

Nominal predicates and gender (Luke Adamson, ZAS)

Introduction The literature on grammatical gender is split on the issue of whether gender is fundamentally a property of nouns (or of nominalizing heads), of larger nominal phrases, or of both (Steripolo and Wiltschko 2010; Kramer 2015; Puškar 2018; a.o.), a debate which bears on key issues regarding the internal structure and interpretation of nominal phrases. Previous work on hybrid agreement in Russian has suggested that there *can* be a higher gender projection in the nominal domain for interpretable gender: mismatched F agreement with some M professional nouns is allowed for female referents, but *not* with classificatory adjectives (e.g. Pesetsky 2013; Privizentseva 2024 for adjectives like ‘executive director’, where ‘executive’ must be M, disallowing hybrid agreement). The received view for such cases is that interpretable gender can be introduced at a higher locus (such that agreement diverges depending on whether it is with an element that is higher or lower than this locus), though it remains an open question whether this higher locus is only available for specific instances of hybrid agreement, or has a broader cross-linguistic reality. The present work contributes to this debate through a novel investigation of predicate nominals in German and Greek, the idea being that *capacity nominals* in these languages instantiate a smaller nominal structure than full nominals (De Swart et al. 2007 on other languages; see relatedly Matushansky and Spector 2005; Beyssade and Dobrovie-Sorin 2005). Such ‘truncated’ structures distinguish between ‘low’ versus ‘high’ gender hypotheses in the predictions made for gender in the absence of higher nominal projections. To test these predictions, we contrast article-less *bare nominals* in predication, which have been argued to correspond to smaller nominal structures, with larger *marked* indefinite nominals.

Proposal We find for German predicate nominals (for some speakers) and a subset of Greek predicate nominals that with subjects referring to female individuals, feminine (F) and (to some degree) unmarked masculine (M) nouns are both available for bare nominals in predicate position, whereas M nouns are severely degraded for the corresponding marked indefinite nominals. We propose to derive this pattern through i) optional ‘adjunct’ (interpretable) gender features introduced on the nominalizing head (see e.g. Konnelly and Cowper 2020 on adjunct features); ii) obligatory gender features that are introduced at a higher position present for marked nominals but not bare nominals and which participate in semantico-pragmatic competition (i.e. Maximize Presupposition); and iii) a prohibition on mismatch within the nominal domain, disallowing a hybrid agreement pattern in German and Greek.

Data For many German M human-denoting nouns, where the corresponding M form either bears no gender inference or a male-specific one depending on the noun, a highly productive F suffix realized as *-in* can be added, producing forms referring to female individuals (e.g. Bobaljik and Zocca 2011). The lack of gender inference with M can be seen in its use with professional nouns such as *Architekt* ‘architect’ for mixed-gender groups such as *Architekten* ‘architects’ (see relatedly Jakobson 1984; Sudo and Spathas 2020), though it is worth noting that the gender-neutral status of M is changing in German following sociocultural debates in public discourse. Indefinite predicate nominals in the language take an indefinite article for examples such as *Maria ist eine Frau* ‘Maria is a woman’. An important exception to this comes from *capacity* nominals denoting properties including professions, demonyms, and religious affiliations, where an indefinite article is omitted. (1) shows a subject referring to a male individual and illustrates the lack of article with a capacity noun, further highlighted by the compatibility with a PP ‘by profession’ (see De Swart et al. 2007). For (1), M is acceptable on the predicate nominal while F is not, as the latter would lead to a female inference. That such nouns are also grammatically M or F is also evident from agreement on the classificatory modifier *technisch* ‘technical’, which further classifies the type of profession and also

occurs without an article. In (2), we show that for a female-referring subject, the bare noun is acceptable with F; for some speakers, unmarked M is also at least marginally acceptable (though potentially with a preference against using the M form for sociocultural reasons).

- (1) Peter ist von Beruf {(technischer) Architekt /#[(technische) Architekt-in]}.
 Peter is from profession technical.M editor.M /technical.F editor-F
 ‘Peter is a (technical) architect by profession.’
- (2) Maria ist von Beruf {(technische) Architekt-in /(%??)[(technischer) Architekt]}.
 Maria is from profession technical.F editor-F /technical.M editor.M
 ‘Maria is a (technical) architect by profession.’

We observe that the situation changes for marked nominals. Professional-noun nominal predicates cannot omit an article if modified by a non-classificatory modifier (3), suggesting they necessarily become marked nominals. We observe for (4) that female subjects with marked nominals in this position take F nominal predicates, with severe degradation of the M relative to (2) (including for some speakers who do not accept the M in (2)).

- (3) Peter ist *(ein) schlecht bezahlter Architekt.
 Peter is a.M badly paid.M editor.M
 ‘Peter is a badly paid architect.’
- (4) Maria ist {eine schlecht bezahlte Architekt-in /?/*ein schlecht bezahlter Architekt}.
 Maria is a.F badly paid.F architect-F /a.M badly paid.M architect.M
 ‘Maria is a badly paid architect.’

We observe a parallel pattern in Greek with a specific class of nouns (omitted for reasons of space), which are characterized by their lack of formal difference between M and F forms and corresponding semantic differences (see Sudo and Spathas 2020 on *iatros* ‘doctor’).

Analysis We adopt the view from De Swart et al. 2007 that bare nouns correspond to smaller structures, such as *nP*, while marked nominals in predicate position correspond to a larger (e.g. DP) structure, correlating with article presence and other properties such as number neutrality (see De Swart et al. 2007 for discussion). In the case of marked nominals, we take DP to be built obligatorily on the full nominal spine. We propose that (pace Steripolo and Wiltschko 2010), interpretable gender is *available* on the nominalizing head in both languages, accounting for the availability of F gender for bare nominals (and show convergent evidence from ellipsis facts, not included), though the choice between feminine and masculine is *optional* for this class of nouns and for these speakers; we liken this to *Mary is a (female) teacher*. In contrast, marked nominals necessarily project more than *nP*, which we assume semantically translates kind(-like) predicates to individual-level predicates. In German and Greek, this necessitates gender to be evaluated via semanticopragmatic competition (e.g. Maximize Presupposition), obligating the use of the more specific F form for a female-denoting subject. Unlike Russian, this *cannot* result in hybrid agreement (not shown); that is, it is not well-formed to have a M classificatory adjective and a higher F adjective, which we suggest follows from a ban on nominal concord mismatches, which are also not attested in German or Greek for gender or other feature types. (Our account extends to article-less nominals observed with the preposition *als* ‘as’; not included.)

Select references Beyssade, C., & C. Dobrovie-Sorin. 2005. A syntax-based analysis of predication. Bobaljik, J., & C. Zocca. 2011. Gender markedness: The anatomy of a counterexample. De Swart, H., Y. Winter, & J. Zwarts. 2007. Bare nominals and reference to capacities. Konnelly, L., and E. Cowper. 2020. Gender diversity and morphosyntax: An account of singular they. Matushansky, O. 2013. Gender confusion. Matushansky, O., & B. Specator. 2005. Privizentseva, M. 2024. Semantic agreement in Russian: Gender, declension, and morphological ineffability. Puškar, Z. 2018. Interactions of gender and number agreement: Evidence from Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian.