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GENDER ASSIGNMENT OF ENGLISH SUBSTANTIVES IN MODERN GREEK

Due to the rapid development of the sciences and technology, borrowing from English has lately become a sine qua non not only for Modern Greek but also for other languages of the modern world. The proportions of the material that is infiltrated into Modern Greek as a result of its contact with English are such as to cause the language purists to worry about the fate of the greek language. However, much of this bulk of words is ephemeral to a great extent; moreover, as we have shown¹, the loanwords from English into M.G.* do not constitute importations but adaptations in accordance with the particularities of the phonological system of M.G.

The loanwords of M.G. from E.** basically belong to three grammatical classes: they are nouns, adjectives and verbs³. As far as numbers go, nouns can be said to have the highest rate, while adjectives have the lowest percentage in the total of English loanwords. The high percentage of nouns is due to the fact that nouns, by definition, lend themselves more easily to borrowing³ than other classes of words do.

In this paper we will proceed to examine the assignment to gender of loanword substantives from E into M.G. and attempt an interpretation of the factors at work and a formulation of the patterns that seem to arise out of the analysis of data.

In order to proceed with our investigation, we will first examine the respective systems of gender as they are perceived to function in the two languages we are here concerned with.

M.G. classifies nouns into two kinds of gender: natural gender and grammatical gender⁴. In the first category we have only animate male or

* Modern Greek.

** English.

1. A. Apostolou-Panara, *The Phonological Integration of English Loanwords into Modern Greek* (Doct. Diss. in greek), University of Athens, 1985.

2. Our research has also yielded some adverbs and exclamations. These loans prove that the greek language is very receptive as regards borrowing.

3. «Nouns are most easily borrowed, then the various other parts of speech, then suffixes, then inflections, then sounds». E. Haugen, «The Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing», *Language* 26, 1950, p. 224.

4. Seaman seems to believe that gender in M.G. is only grammatical «Greek gender is said to be grammatical, i.e. greek nominals fall *more or less arbitrarily* within one of the three genders (with little regard to sex), so that greek gender usually has no 'meaning' in the English sense...» P. D. Seaman, *Modern Greek and American English in Contact: A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Greek American Bilingualism* in Chicago, 1972, pp. 153-154. (The italics are ours).

female beings that are assigned to either the masculine or the feminine gender according to sex. We find no neuter nouns in this category, nor do we find any inanimate objects, abstract entities, etc. Grammatical gender, on the other hand, may include both animate and inanimate objects and it may, at times, be in opposition with the natural gender⁵.

For instance, with nouns such as:

(a)	/o kaθreftis/,	(the mirror),	<o kaθreftης>
(b)	/i karekla/,	(the chair),	<η καρέκλα>.
(c)	/to koritsi/,	(the girl),	<το κορίτσι>
(d)	/to ayori/,	(the boy),	<το αγόρι>,

we have four cases of opposition between natural and grammatical gender, i.e. cases (a) and (b), where the masculine and feminine genders correspondingly refer to inanimate objects, and cases (c) and (d), where the neuter gender of the grammatical category refers to animate entities, being, thus, in opposition with the natural gender.

Grammatical gender in M.G. classifies nouns into all three categories: masculine, feminine, neuter. The presence in the system of both natural and grammatical gender has always been a puzzle for researchers with varying conclusions⁶. Indeed, as research has shown⁷ grammatical gender seems to defy logical analysis⁸.

English distinguishes nouns into masculine, feminine and neuter ones. Sex seems to be decisive in this categorization⁹. In this sense, masculine are considered to be all the naturally male animates and feminine all the naturally female ones¹⁰. All inanimates are considered as belonging to the neuter gender. To this category are also assigned small animals or babies when their sex is not explicitly mentioned.

From the above we may assume that natural gender is prevalent in E while grammatical gender seems to be almost non-existent¹¹. In M.G., on the

5. M. Triandaphyllides, *Mikri Neoelliniki Grammatiki*, Thessaloniki, 1975, p. 84.

6. P. Mackridge, *The Modern Greek Language*, A Descriptive Analysis of Standard Modern Greek, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 42 ff.

