaskalos_M = \lambda x : x \text{ is a teacher} \]

Of particular interest here is the third kind that has no gender inference in the lexical semantics but gets one via competition with the feminine form. More concretely, according to this idea, (5a) is semantically consistent but is nonetheless infelicitous, because its feminine counterpart (5b) blocks it.

(5) a. *I Maria ine dhaskalos. the Maria is teacher_F ‘Maria is a teacher.’
b. I Maria ine dhaskala. the Maria is teacher_F ‘Maria is a female teacher.’

Sudo & Spathas’s analysis above is based on a number of linguistic tests. For instance, pluralization can be used to see if the lexical semantics involves natural gender: a plural noun with lexically specified gender (merely presupposed, or also asserted) describes uni-gendered groups, while a plural noun without lexically specified gender can describe mixed-gendered groups. Concretely, vasiliadhes_M ‘kings’ only describes male-only groups and dhaskales_F ‘female teachers’ only describes female-only groups, while dhaskali_M ‘teachers’ can be true of mixed-gendered groups as well as male-only groups, as shown by the following examples.

(6) a. #O Petros ke i Maria ine vasiliadhes_M. the Petros and the Maria are kings_M.
b. #O Petros ke i Maria ine dhaskales_F stin Katerini. the Petros and the Maria are teachers_F in the Katerini

(7) O Petros ke i Maria ine dhaskali_M stin Katerini. the Petros and the Maria are teachers_M in the Katerini ‘Petros and Maria are teachers in Katerini.’

Note that dhaskali_M cannot describe female-only groups. This is in line with Sudo & Spathas’s analysis, according to which the feminine plural form dhaskales_F, which only describes female-only group, blocks it in such a case.

Negative existential sentences like (8) show the same thing.

(8) a. O Petros dhen exi kanenan dhaskalo_M stin Katerini. the Petros not has no_M teacher_M in the Katerini ‘Petros has no teacher in Katerini.’

⇒ Petros has no female teacher in Katerini

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²Recall that jatros is compatible with both masculine and feminine; jatros_f is used when this noun triggers feminine agreement and jatros_M is used when it triggers masculine agreement. As Sudo & Spathas (2019) stress, these denotations need not and should not be thought of as the denotations of the roots or the nouns themselves, but potentially of some larger constituent. We will adopt one concrete idea about this due to Spathas’s (2019), which will be introduced below.
b. O Petros dhen exi kamia dhaskala_F stin Katerini. the Petros not has no.F teacher.F in the Katerini
‘Petros has no female teacher in Katerini.’

⇒ Petros has no male teacher in Katerini

The masculine noun $dhaskalos_M$ behaves as if it is gender-neutral in (8a), while the feminine noun $dhaskala_F$ retains its gender inference in (8b). Consequently, (8a) has a stronger meaning than (8b). Masculine nouns with lexically specified gender like $vasilias_M$ also keep their gender inference in this construction, just like (8b).

(9) I Agglia dhen exi kanenan $vasilia_M$.
the England not has no.M $king_M$
‘England has no king.’

⇒ England has no queen

In addition to these two diagnostics for the presence of lexically specified gender, Sudo & Spathas make use of focus constructions to see if the gender is asserted or merely presupposed (see also Merchant 2014). They observe that in focus constructions nouns like $jatros_F$ that only presuppose gender and nouns like $dhaskala_F$ that also assert gender behave differently, as illustrated by (10).

(10) a. Mono i Maria ine kali $jatros_F$.
only the Maria is good.F doctor
‘Only Maria is a good doctor.’
⇒ Petros is not a good doctor.

b. Mono i Maria ine $dhaskala_F$.
only the Maria is teacher.F
‘Only Maria is a teacher.’
⇒ Petros is not a teacher.

Similar constructs are observed with other focus constructions like superlatives and also nominal ellipsis, although as Sudo & Spathas (2019) remark, judgments about nominal ellipsis seem to be relatively unstable.

Sudo & Spathas’s analysis above reveals some generalizations that hold among human nouns in Greek. Firstly, there is no masculine noun where the gender inference is only presupposed, and there is no feminine noun that is lexically underspecified for gender. Thus, masculine human nouns either have asserted (as well as presupposed) gender, as in the case of $vasilias_M$ ‘king’, or have no lexically specified gender, as in the case of $dhaskalos_M$ ‘teacher’. On the other hand, feminine nouns always have lexically specified gender, either presupposed gender, as in the case of $jatros_F$, or asserted gender, as in the case of $dhaskala_F$. In addition, there is no masculine-feminine pair in which the masculine noun has asserted gender, while the feminine noun does not.

These observations relate to the idea of markedness (Jakobson 1984). In European languages with nominal gender systems, masculine is said to be less marked than feminine in the sense that masculine nouns can be lexically underspecified for gender and used as elsewhere cases, while feminine nouns always have gender inferences (e.g. Sauerland 2008, Bobaljik & Zocca 2011, Percus 2011, Kiparsky & Tonhauser 2012; see Corbett 1991, Kramer 2015 for languages where feminine is less marked). This has led some researchers to assume that the
masculine feature has trivial semantics and has no entailments about gender (Percus 2011; see also Sauerland 2003, Heim 2008, Sauerland 2008 for the same point about pronominal gender). Sudo & Spathas’s (2019) analysis is a version of this, except that they admit masculine nouns that have asserted gender.

The distinction between nouns with and without asserted gender can perhaps be more clearly understood in the following implementation of this idea due to Spathas (2019). He proposes that nouns with asserted genders like *vasilias*<sub>M</sub> ‘king’ and *dhaskala*<sub>N</sub> carry gender inference at the root level. These cases can be thought of as lexicalizing concepts that contain gender information, and the same presumably applies to gendered nouns in English too, e.g. kinship terms like *father*, *sister*, and occupation terms like *actress*.

(11) a. √*vasilias* = λx. x is male and x is a monarch  
   b. √*dhaskala* = λx. x is female and x is a teacher

On the other hand, nouns without asserted gender have nominal roots with gender-neutral semantics.

(12) a. √*jatros* = λx. x is a doctor  
   b. √*dhaskalos* = λx. x is a teacher

Following Kramer (2014), Spathas (2019) furthermore assumes that these roots combine with *n*, which can be seen as the locus of syntactic agreement. Crucially, Spathas proposes that *n* can introduce one of two gender-related presuppositions for nouns with natural gender. Specifically, nouns that agree in feminine combine with *n*<sub>F</sub>, which presupposes femaleness, and nouns that agree in masculine combine with *n*<sub>M</sub>, which presupposes no gender (or at most animacy). Here, the term ‘masculine’ is a bit misleading, because it actually does not mean masculine.

(13) a. [*[n]<sub>M</sub>*] = P.λx. P(x)  
   b. [*[n]<sub>F</sub>*] = λP. λx : x is female. P(x)

Crucially, there is no *n* that introduces a maleness presupposition in Greek, and this corresponds to the aforementioned idea of unmarked masculine. Lastly, it is also assumed that whenever (13a) and (13b) give rise to the same meaning, (13b) must be chosen, which captures the blocking effects mentioned earlier (see Sudo & Spathas 2019 for a concrete implementation of this principle).

The idea that masculine is semantically less marked than feminine in languages like Greek and has gender-neutral semantics is widely countenanced, and in the domain of human nouns, this idea seems to be exceptionless. However, very little has been said in the theoretical literature about examples found in the domain of animal nouns that are seemingly problematic for this idea. Concretely, *jata* ‘cat’ in Greek is a feminine noun but is used to describe a cat of any gender, while its masculine counterpart, *jatos*, is used to only describe a male cat. How could we maintain the semantic unmarkedness of masculine that seems to nicely hold in the domain morphological markedness in the present paper.

