

Aspects of Dialectal Variation in the Nominal Inflection of Greek: A Feature-Based Approach¹

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1. Introduction

This paper examines some aspects of dialectal variation in the nominal inflection of Greek. More specifically, we investigate the status of the [\pm human] feature as well as of definiteness in determining certain aspects of the nominal inflection, such as case syncretism, the feature inventory of formatives and the determination of inflectional classes. The aim of our investigation is to reveal the role of the relevant features in the dialectal subsystems and to propose a formal description of the facts in terms of a feature-based approach to nominal inflection.

Our analysis is couched within a feature-based approach to nominal inflection and it is based on the analysis of Greek nominal inflection proposed by Ralli (2000, 2005). This approach has the benefit of providing the basis for capturing in formal ways the systematic dialectal variation as well as the systematic relations holding among the systems of the various dialects and Standard Greek. Its advantage is that it allows for systematic dialectal variation to be explained as the parametric effect of the differences in the morphological function of certain features in the relevant subsystems. These parameters can be formulated as follows:

- (1) a. A feature may be inflectionally active or not
- b. A feature may acquire different specifications
- c. A feature may belong to the feature inventory of a formative or not
- d. A feature may trigger certain morphological operations or not
- e. A feature may determine inflectional patterns or not

In this paper, we show that both definiteness and the [\pm human] feature are inflectionally active and control certain aspects of nominal inflection in a number of Asia Minor Greek dialects such as Cappadocian and Pontic Greek. In Standard Greek, these two features have no effect on the nominal inflection. However, their existence in the morphosyntactic structure of Greek is revealed by their effect on certain agreement rules. Thus, we propose that these two features are part of the feature inventory of the Greek nominal morphosyntax. In Standard Greek they are inflectionally inactive, in the sense that they do not affect the distribution of the inflectional endings and they do not condition any rules of inflection. As a result of a different parametric setting, these two features are inflectionally active in the nominal system of the aforementioned Asia Minor Greek varieties. Definiteness triggers *Differential Object Marking* and thus determines the distribution of the nominative and accusative formatives in the singular. The [\pm human] feature has a more pervasive effect, since it may determine the

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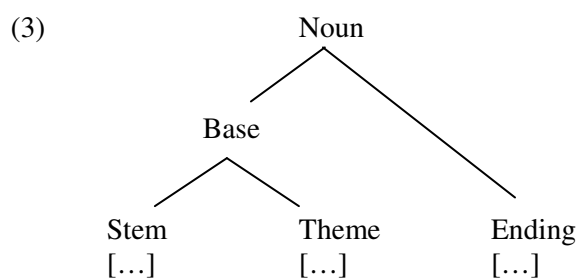
inflectional pattern of nouns and, thus, define inflectional classes, it controls the distribution of certain endings within an inflectional class and it can trigger case syncretism.

2. Background: standard Greek nominal inflection

Ralli (2000, 2003, 2005) has proposed a feature-based analysis of Standard Greek inflection, the basic premises of which we follow for the purposes of this paper. According to this analysis, Greek nominal inflection involves eight inflectional classes (IC), which are defined in terms of the allomorphic variation of the bases and the system of endings attached to them. Each ending is in fact an inflectional formative defined as a bundle of features with the relevant specification. These features belong to an independently defined set of features that determine the nominal morphology. In Standard Greek this set includes the features presented in (2) together with their potential values:

- (2) Nominal features of Greek:
- Inflection Class (IC): 1-8
 - Number: singular, plural
 - Case: nominative, genitive, accusative
 - Gender: masculine, feminine, neuter

In addition, we adopt Halle and Vaux's (1998) description of the morphological structure of nouns by means of a tripartite scheme which consists of the base (further divided into the stem and the thematic vowel or theme) and the ending:



Gender and Inflectional Class are assumed to be properties of the base, because of their inherent nature. On the other hand, number and case are considered to be properties of the ending. Thus, the formatives that manifest this terminal node are specified for these two features. The feature inventory of the formatives also includes a specification for Inflectional Class, which is checked against the relevant specification of the base. In this way the compatibility of a particular base with a particular set of formatives is formally accounted for (see also Alexiadou and Müller 2008). The feature inventory of formatives does not include the feature of gender, as it has been convincingly argued for by Ralli (2003, 2005), because gender does not control the distribution of these formatives. In Greek, nouns of different gender may follow the same inflectional pattern, i.e. they may share the same set of formatives. This is illustrated in (4):

- (4) *a'nthropos* 'man' (MSC) - *dia'lektos* 'dialect' (FEM)

SINGULAR		
NOM	a'nthrop-os	dia'lekt-os
GEN	anθróp-u	ðialékt-u
ACC	a'nthrop-o	dia'lekt-o
PLURAL		
NOM	a'nthrop-i	dia'lekt-i
GEN	anθróp-on	ðialékt-on
ACC	anθróp-us	ðialékt-us

In addition to these features there is evidence that the nominal morphosyntax of Standard Greek involves two other features, namely definiteness and [\pm human]. Definiteness is a phrasal property of the noun phrase which is marked syntactically mainly by the choice of the relevant article:

- (5)
- | | | | |
|----|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| a. | MASCULINE | | |
| | o | a'nθropos | énas a'nθropos |
| | the | man | a man |
| b. | FEMININE | | |
| | i | γινéka | mja' γινéka |
| | the | woman | a woman |
| c. | NEUTER | | |
| | to | peðí | éna peðí |
| | the | child | a child |

The [\pm human] feature is a class feature related to animacy and it constitutes a lexical (semantic) property of the stem. The formal postulation of this feature relies on its role in determining the resolution of gender conflict in conjunction, as this is revealed by the participation of the conjoined structure in agreement constructions (Holton *et al.* 1997, Chila-Markopoulou 2003, Spyropoulos 2005):

- (6) When the conjunct DPs are [+human] \rightarrow Adj[masculine]
- | | | | | | | | |
|----|-----|--|-----|-----|----------------|------|-----------------------|
| a. | o | pe'tros | ke | i | mari'a | i'ne | fi'li |
| | the | Petros-MS.C.NOM | and | the | Maria-FEM.NOM | are | friends- MSC.PL.NOM |
| | | 'Petros and Maria are friends' | | | | | |
| b. | i | γine'kes | ke | ta | peðja' | na | i'ne e'timi |
| | the | women-FEM.NOM | and | the | children-NT.PL | SUBJ | are ready-MS.C.PL.NOM |
| | | 'The women and the children should be ready' | | | | | |
- (7) When the conjunct DPs are [-human] \rightarrow Adj[neuter]
- | | | | | | | | | |
|----|-----|---|-----|-----|-----------------|----------------|----------------|--------|
| a. | o | komunismo's | ke | i | ele'fθeri | aγora' | | |
| | the | communism-MS.C.NOM | and | the | free | market-FEM.NOM | | |
| | | i'ne asimvi'vasta | | | | | | |
| | | are incompatible-NT.PL.NOM | | | | | | |
| | | 'Communism and free market are incompatible' | | | | | | |
| b. | i | ðro'mi | ke | i | plati'es | i'tan | γema'ta | ko'smo |
| | the | streets-MS.C.NOM | and | the | squares-FEM.NOM | were | full-NT.PL.NOM | people |
| | | 'The streets and the squares were full of people' | | | | | | |

In situations where two [+human] DPs of different gender are conjoined the resulting phrase acquires the masculine value for the gender feature. This is evident in examples such as those in (6): the adjectival predicate which obligatorily agrees with the conjoined phrase is specified as masculine. On the contrary, when two [-human] DPs of different gender are conjoined, the resulting phrase is specified as neuter, as evident by the neuter specification of the agreeing adjectival predicate (7).