7. I. Fodor, «The Origin of Grammatical Gender», *Lingua* 8, 1959, pp. 1-14, 187-214.

8. «...la distinctions des genres grammaticaux ne repond à rien de rationnel...» J. Vendryes, *Le langage*, 1968, p. 63. See also O. Jespersen, *Language*, 1968, pp. 346-48, and P. Colaclides, «The Pattern of Gender in Modern Greek», *Linguistics* 1963-64, pp. 65-68.

9. «English gender is mainly based upon sex (or lack of sex) and is largely unmarked both in the nouns and most attributive words». P. D. Seaman, *Modern Greek and American English in Contact: A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Greek American Bilingualism* in Chicago, 1972, p. 153.

10. In this category we may find some inanimates too, which are considered as belonging to the feminine gender such as the substantive 'ship', and abstract substantives such as 'virtue', 'liberty', 'England'.

11. R. Fowkes, «On the Gender of Early English Loanwords in Welsh», *Word* 10, 1954, p. 64.

other hand, grammatical gender is functionally very active. We have here a case of two languages whose gender systems seem, at first glance, to be parallel in the sense that they both classify nouns into three genders. A closer investigation, however, reveals differences in the criteria of classification that are at work in each language. Thus, when these two languages engage in contact through borrowing one may expect some activity which is not altogether free of problems¹².

We started our analysis of loanword behaviour concerning gender assignment by drawing a distinction between the animate and inanimate nouns in our corpus. In this way we could easily cater for natural gender which indeed seems to follow the same pattern in M.G. as it does in E. As for the grammatical gender, we proceeded into a further distinction of data of those that appear to be morphologically adapted from those whose assimilation is limited only to the phonological level. We were thus left with a considerable number of morphologically unadapted data which seemed to constitute the actual problematic area of the whole process of gender assignment. Our research yielded the following results:

1. All animates seem to be assigned to the proper gender independently of degree of morphophonological assimilation. The existence in M.G. of natural gender makes this function automatic.

E.g. /o star, i star/ <ο σταρ, η σταρ>
/o lorδος, i leδi/ <ο λόρδος, η λαίδη>

2. Inanimates, such as kinds of machinery, equipment, food, sports, dance, cloth, abstract entities, etc. seem to fluctuate among the three genders. It is noteworthy that the neuter appears to be the strongest of all¹³. Preference for a certain gender is quite common in languages, though the reasons for this preference cannot always be inferred¹⁴.

This fluctuation of the inanimate loanwords of E in M.G. with a marked preference for the neuter may, at first glance, create the impression of a random process connected with an individual's competence in E. This, however, is rather subjective, as an analysis of data has shown.

According to this analysis two basic factors appear to affect both

12. «When two languages are in contact, both of which classify their nouns into gender patterns, any transfer of lexical items arising through the contact situation will bring in its wake problems related to the gender of the transferred elements». H. Baetens-Beardmore, «A Gender Problem in a Language Contact Situation», *Lingua* 27, 1971, p. 141.

13. B. Newton, «The Grammatical Integration of Italian and Turkish Substantives into Modern Greek», *Word* 19, 1963, p. 30.

14. «There may be a strong preference for one gender or the other. Thus in Norwegian and in Portuguese there is a bias towards masculine assignment and in German towards feminine assignment of loanwords». S. Ervin, «The Connotations of Gender», *Word* 18, 1962, p. 253.

morphologically adapted and unadapted loans in their selection of gender: the phonetic shape of the final syllable of the loan and the existence in M.G. of a synonymous lexical item, which may be a native word or an older loan. In this sense, the loans whose final syllable consists of phonemic sequences that resemble, in a way, phonemic sequences in M.G. that constitute markers of gender¹⁵ are assigned to the gender thus implicated¹⁶. On the other hand, the loans that seem to have some synonymous equivalent in M.G. tend to be assigned to the gender of the native word¹⁷. In view of these results the distinction between morphologically adapted and unadapted loans would appear to serve purely formal criteria. Not quite so, as will be shown later on in our research. The above tendencies may be categorized as follows:

1. Assignment to gender by morphological assimilation (addition of suffixal morpheme)

The assignment of gender of morphologically adapted substantives is automatic with the morphological assimilation. The factors that are at work in this assimilation are basically connected with the morphophonological shape of the last syllable of the substantive and the existence of a synonymous lexical item in M.G. as we have pointed out above. In this category we have all three classes of gender: masculine, feminine, neuter.

a. E.g. E. <protein>	/prət̪ ʊti:n/
M.G. <(η) πρωτεΐνη>	/(i) proteini/
E. <MacCathyism>	/məkɑ:θiizəm/
M.G. <(ο) μακαρθισμός>	/(o) makarθizmos/
E. <caravan>	/kærəvən/
M.G. <(το) καραβάνι>	/(to) karavani/

b. E.g. E. <dengue> /dengi/

M.G. <(ο) δάγκειος>	/(o)δα(v)γιος/*
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* The substitution of /e/ by /a/ in M.G. indicates a French influence which indeed is the case here. See Bloch & Von Wartburg, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française*, Édition 6ème, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1975, p. 186.

15. B. Newton, «The Grammatical Integration of Italian and Turkish Substantives into Modern Greek», *Word* 19, 1963, p. 21. See also A. Mirambel, «La 'Fin de Mot' en grec moderne» *BSL* 63, 1968, pp. 21-25.

16. J. André, «Les changements de genre dans les emprunts du latin au grec», *Word* 24 (II), 1968, pp. 1-7.

17. S. Ervin, «The Connotations of Gender», *Word* 18, 1962, p. 254.

after <ο πυρετός>, 'fever' a native substantive of masculine gender.

E.	<sterling>	/st3:lig/
M.G.	<(η)στερλίνα>	/(i)sterlina/

after <η λίρα>, 'pound', an older loan of feminine gender.

E.	<punch>	/pʌntʃ/
M.G.	<(το)πόντσ(i)>	/(to) ponts(i)/

possibly after the substantive <ποτό>, 'drink'.

2. Assignment to gender by phonemic substitution¹⁸.

In this category we noticed two distinct tendencies:

a. The loanwords whose final syllable consists of a vowel phoneme tend to become either feminine or neuter. (according to the phonetic shape of the final syllable, see above).

E.g.	E.	<coca cola>	/kəukəkəulə/
	M.G.	<(η) κόκα κόλα>	/(i) kokakola/
	E.	<polo>	/pəuləu/
	M.G.	<(το) πόλο>	/(to) polo/
	E.	<rally>	/ræli/
	M.G.	<(το) ράλι>	/(to) rali/

b. The loanwords whose final syllable is closed by a consonant or consonant cluster show a distinct preference for the neuter gender.

E.g.	E.	<gallop>	/gæləp/
	M.G.	<(το) γκάλοπ>	/(to) galop/
	E.	<stock>	/st k/
	M.G.	<(το) στοκ>	/(to) stok/
	E.	<commercials>	/kəm3: ʃəlz/
	M.G.	<(τα) κομέρσιαλς>	/(ta) komersials/*

c. Loanword substantives that have a synonymous counterpart in M.G. show a preference for the gender of this lexical item.

* We may mention here some loans such as /i pab/, (the pub), <η παρτ>, /mia sevenap/, (one seven up), <μια σέθεν άπ>, which may appear as exceptions to this category. In our opinion we have here a shift from category 2b to category 2a as these feminines that actually constitute recent substitutions for the older /to pab/ and /ena sevenap/, both neuter, may show this preference for the feminine gender after the models of /i cafeteria/, (the cafeteria), <η καφετέρια> and /mia koka kola/, (one koka kola), <μια κόκα κόλα>, both older loans.

18. For a comprehensive model of the phonological integration of English loanwords into M.G. see A. Apostolou-Panara, *The Phonological Integration of English Loanwords into Modern Greek*, (Doct. Diss.), University of Athens, 1985, pp. 167-207.

E.g.	E.	<Eurovision>	/juərəʊvɪzən/
	M.G.	<(η) Γιουροβίζιον>	/(i)juərovizion/

We notice here assignment to the feminine gender after the substantive <η τηλεόραση>, /i tileorasi/, an older loan. This tendency, however, is not without exceptions and we may notice such substantives fluctuating between two categories. Such exceptions are the following loanwords:

E.	<story>	/stɔ:ri/
M.G.	<(η) στόρου>	/(i) stori/

a feminine substantive after the native <η υπόθεση> according to category 2c above), or:

E.	<story>	/stɔ:ri/
M.G.	<(το) στόρου>	/(to) stori/, a neuter

substantive according to category 2a above.

Also:

E.	<suspens>	/sʌspens/
M.G.	<(η) σασπένς>	/(i) saspens/,

a feminine substantive after the native element <η αγωνία>, or:

E.	<suspens>	/sʌspens/
M.G.	<(το) σασπένς>	/(to) saspens/,

a neuter substantive according to category 2b*.

This fluctuation may, in our opinion, be interpreted as a strong indication that the phonological implications in this case of gender assignment of loanwords are very important indeed. It is noteworthy that not one loanword of the category of morphologically unadapted substantives seems to be assigned to the masculine gender.

We may mention here that together with the morphophonological analysis of our data we proceeded into a parallel analysis based on semantic criteria. We grouped the substantives in our corpus according to semantic content in an attempt to trace gender preferences according to semantic field. Indeed, some groups of substantives belonging to the same semantic field, showed a marked preference for a specific gender. Kinds of sports, for instance, seem to be assigned to the neuter gender almost exclusively.

* «...βασίζεται στο σασπένς...» and «...ξεπερνά τη σασπένς...», EPIKAIRA Magazine, 5-11/2/81 (from an original text by I. Daifas). Also: «...δύοι ασχολούνται με το σώου μπίζνες και τους δίσκους...» TO VIMA Newspaper, 6/2/77, and «...ο γάμος γάμος και η μπίζνες μπίζνες...», EPIKAIRA Magazine, 7/10/76.

A closer examination, however, revealed that this is a coincidence and that the substantives that belong to this semantic field are assigned to gender according to categories 1a, 1b and 2a, 2b.

Gender assignment of E loanword substantives into M.G. may be schematically presented as follows:

1. Morphophonologically adapted loans

a. Animate loans (natural gender)	/ \	b. Inanimate loans (grammatical gender)
Masculine	Feminine	/ \
Masculine	Feminine	Masculine
		Neuter

2. Phonologically adapted loans

(Inanimate loans)

a.	b.	c.
/ \		/ \
Feminine Neuter	Neuter	Feminine Neuter

Conclusion

The factors that affect the assignment to gender of E loanword substantives into M.G. may be investigated on two levels, i.e. the morphophonological and the lexical one. Thus, morphophonologically adapted loans tend to be assigned to all three genders (inanimates), or to the masculine and feminine (animates), while loans that are only phonologically adapted may be assigned to either feminine or neuter genders according to the underlying structural and lexical patterns. We may, therefore, proceed to the conclusion that future loans will have to be assigned to gender according to the above model.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Αθηνά - Μαρία Αποστόλου - Πανάρα, *Το γένος των δανείων ουσιαστικών της Νέας Ελληνικής από την Αγγλική*

Στην εργασία αυτή εξετάζονται τα δάνεια ουσιαστικά της Νέας Ελληνικής από την Αγγλική γλώσσα. Συγκεκριμένα, επιχειρείται, αφενός η ανίχνευση των παραγόντων σύμφωνα με τους οποίους τα δάνεια αυτά κατατάσσονται σε γένος όταν εισέρχονται στο σύστημα της Νέας Ελληνικής, και αφετέρου η διατύπωση ενός προτύπου κατάταξης σε γένος του είδους αυτού των δανείων από την Αγγλική.

Σύμφωνα με τα ευρήματα της έρευνάς μας οι παράγοντες αυτοί πρέπει να αναζητηθούν στο μορφοφωνολογικό και λεξιλογικό επίπεδο.