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4For nouns with grammatical gender, one could assume that there are versions of *n* that carry no gender inferences but still trigger agreement. See Kramer (2014) for more concrete proposals.

5As mentioned above, there are human nouns with grammatical gender, e.g. neuter nouns like *agori* ‘boy’ in Greek, feminine nouns like *persona* ‘person’ in Spanish and Russian. The claim here is that there is no pair of feminine-masculine nouns where the feminine is less marked.
of human nouns in light of such examples? This is the question we would like to address in the
rest of this paper.

3 Animal Nouns

Let us first recapitulate the key facts about human nouns in Greek. Firstly, there are human
nouns with grammatical gender (e.g. neuter nouns like koritsi ‘girl’) and human nouns with
natural gender. Among human nouns with natural gender, the ones that can agree in masculine
or feminine are called epicene nouns (e.g. jatros ‘doctor’). In Greek all epicene nouns have
invariant forms, i.e. gender is only indicated on other items, but this seems to be an idiosyncratic
property of Greek (see Bobaljik & Zocca 2011 for Portuguese data, for example). According
to Sudo & Spathas (2019), masculine epicene nouns have no gender inferences, while feminine
epicene nouns only presuppose gender. In Spathas’s (2019) theory, this means that epicene
nouns all have roots that are lexically unspecified for gender, and a gender presupposition is
introduced by $n_F$. The other flavor of $n$, $n_M$, does not trigger a gender presupposition, but is
subject to the blocking effect such that whenever $n_F$ can be used to mean the same thing it must.

\[
\sqrt{\text{jatros}} = \lambda x. x \text{ is a doctor}
\]

Nouns like $\text{vasilias}_M$ ‘king’ and $\text{vasilissa}_F$ ‘queen’, on the other hand, both have asserted
gender, so under Spathas’s (2019) view, they have roots with lexically specified genders.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \sqrt{\text{vasilias}} = \lambda x. x \text{ is male and } x \text{ is a monarch} \\
\text{b. } & \sqrt{\text{vasilissa}} = \lambda x. x \text{ is female and } x \text{ is a monarch}
\end{align*}
\]

Lastly, there are pairs like $\text{dhaskalos}_M$ ‘teacher’ vs. $\text{dhaskala}_F$ ‘teacher’ where the masculine
form has no gender, but the feminine form involves asserted gender.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \sqrt{\text{dhaskalos}} = \lambda x. x \text{ is a teacher} \\
\text{b. } & \sqrt{\text{dhaskala}} = \lambda x. x \text{ is female and } x \text{ is a teacher}
\end{align*}
\]

As in the case of $\text{jatros}$, the feminine form must be used whenever possible.

As remarked in the previous section, the following generalizations hold among human nouns
with natural gender.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{Masculine nouns either assert (and presuppose) gender, or are gender neutral.} \\
\text{b. } & \text{Feminine nouns either assert (and presuppose) gender, or presuppose gender.} \\
\text{c. } & \text{For any masculine-feminine pair, if the masculine noun asserts gender, then so } \\
& \text{does the feminine noun.}
\end{align*}
\]

In light of these observations, let us now examine animal nouns in detail. There are three sub-
cases, depending on which gender is the default.

3.1 Neuter-Default Nouns

As in the case of human nouns, there are animal nouns that arguably have grammatical gender.
For example kuneli$_N$ ‘rabbit’ is a neuter noun and can describe rabbits of either sex. Here is a
list of neuter animal nouns in Greek.
All of these are underspecified for gender, except for vodhi ‘ox’. In addition, there are neuter animal nouns that contain the highly productive diminutive suffix -aki, which renders any noun neuter.

Interestingly some of these neuter animal nouns have gendered variants. For example, kuneli\textsubscript{N} ‘rabbit’ has a feminine form kunela\textsubscript{F} ‘female rabbit’, which has a gender inference, as evidenced by the fact that its plural form kuneles\textsubscript{F} means ‘female rabbits’. Also, in a negative existential sentence, kunela\textsubscript{F} retains its gender inference.

Furthermore, given that the gender inference is observed in focus constructions, we can conclude that kunela\textsubscript{F} ‘female rabbit’ asserts (and presupposes) gender.

As in the case of human nouns, neuter default nouns can be understood as grammatical gender, but importantly there does not seem to be a neuter human noun that has a morphologically related feminine form with a gender inference. Pairs like kuneli\textsubscript{N}-kunela\textsubscript{F} can only be found among animal nouns.

Some of the nouns in the above list have morphologically related masculine forms, but interestingly they do not seem to add gender inferences. For example, pontiki\textsubscript{N} ‘mouse’ has a morphologically related masculine form pontikos\textsubscript{M}, but this noun is also gender neutral. Another such case is koraki\textsubscript{N} ‘crow’, whose masculine form is korakas\textsubscript{M}, but its meaning is ‘raven’, rather than ‘male crow’. Also, as mentioned above, vodhi\textsubscript{N} ‘ox’ is already gender specified, but there is a masculine form vodinos\textsubscript{M}, which means ‘bovine’ or ‘beef’. Again, there do not seem to be such cases of neuter-masculine pairs in the domain of human nouns where the masculine variant has no gender inference but some other idiosyncratic meaning.

### 3.2 Masculine-Default Animal Nouns

Among masculine animal nouns, one can certainly find cases that are at least compatible with the hypothesis that the gender is interpreted, e.g. tragos\textsubscript{M} ‘male goat’ and jatos\textsubscript{M} ‘male cat’. In addition, it is not hard to find masculine animal nouns that don’t have gender inferences. Here are some examples of this kind.
A couple of these have morphologically related feminine forms. For instance, while the masculine form skilos may be the default, there is a feminine form skila, which means ‘female dog’ (also used idiomatically as a slur against women). The same diagnostics as above indicate that this noun asserts gender. In particular, the following example with a focus construction indicates that the gender is asserted.

(22) Mono i Ellie ine skila.  
only the Ellie is dog.  
‘Only Ellie is a female dog.’ \(\Rightarrow\) Brian is not a male dog

Interestingly, there is also a neuter form skili of this noun, which is gender neutral (and also figuratively means ‘hard worker’). We are not aware of such a triplet of morphologically related human nouns.

Other animal nouns in (22) that have morphologically related feminine forms are, likos ‘wolf’, whose feminine form is likena ‘female wolf’, and lajos ‘hare’, whose feminine form is lajina ‘female hare’. These feminine forms can be shown to assert gender, but relevant data are omitted here. For the rest, a feminine form can be derived with the derivational suffix -ina, as in the case of skiuros ‘squirrel’ and skiurina ‘female squirrel’. This strategy is quite productive and always results in asserted gender.

Recall that masculine is unmarked or default in the domain of human nouns, but one notable difference is that none of the above animal nouns exhibit blocking effects, even when there is a morphologically related feminine form. Thus, skilos ‘dog’ can perfectly felicitously describe a single female dog, unlike a human noun like dhaskalos ‘teacher’.

(23) Exo enan skilo. Ine egkios.  
‘I have a dog. She is pregnant.’

3.3 Feminine-Default Animal Nouns

There are some feminine animal nouns that arguably have natural gender inferences, e.g. jidha, ega and katsika, which all mean ‘female goat’. In addition, there are feminine animal nouns with no gender inferences such as the following.

