The Neuter Agreement Constraint in Lithuanian

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Introduction: This study analyzes the role of gender in agreement by focusing on Lithuanian neuters. Lithuanian has three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter; however, the neuter is unusual in that it is not an inherent gender of any lexical noun, unlike other 3-gendered languages (e.g., Russian, Greek). The only nominal neuter arguments are pronouns and quantifier-like elements as in (1).

(1) Viskas/tai   buvo visiškas   chaosas
    Everything-NOM.NEUT/this.NOM.NEUT was   total.NOM.M.SG chaos.NOM.M.SG
    'Everything/this was total chaos.'

Proposal: We argue that Lithuanian has what we call the Neuter Agreement Constraint in (2), which causes neuter arguments to fail to control agreement with adjectives, yielding ungrammaticality. The NAC is particularly striking, given that neuter forms can appear in various positions and in various cases, suggesting it is not a result of the language lacking certain agreement forms. We propose instead that the NAC is due to the lack of gender features on neuter arguments. When agreement is obligatory between a nominal argument ('controller') and an agreeing expression ('target'), the controller must value the gender features of a target with unvalued gender (i.e., adjectives but not nominal predicates). As we show, neuter arguments in Lithuanian lack gender features altogether (cf. Kramer 2015), and are therefore ineligible to value a target's gender features. (2)

NAC: Gender features on non-verbal agreement targets must be valued.

Motivation for NAC: Despite the fact that both neuter pronouns and adjectives occur in different positions independently, agreement between them is ungrammatical. **First**, the neuter pronouns *viskas* and *tai* appear in various constructions: in structural accusative object position (3), and as an object under negation, which in Lithuanian takes genitive (4). **Second**, substantivized neuter adjectives can also appear in the same environments: accusative object (5) and genitive-of-negation object (6).

(3) Jis valgė viską/tai.   (4) Jis ne-valgė visko/to
    He ate   everything.ACC.NEUT/this.ACC.NEUT   He NEG-ate   everything.GEN.NEUT/this.GEN.NEUT
    `He ate everything/this.'                  `He didn't eat everything/this.'

(5) Jis valgė kepta   ir virta.   (6) Jis ne-valgė nei   kepta   nei virta
    He ate   fried.NEUT and boiled.NEUT   He NEG-ate neither fried.NEUT nor boiled.NEUT
     `He ate fried and boiled.'   'He ate neither fried nor boiled.'

Third, while masculine (as well as feminine) arguments agree with adjectives, neuter arguments cannot. For example, secondary depictive predicates that agree in gender, number, and case (GNC) with an accusative masculine object (7) are ungrammatical with neuter objects (8). Adjectives in the complement of *make*-causatives also show agreement in number and gender with a masculine causee (9), whereas neuter causees fail to agree with such adjectives (10).

(7) Jis valgė daržoves   žalias.   (8) Jis valgė viską   (*žalia/*žalią/*žalią)
    He ate   vegetables.ACC.M raw.ACC.M   He ate everything.ACC.**NEUT**(raw.ACC.**NEUT**/ACC.M/ACC.F)
    'He ate the vegetables raw.'   'He ate everything raw.'

(9) Karas padarė miestą   neatpažįstamą/%neatpažįstamu.
    War   made   city.ACC.**M**.SG   unrecognizable.ACC.**M**.SG/INST.**M**.SG
    'War made the city unrecognizable.'

(10) *Karas padarė viską/tai   neatpažįstamą/neatpažįstamu/neatpažįstama.
     War   made everything.ACC.**NEUT**/this.ACC.**NEUT** unrecognizable.ACC.**M**.SG/INST.**M**.SG/**NEUT**.ACC
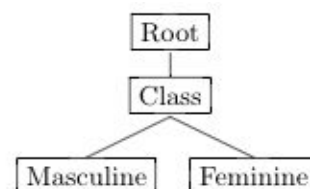
'War made everything/this unrecognizable.'

Analysis: We analyze the neuters' inability to satisfy the NAC (2) as GNC "agreement failure." We propose that the neuter is the absence of gender in Lithuanian, and thus neuter arguments fail to transmit gender features to their agreement targets. The absence of gender can be illustrated by neuter-form predicative adjectives occurring in the presence of non-nominal genderless subjects, such as to-infinitives (11) and substantivized adjective subjects (12).

(11) Pavargti už tėvynę - gražu/*gražus/*graži.   (12) Saldu   gradu/*gradus/*gardi.

 to.suffer for homeland beautiful.**NEUT**/NOM.M.SG/NOM.F.SG Sweet.**NEUT** delicious.**NEUT**/NOM.M.SG/NOM.F.SG

`To suffer for one's homeland is beautiful.'   'Sweet is delicious.' (Ambrazas 1997)

Crucially, the absence of gender in Lithuanian (neuter) is distinct from default gender (masculine), which surfaces in coordination resolution (Corbett 1991), as in (13). To capture this distinction, we propose a modified version of Harley and Ritter's (2002) feature geometry in (14), whereby neuter is represented with just a feature Root while masculine additionally bears a nominal Class (gender) feature.

(13) Kėdė   ir stalas   yra purvini/*purvinos/*purvina. (14)

    Chair.NOM.F.SG and table.NOM.M.SG are dirty.NOM.**M**.PL/NOM.F.PL/NOM.NEUT

    'The chair and the table are dirty.'

That the NAC is due to failure to transmit gender features to an agreement target (cf. 8-10) is further evidenced by nominal predication, which is grammatical with neuter arguments (15). Unlike agreeing adjectives, whose gender is valued by a controller, predicative nominals have inherent gender (FEM in 15), thus they do not need to receive gender features from a controller.

(15) Karas padarė viską/tai   tikra   betvarke.

    War   made everything.ACC.NEUT/that.ACC.NEUT real.INST.**F**.SG chaos.INST.**F**.SG

    'War made everything/that into real chaos.'

Non-copular nominative neuters are also subject to the NAC e.g., the derived passive subject in (16), suggesting non-nominative cases are not responsible for agreement failures.

(16) *Viskas   buvo serviruojama šalta.

    Everything.NEUT.NOM was served-NEUT   cold.NEUT `Everything was served cold.'

Implications: This study has broader implications for the representation of gender, particularly for 'absence' versus 'default;' and for the nature of agreement 'failures,' which, for Lithuanian neuters, causes a crash rather than yielding default morphology (cf Preminger 2011). The study thus suggests a separation between non-agreement on the one hand, and failed obligatory agreement on the other.

Neuter controllers and neuter targets do appear to cooccur in one construction, namely in copular sentences, as in (17). We take this not to be a counterexample to our NAC generalization. These data suggest that the requirements for agreement differ for copular sentences, and warrant further research.

(17) Viskas/tai   buvo gražu.

    Everything-NOM.NEUT/this.NOM.NEUT was beautiful.NEUT.

    'Everything/this was beautiful.'

References: <u>Ambrazas</u> (1997). Lithuanian grammar. <u>Anagnostopoulou</u> (to appear). Gender and defaults. <u>Kramer</u> (2015). The morphosyntax of gender. <u>Harley and Ritter</u> (2002). Person and number in pronouns: A feature-geometric approach.<u>Preminger</u> (2011).Agreement as a fallible operation. <u>Wechsler</u> (2011). Mixed agreement, the person feature, and the index/concord distinction.