Grammatical Gender and Conceptualization: A Cross-Linguistic Study of Greek and English Speakers

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1 Introduction

- Does language influence thought? Research on grammatical gender has yielded contradictory results. Some studies show that language structure affects object perception—even in non-verbal tasks and in three gendered languages—while others find no such effects (Samuel et al., 2019).
- Most previous research focused on two-gender languages (e.g., Spanish, German).
- Beyond grammar, anthropologists have proposed that people universally associate natural objects with femininity and artifacts with masculinity (Ortner, 1972).
- While some studies support this pattern (e.g. Vernich et al., 2017), others have failed to replicate it (e.g. Haertlé, 2017).
- This study explores how Greek (three-gender system) and English (natural gender) speakers describe objects, testing whether grammatical gender impacts adjective choices in an English-only task.

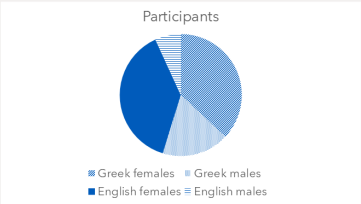
2 Objectives & Hypotheses

- H1: Greek speakers will ascribe masculine and feminine features to a given image in congruence with the grammatical gender of the corresponding noun in their language, whereas English speakers will ascribe masculine and feminine features randomly to a given image.
- H2: Grammatical gender effects will be present in both participants who receive instructions to personify and those who do not.
- RQ1: Will there be a difference in the frequency with which feminine and masculine features are attributed to nouns that refer to different semantic categories?
- RQ2: Will there be a difference in the presence of the grammatical gender effect depending on whether the object is animate or inanimate?

3 Method

Participants

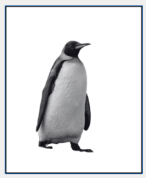
- 40 native Greek speakers
- 33 native English speakers



Materials

Materials were chosen based on findings from two preliminary pilot studies.

- 10 adjectives: 5 masculine (e.g., aggressive), 5 feminine (e.g., cute)
- 24 black-and-white images: balanced across gender, animacy, and semantic category

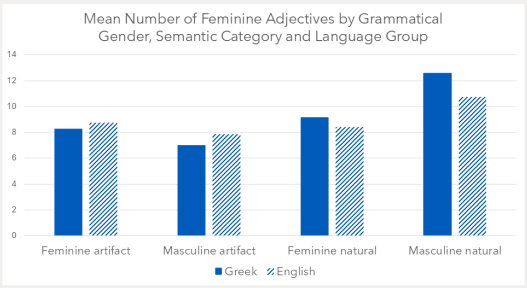


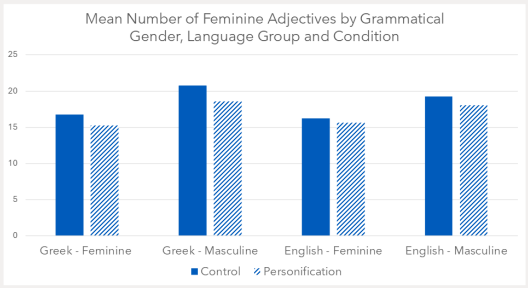


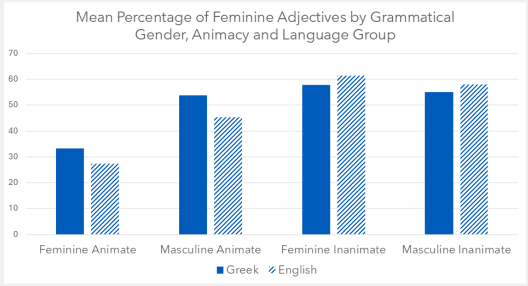
Procedure

- Online task in English
- Two groups: with or without instruction to personify images
- Task: choose 3 adjectives per image

4 Results







5 Conclusion

- No significant grammatical gender effects were found between Greek and English speakers, challenging prior studies.
- Masculine images were assigned more feminine adjectives than feminine ones, especially in the control group.
- Natural items received more feminine adjectives than artifacts – this was more pronounced among Greek speakers.
- Inanimate items received more feminine adjectives than animate – this effect was stronger among English speakers.
- The findings support the universal conceptual distinction.
- Overall, the study highlights that cultural associations and task framing may shape object categorization more than grammatical gender alone.

6 References

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