(24) jata ‘cat’ alepou ‘fox’ kota ‘chicken’  
xelona ‘turtle’ papia ‘duck’ kamila ‘camel’  
kamilopardhali ‘giraffe’ araxni ‘spider’ arkoudha ‘bear’  
ajeladha ‘cow’ kukubaja ‘owl’ jlavka ‘owl’  
tigri ‘tiger’

As remarked in the previous section, nouns like (24) are never found in the domain of human nouns in Greek. The noun jata ‘cat’ is of particular interest, because it has a morphologically related masculine form jatos ‘male cat’, which has a gender inference. Relevant data indicate that the gender is asserted in this case.

(25) Mono o Garfield ine jatos.  
only the Garfield is cat.  
‘Only Garfield is a male cat.’ \(\Rightarrow\) Arlene is not a female cat

In addition, there is a neuter form, jati, which means ‘kitten’.
As in the case of masculine-default animal nouns, the default feminine forms in (25) can felicitously apply to male animals without exhibiting blocking effects, even when there is a morphologically related masculine form. Thus, the following is a perfectly coherent.

(26) Exo mia jata. Ton lene Roger.
    have.1SG a.F cat.F. him call.3PL Roger
    ‘I have a cat. He is called Roger.’

3.4 Summary and Analysis

To sum up the key observations, there are several properties of animal nouns that distinguish them from human nouns.

Firstly, any of the three genders can be the default in the domain of animal nouns, and in each case one can find examples that have another form with natural gender. Relevant examples are: \(kunel_{N} \)-kunela\(_{F}\) ‘rabbit’, skilos\(_{M}\)-skila\(_{F}\) ‘dog’, and jata\(_{F}\)-jatos\(_{M}\), where the first member of each pair is gender neutral.

In the domain of human nouns, only masculine can be gender neutral. Furthermore, when there is a related feminine form (and there usually is), such a gender neutral masculine human noun exhibits blocking effects. It appears that none of the animal nouns show blocking effects even when there are morphologically related forms with natural gender.

In addition, in the case of animal nouns, all cases of natural gender seem to involve asserted gender. In other words, there is no case like jatros\(_{F}\) ‘doctor’, where the gender is only presupposed, and all cases of natural gender are similar in quality to vasilias\(_{M}\) ‘king’ and dhaskala\(_{F}\) ‘female teacher’.

How do these observations square with the idea that masculine in Greek is unmarked? Here is one way to make sense of the data within the theoretical view reviewed in the previous section.

- All gender-neutral animal nouns have grammatical genders. There is no gender-neutral natural noun like dhaskalos\(_{M}\) ‘teacher’ that gives rise to blocking effects.
- Natural genders of animal nouns are always asserted. There is no noun like jatros\(_{F}\) ‘doctor’ that only presupposes gender.

To be more precise, adopting Spathas’s (2019) analysis, we assume that certain roots are somehow required to combine with an instance of \(n\) with a grammatical gender. Something like this needs to be assumed for bona fide cases of grammatical gender like kipos\(_{M}\) ‘garden’ and avli\(_{F}\) ‘backyard’. According to the analysis proposed here, the gender neutral nouns like kuneli\(_{N}\) ‘rabbit’, skilos\(_{M}\) ‘dog’, and jata\(_{F}\) ‘cat’ combine with \(n\) with a grammatical gender. Similarly for animal nouns that do not have related forms with natural genders, e.g. fidhi\(_{N}\) ‘snake’, karxarias\(_{M}\) ‘shark’, araxni\(_{F}\) ‘spider’. And by assumption, nouns with grammatical gender do not trigger blocking effects with respect to nouns with natural gender, no matter what the morphological properties of the relevant nouns are. In the current proposal this amounts to saying that \(n\) bearing natural gender does not compete with \(n\) bearing grammatical gender.

In this respect, animal nouns are a lot more like inanimate nouns. There are many cases of grammatical gender and gender assignment is largely unpredictable from semantics. In the domain of human nouns in Greek, the distribution of grammatical gender is much more constrained. There are not many cases of neuter nouns, and there no case of grammatical gender with a related form with natural gender.

At the same time, animal nouns are not completely like inanimate nouns, because there are also many cases with natural genders. But such examples all involve asserted gender, and in
Spathas’s (2019) terms, this means that they all lexicalize gendered concepts. More concretely:

\[
\begin{align*}
\sqrt{\text{kounela}} & = \lambda x. x \text{ is female and } x \text{ is a rabbit } \\
\sqrt{\text{skila}} & = \lambda x. x \text{ is female and } x \text{ is a dog } \\
\sqrt{\text{jatos}} & = \lambda x. x \text{ is male and } x \text{ is a cat }
\end{align*}
\]

It must be ensured that these roots combine with the correct kind of \( n \), but we can assume that the mechanism is the same as in the case of human nouns. That is, whenever the gender presupposition of \( n_F \) is satisfied (in the local context), it must be used.

Finally, there are no animal nouns that only presuppose gender, which would be similar to human nouns like \( jatros_F \) ‘doctor’, or no nouns that have vacuous natural gender and are subject to blocking effects, which would be similar to human nouns like \( jatros_M \) ‘doctor’ and \( dhaskalos_M \) ‘teacher’.

4 Concluding Remarks

In this paper, we started from the idea of markedness among different gender categories with the thesis that masculine is unmarked and semantically vacuous in languages like Greek. Examples such as \( jata_F \) ‘cat’ initially seemed to be problematic for this thesis, but adopting the theoretical view propounded in previous studies, especially, Sudo & Spathas (2019) and Spathas (2019), we argued that they can be explained away as cases of grammatical gender. In doing so, we observed non-trivial differences between human nouns and animal nouns. In both domains, grammatical and natural genders are found, but their distributions and properties are not identical, as summarized in the previous section. Admittedly we are far from explaining why such differences exist in Greek, but at least we hope to have made informative empirical observations in the present paper.

Before closing, we would like to mention that Jakobson (1984:p. 1f), whose work the idea of markedness dates back to, illustrates the markedness in the domain of gender with an animal noun in the following passage.

The Russian word \( oslíca \) ‘she-ass’ indicates the female sex of the animal, whereas the general meaning of the word \( osél \) ‘donkey’ contains no indication of the sex of the animal in question.

We certainly hope that our analysis will be applicable to animal nouns in Russian and other languages with nominal gender. That is, we expect that gender neutral animal nouns like \( osél_M \) involve grammatical gender, while ones with natural gender like \( oslíca_F \) assert gender, but we have to leave a detailed empirical investigation for another occasion. Yet, Jakobson’s following observation made right after the passage quoted above is worth mentioning.

If I say \( osél \), I make no decision as to whether I have to do with a male or a female, but if I am asked \( èto oslíca? \) ‘is it a she-ass?’ and I answer \( nét, osél \) ‘no, a donkey’, then in this case the masculine gender is indicated—the word is used in a restricted sense.

Similar examples can be constructed in Greek. For example:
Neuter default nouns do not allow such an interpretation.

(29)  #Ine kunela? Oxi, ine kuneli.
      is.3SG rabbit.F no is.3SG rabbit.N
   (intended) ‘Is it a female rabbit? No, it is a male rabbit.’

These data suggest that those cases of grammatical masculine and feminine can optionally turned into natural genders. Note that due to the aforementioned restrictions in the domain of human nouns, one cannot find comparable examples there.

This idea, however, poses further theoretical questions. Since we are assuming that $n_M$ with natural masculine gender has vacuous semantics in Greek, we are forced to say that the data like (28a) involves asserted natural gender in the root. Then there must be a mechanism that takes a gender neutral root and turns it into one with natural gender. That mechanism, furthermore, has to somehow interact with grammatical gender specification of the root, because it needs to be blocked if the root is one with grammatical gender, as in (29). One possibility is that all feminine and masculine neutral animal nouns are systematically lexically ambiguous and are associated with a second, gender-restricted variant. We will leave this issue for future research.

References


