

Grammatical Gender in Greek

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Gender in Indo-European Languages

Examples of IE languages with 2 Genders:
(masculine and feminine)

- French
- Italian
- Spanish
- Portuguese
- Latvian
- Lithuanian
- Irish

Examples of IE languages with 3 Genders:
(masculine, feminine, and neuter)

- Russian
- Polish
- Serbian
- German
- Norwegian
- Latin
- Greek

General Hypothesis: Greek has grammatical gender with three classes of gender: masculine, feminine, and neuter.

Indo-European refers to a large family of languages, that all share a common linguistic ancestry.

This includes Romance languages like French and Spanish, Germanic languages like German and English, Slavic languages like Russian and Polish, and the Hellenic languages – Greek.

Gender is a grammatical category found in all of the languages listed above except English.

It is a common grammatical category for IE languages, so it is likely that it exists in Greek if we find the right patterns.

There are two common manifestations of Gender: 2-gender languages (masculine and feminine) and 3-gender languages (masculine, feminine and neuter).

In what follows, I show my hypothesis for why Greek is a 3-gender language.

Finding Gender in a language

Do the nouns have patterns?

Example: Russian Noun Endings

Gender:	Masculine:	Feminine:	Neuter:
Pattern that defines the gender:	Always ends with a consonant (or й)	Always ends with [a] (а, я, ия)	Always ends with -о or -е (о, е, ие)
Examples:	снег - [snjeg] мир - [mir] музей - [muzjei]	девушка - [djevufka] земля - [zemlja] фамилия - [familija]	озеро - [ozjerə] платье - [platje] образование - [abrazavanije]

So how do we go about identifying if a given language has gender or not?

There are a few ways to go about this:

- 1) Look at agreement (do male/female subjects require different gender-specific adjectives or adjectival endings?)
- 2) Look at the declension (the word ending)

Let's take the second approach by looking for patterns in the noun

Gender usually manifests itself by way of common word endings (inflections)

Example: Russian (see slide). Note that there are some exceptions to the rules.

So, if we want to argue that Greek has gender, we need to find the pattern(s) in the nouns that define the gender classes.

Nouns Endings in Greek

Four identifiable noun endings:

-s (or vowel + s)	-a	-i	-o
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‘man’ in Greek: [adras] → masculine

‘woman’ in Greek: [jinɛka] → feminine

[i] and [o] have their own agreement patterns, that seem to be the same as each other, but different from masculine or feminine patterns. Thus, they occupy their own grammatical category (neuter).

Note: The words for ‘man’ and ‘woman’ in every IE language with gender seem to be masculine and feminine, respectively.

	man	woman
German	Mann (m)	Frau (f)
French	homme (m)	femme (f)
Italian	uomo (m)	donna (f)
Spanish	hombre (m)	mujer (f)

In Greek, there is even more of a pattern to noun endings (note that this is all in the singular; we’re not considering plurality at this point).

In the data collected by our class, we only found 4 noun endings: -s (or vowel + /s/), -a, -i, -o.

Now that we know what the data are, how do we know which endings to assign to which gender?

One clue is that it seems to be the case that in other Indo-European languages like Greek, the word for man is masculine and the word for woman is feminine.

If the word for man in Greek has the ‘s’ ending and the word for woman has the [a] ending, then it would be logical to conclude that of the four Greek word endings, [s] is the masculine ending and [a] is the feminine ending.

[i] and [o] have their own agreement patterns in Greek, which are the same as each other but different from the masculine and feminine agreement patterns.

Thus, we can say that they belong to their own gender class: neuter. This would make Greek a 3-gender language.

Pattern between Russian and Greek

	Masculine:	Feminine:	Neuter:
Pattern:	ends with consonant ([s])	ends with [a]	ends with [o]
Russian:	[vapros]	[ptitsa]	[akno]
Greek:	[skilos]	[riza]	[ptino]

Some Important Final Notes:

- Gender can have a lot of variation and irregularities (in terms of noun endings).
- Gender is also identified by the agreements that are imposed.
- The functional role gender imposes on agreement is therefore very important.

As a final observation, it seems that there is a typological similarity between gender-related noun endings in Greek and Russian (both IE languages).

Patterns like these that occur in related languages help support the hypothesis that both of these language contain the same grammatical category.

As a last remark, this has been the general framework for the hypothesis concerning greek gender.

It might actually be much more complicated (irregularities, more variation,...) but this is the hypothesis that can be constructed from our limited data.

Also, noun-endings are not always enough to confirm gender. It helps to know that Greek is an Indo-European language, and that IE languages commonly display gender.

But patterns in word endings don't always mean gender is present (In Chinese, words only end with a vowel or a nasal, but this doesn't mean there are two gender classes).

There has to be some functional role that gender imposes, and this can be seen in the agreement of word patterns (which Brittany will talk about next).