Despite their existence in the nominal morphosyntax, [\pm human] and definiteness cannot be considered inflectional features in Standard Greek, because they do not determine any aspect of the nominal inflection. Nevertheless, these two features seem to affect the inflection of nouns in various ways in various dialectal varieties. In what follows, we present evidence from the nominal inflection of two dialect groups of Asia Minor Greek, namely Cappadocian and Pontic Greek,² which shows that the [\pm human] feature can (a) control the choice of certain plural formatives, (b) determine the direction of case syncretism in plural and (c)

² Cappadocian Greek data are drawn from the invaluable grammatical description by Dawkins (1916). Pontic Greek data are drawn from Oikonomides (1958) and Papadopoulos (1955).

define inflectional classes. Furthermore, we propose an analysis of *Differential Object Marking* in Cappadocian Greek which illustrates how definiteness determines the realization of case of DP-objects in these varieties.

3. Formatives specified as [\pm human]: Cappadocian Greek

In Cappadocian Greek the [\pm human] feature has undertaken the role of gender, which has been convincingly argued to be absent from the nominal system of the dialect (Dawkins 1916, Janse 2004, Spyropoulos and Kakarikos 2007).³ Significantly, the [\pm human] feature is able to determine the distribution of certain plural formatives. In the variety of Delmeso, nouns of Greek origin ending in *-as*, such as *papa's* 'priest' and *kerata's* 'snail' take different formatives in the plural:

(8)

SINGULAR		
NOM	papa'-s	kerata'-s
GEN	papað-ju'	keretað-ju'
ACC	papa'-∅	kerata'-∅
PLURAL		
NOM	papa'ð-es	kerata'ð-ja
GEN	-	-
ACC	papa'ð-es	kerata'ð-ja

These nouns belong to the same inflectional class, because they exhibit the same pattern of base allomorphy and they take the same set of singular formatives. Plural formatives are grammatically conditioned and their choice depends on the [\pm human] property of the stem. Thus, the *-ja* formative is a special plural formative selected by non-human nouns. On the contrary, the plural formative *-es* has a wider distribution in the variety and it is used for both human and non-human nouns in other inflectional classes:

(9) *ne'ka* 'woman', *tzi'na* 'sparrow', *ni'fi* 'bride', *psi'i* 'crub'

SINGULAR				
NOM	ne'ka-∅	tzi'na-∅	ni'fi-∅	psi'i-∅
GEN	ne'ka-s	tzi'na-s	ni'fi-s	-
ACC	ne'ka-∅	tzi'na-∅	ni'fi-∅	psi'i-∅
PLURAL				
NOM	ne'k-es	tzi'n-es	ni'f-es	psi'-es
GEN	-	-	-	-
ACC	ne'k-es	tzi'n-es	ni'f-es	psi'-es

We therefore conclude that *-ja* is specified as [$-$ human], whereas *-es* is a default plural formative. Interestingly, the same phenomenon appears in other Asia Minor Greek dialects, such as the one of Pharasa (Dawkins 1916, Andriotis 1948):

(10) *papa's* 'priest' vs. *prakana's* 'beetle'

SINGULAR		
NOM	papa'-s	prakana'-s
GEN	papa'-∅	prakana'-∅
ACC	papa'-∅	prakana'-∅
PLURAL		
NOM	papa'ð-es	prakana'ð-ja
GEN	-	-
ACC	papa'ð-es	prakana'ð-ja

³ In the grammatical descriptions of the references cited in the text the [\pm human] feature is referred to as animacy.

4. The [+human] feature and case syncretism in plural: Cappadocian and Pontic Greek

Evidence that the [+human] feature is inflectionally active comes from the fact that it is able to affect the inflection of certain forms by triggering case syncretism. In the following subsections we examine the effects of a case syncretism rule that applies in both Cappadocian and Pontic Greek. The rule is formulated as follows:

(11) [nom] → [acc] / [____, -animate, plural]

4.1. Cappadocian Greek

In the Cappadocian Greek varieties of Delmeso, Potamia and Malakopi, case syncretism between nominative and accusative takes place in the plural of inflectional patterns which employ distinct formatives for each of the two cases. More specifically, nouns of Greek origin ending in *-os*, such as *a'θropos* 'human', *tzoba'nos* 'shepherd', take the *-i* formative for the nominative plural and the *-us* formative for the accusative plural:

(12)

SINGULAR		
NOM	tzoba'nos	a'θropos
GEN	tzoba'nu	aθro'pu
ACC	tzoba'no	a'θropo
PLURAL		
NOM	tzoba'ni	a'θropi
GEN	-	-
ACC	tzoba'nus	aθro'pus

However, when such a noun is non-human, nominative becomes syncretic to accusative and it is expressed by the formative *-us*:

(13) *to'pos* 'place', *mi'los* 'mill', *γα'mos / qa'mos* 'wedding'

PLURAL	<i>Delmeso</i>	<i>Potamia</i>	<i>Malakopi</i>
NOM	to'pus	mi'lus	γα'mus
ACC	to'pus	mi'lus	qa'mus

4.2. Pontic Greek

In Pontic Greek [-human] nouns are subject to the same case syncretism in plural. Significantly, this syncretism applies to all [-human] masculine and feminine nouns,⁴ irrespective of the inflectional class they belong to. Thus, non-human masculine nouns ending in *-os* take the accusative formative *-us* for both the nominative and the accusative plural:

(14) *stavro's* 'cross' vs. *a'nθropos* 'man'

PLURAL		
NOM	stavr-u's	anθro'p-i
ACC	stavr-u's	anθro'p-us

Non-human masculine nouns ending in *-as* (15) as well as non-human feminine nouns ending in *-a* (16a) and *-i* (16b) take the accusative formative *-as* for both the nominative and the

⁴ Unlike Cappadocian Greek, gender exists as a feature in the nominal morphosyntax of Pontic Greek with a tripartite specification (masculine, feminine, neuter) and it controls the choice of the definite article in a similar way as in Standard Greek. An interesting phenomenon attested in Pontic Greek is that [-human] nouns neutralize their gender specification in the plural and behave as neuters; this is evident by the choice of the neuter form of the definite article in these cases.

accusative plural. It should be noticed that whereas the corresponding human masculine nouns in the plural take the distinct *-es* and *-as* formatives for nominative and accusative respectively, the human feminine nouns take the syncretic nominative plural formative *-es* for both the nominative and the accusative:

(15) masculines in *-as*: *mi'nas* 'month' vs. *a'ndras* 'man'

PLURAL		
NOM	mi'n-as	a'ndr-es
ACC	mi'n-as	a'ndr-as

(16) a. feminines in *-a*: *tha'lasa* 'sea' vs. *theyate'ra* 'daughter'

PLURAL		
NOM	tha'las-as	theyate'r-es
ACC	tha'las-as	theyate'r-es

b. feminines in *-i*: *ni'ki* 'victory' vs. *batzi'* 'virgin'

PLURAL		
NOM	ni'k-as	batzi'ð-es
ACC	ni'k-as	batzi'ð-es

5. The [+human] feature defines the inflection pattern: Cappadocian Greek

The Cappadocian Greek variety of Ulaghatsh is characterized by a radical reanalysis of the nominal system under the pressure of the agglutinative typological pattern of Turkish. As a consequence, most of the inflectional patterns became agglutinative. Interestingly, nouns of Greek origin ending in *-os* split into two inflectional patterns depending on whether they denote human or non-human entities.⁵ Thus, human nouns, such as *xeri'fos* 'man', follow a synthetic inflectional pattern, whereas non-human nouns, such as *li'kos* 'wolf', follow the general agglutinative inflectional pattern:

(17)

SINGULAR		
NOM	xeri'fo-s	li'kos-Ø
GEN	xerif-ju'	li'kos-ju (> li'kozju)
ACC	xeri'fo-s	li'kos-Ø
PLURAL		
NOM	xeri'f-ja	li'kos-ja (>li'kozja)
GEN	-	-
ACC	xeri'f-ja	li'kos-ja (>li'kozja)

We can safely conclude that human nouns ending in *-os* form their own inflectional class with a distinct inflectional pattern. In this way, the [+human] feature defines a certain inflectional class. The defining characteristic of this inflectional pattern is the syncretic *-s* formative for the nominative and accusative singular. These facts led to the reanalysis of this *-s* singular formative as an [+human] marker, as revealed by the spread of its use in examples like *pana'jas* (< *pana'ja*) 'Holy Mother', *sofja's* (< *sofja'*) 'Sophia' (Kesisoglou 1951: 31).

6. Interim summary: the [±animate] feature

⁵ A similar situation is also attested in the Cappadocian Greek variety of Axos (see Dawkins 1916 and Mavroxalyvidis and Kesisoglou 1961).

The evidence presented above show that the feature [\pm human] is active in the nominal inflection of Cappadocian and Pontic Greek. This [\pm human] feature is a class feature related to animacy. It conditions rules that affect the feature constitution of the ending terminal node and it may determine the inflectional pattern of an inflectional classes. What is more, certain formatives may be specified for this [\pm human] feature in a similar way as for the inflectional class feature. This specification determines the distribution of these formatives in accordance with the [\pm human] specification of the stem.

7. Case and definiteness: Differential Object Marking in Cappadocian Greek

Another characteristic of some Cappadocian Greek varieties is that they exhibit *Differential Object Marking* (DOM) with respect to definiteness. When a noun that follows an inflectional pattern with distinct nominative and accusative case formatives in the singular is the object of the clause, it appears in the nominative form instead of the accusative when it is interpreted as indefinite (Dawkins 1916, Janse 2004, Spyropoulos and Tiliopoulou 2006). In the following examples from the Delmeso and Potamia varieties the generic and indefinite objects appear in the nominative case form with the characteristic *-s* formative, instead of the expected accusative forms *ya*↔*mo* ‘marriage-SG.ACC’ and *layo*’ ‘hare-SG.ACC’:

(18) *Potamia* (Dawkins 1916: *Potamia 1*, p.456: 1)

i↔stera pi↔kan ya↔mos
 afterwards made-3PL marriage-SG.NOM
 ‘after that they got married’

(19) *Delmeso* (Dawkins 1916: 94)

Δe↔ke e↔na layo↔s
 hit-3SG a hare-SG.NOM
 ‘He struck a hare’

Janse (2004) follows the traditional description by Dawkins (1916) and argues that the *-s* formative has been reanalyzed as an indefiniteness marker. According to his analysis, forms with *-s* are cited as indefinite accusative singular in the relevant nominal paradigms. The main objection against such an analysis is that the formative *-s* seems to predominately mark the nominative case of subject function irrespective of definiteness/indefiniteness. This is evident in example (20) where the noun *e*↔*ljos* ‘sun’ which is the subject of the clause, takes the characteristic formative *-s* although it has a definite reading:

(20) *Delmeso* (Dawkins 1916: *Delmeso 1*, p.312: 14-15)

e↔ljos ma↔vrosen to pro↔sopo
 sun-NOM.SG blackened-3SG the-ACC.SG face-ACC.SG
 ‘the sun blackened my face’

On the basis of this evidence, Spyropoulos and Tiliopoulou (2006) argue that such constructions reveal an instance of direct structural interference from Turkish. According to their analysis Cappadocian Greek DOM involves a situation where the nominative form substitutes for the accusative one resulting in the indefinite reading. Cappadocian Greek DOM is therefore formulated in terms of feature substitution as follows:

(21) Cappadocian Greek DOM

[acc] → [nom] / [____, -definite]

Nevertheless, such a formulation goes against the mechanism of DOM itself. In DOM situations accusative is not substituted for by nominative but rather by an absolutive form which coincides with the nominative (Aissen 2003). This absolutive form is marked with the

null formative $-\emptyset$, which is the default morpheme. However, in Cappadocian Greek the situation is reversed, since the null formative $-\emptyset$, which is the default morpheme (Spyropoulos and Kakarikos 2007), marks the accusative case. Thus Cappadocian Greek DOM involves a situation in which the [–definite] specification of the DP neutralizes the distinction between accusative and nominative and allows for the insertion of the more specified nominative formative $-s$.

