Gender disagreements (in Greek NP ellipsis)

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This paper examines three classes of noun in Greek that differ in whether their gender features are relevant to the establishment of the identity relation needed for nominal (NP) ellipsis. I show that this is part of the following broader generalization:

1. **Gender and ellipsis generalization:** When gender is variable (as on determiners, clitics, adjectives, and some nominals under certain conditions), it may be ignored under ellipsis. When gender is invariant (on nouns in argument positions, and on some nominals in predicative uses), it may not be ignored under ellipsis.

While the facts are well known for adjectives, the behavior of Greek nouns under ellipsis has not previously been investigated. I show that (like their better studied counterparts in Romance) gender-variant noun pairs come in three varieties regarding their behavior in predicate ellipses: 1. nonalternating nouns (aderfos/-i ‘brother/sister’; kirios/-ia ‘mister/missus’; prinkipas/-issa ‘prince/princess’; etc.), 2. epicene nouns (jatros ‘doctor’; dhikigoros ‘lawyer’; singrafeas ‘author’; glosologos ‘linguist’; martiras ‘witness’; asthenis ‘patient’; singenis ‘relative’; etc.), and 3. unidirectional nouns (dhaskalos/-a ‘teacher’; kathijitis/-tria ‘professor’; pianistas/-tria ‘pianist’; manavis/-issa ‘grocer’; etc.)

(2) **Nonalternating nouns**
   a. * O Petros ine aderfos, ala i Maria dhen ine. (P. is a brother, but M. isn’t)
   b. * I Maria ine aderfi, ala o Petros dhen ine. (M. is a sister, but P. isn’t)

(3) **Epicene nouns**
   a. O Petros ine jatros, ala i Maria dhen ine. (P. is a doctor, but M. isn’t)
   b. I Maria ine jatros, ala o Petros dhen ine. (M. is a doctor, but P. isn’t)

(4) **Unidirectional nouns**
   a. O Petros ine pianistas, ala i Maria dhen ine. (P. is a pianist, but M. isn’t)
   b. * I Maria ine pianistria, ala o Petros dhen ine. (M. is a pianist, but P. isn’t)

What has not previously been noticed is that this variable behavior is found only when the nouns are used as predicates: in argument positions (more accurately, when gender is not controlled), no alternations are found.

Previous approaches cannot handle the full range of facts. I show instead that it is sadly possible to implement an account of the generalization in (1) relatively straightforwardly under an LF-copy theory of ellipsis identity and resolution (Fiengo and May 1994, Chung et al. 1995). Briefly, we must posit that the values for gender (masculine, feminine) on nouns can be variably specified as indelible or delible, and that a version of Agree can be defined to delete the delible features (following von Stechow 2003a,b, Heim 2008), allowing LF-copy to work appropriately with the results of such feature manipulations. Since nouns in argument positions are not (typically) potential controllees for agreement, their lexical gender features cannot be altered, and so LF anomaly always results.

Surprisingly, recasting this account in more congenial semantic or LF-identity approaches to ellipsis (whether implemented with PF-deletion or syntactic deletion or neither; variously Hardt 1993, Merchant 2001, Ginzburg and Sag 2000, Culicover and Jackendoff 2005) proves remarkably difficult, as I show in unfortunate conclusion.