Spyropoulos and Kakarikos (2007) propose an analysis which is based on the feature decomposition of case (Halle and Vaux 1998, McFadden 2004) combined with a division of labour between narrow syntax and morphology as far as case assignment is concerned (Español-Echevarría and Ralli 2000, Spyropoulos in progress). They assume that morphological case (m-case) is set apart from syntactic (abstract) case (s-case) (Marantz 1992, Schütze 1997, McFadden 2004, Bobaljik 2006) in the sense that syntax does not determine m-case, i.e. the surface case specification, but rather those aspects of case that are related to the licensing of DPs (Español-Echevarría and Ralli 2000, Spyropoulos in progress). The full case feature specification is determined in morphology in terms of case domains and hierarchies (McFadden 2004, Bobaljik 2006). Case is therefore decomposed in a number of case features which represent its morphological and syntactic aspects:

- (22) Case features (Halle and Vaux 1998, McFadden 2004)
- [\pm structural]: [+structural] is assigned to DPs on the basis of their position in the syntactic structure (Halle and Vaux 1998).
 - [\pm oblique]: [+oblique] is assigned to DPs by certain functional heads, such as *vAPPL*, *P* etc. (McFadden 2004).
 - [\pm genitive]: [+genitive] is a lexically specified case feature assigned by certain functional or lexical heads (McFadden 2004, Español-Echevarría and Ralli 2000).
 - [\pm inferior]: [+inferior] is assigned to DPs due to the presence of a higher argument within the case-domain (McFadden 2004, Bobaljik 2006).

Each case is therefore the result of the appropriate specification of the relevant case features. Thus, nominative and accusative are defined as follows:

- (23) Feature decomposition of nominative and accusative
- a. nom = [+case, –oblique, –inferior]
 - b. acc = [+case, –oblique, +inferior]

Nominative and accusative are syntactically identical, being the *par excellence* structural cases. This means that the [inferior] feature which differentiates them is specified in the syntax-morphology interface as a result of the position of the relevant DP in its case domain. Thus, syntax provides the same terminal node for nominative and accusative, which is given in (24):

- (24) [+case, +structural, –oblique, –genitive, α inferior]

In Cappadocian Greek, DOM is the effect of a rule which negatively specifies the [inferior] feature in a [–definite] environment:

- (25) [α inferior] \rightarrow [–inferior] / [____, –definite]

After the application of this rule the terminal nodes for nominative and accusative are defined as follows:

- (26)
- a. nominative
[+case, –oblique, –inferior]
 - b. accusative definite
[+case, –oblique, +inferior | +definite]
 - c. accusative indefinite
[+case, –oblique, –inferior | –definite]

The *-s* formative, being the characteristic formative for the nominative, is specified as [-inferior]. Thus, Cappadocian Greek DOM is analyzed here as an operation on case features, according to which the [-definite] specification is able to determine the case feature specification of the terminal node of the ending. By doing so, it creates the appropriate environment for the insertion of the *-s* formative in situations where this is not expected to occur. Thus, indefiniteness controls the distribution of the *-s* formative, as implied by Janse's and Dawkins' descriptions, but it does so in an indirect way and not totally. The formative *-s* is not specified as [-definite]; this specification is carried only by the terminal node that hosts this formative, which gives the impression that *-s* is an indefiniteness marker. In fact, the [-definite] feature only forces the negative specification of the [inferior] feature in the terminal node, which in turn results in the insertion of the *-s* formative which carries the [-inferior] specification.

What is important for our discussion is that (in)definiteness has the ability to trigger a specific rule that affects the inflectional manifestation of case. In this sense it can be argued that (in)definiteness is inflectionally active in these dialectal varieties.

8. Summary: Conclusions and extensions

The examination of the data from Cappadocian and Pontic Greek has revealed that definiteness and the [\pm human] feature determine certain aspects of their nominal inflection, a fact that differentiates these dialect groups from Standard Greek. More specifically, the two features were shown to determine the realization of case by triggering rules that affect the feature content of the terminal node of the ending. The [\pm human] feature was additionally shown to behave as a class feature and to be able to determine the inflectional pattern of certain nouns and to control the distribution of certain plural endings. The complexity of the dialectal facts was accounted for by means of (a) morphological operations which affect the feature content of the terminal nodes in the morphological structure and (b) an inventory of formatives with the relevant feature specification (see also Spyropoulos and Kakarikos 2007). Such a feature-based analysis allows us to explain some very important aspects of dialectal variation in the nominal system of Greek as the result of micro-parametric variation with respect to the status and function of certain features.

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