

The Neuter Agreement Constraint in Lithuanian*

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1 Introduction

- Lithuanian has been reported to have three genders reflected on adjectives: masculine, feminine, and neuter (Ambrazas et al. 1997:134).

(1) Kėd-ė buv-o graž-i.
Chair-NOM.F.SG be.PST.3 beautiful-NOM.F.SG
'The chair was beautiful.'

- The neuter, however, is unusual: there are *no lexical nouns* with inherent neuter gender, only pronouns and quantifier-like elements (cf. other languages with three genders, such as Greek, Icelandic, and Russian)¹

(2) Neuter pronouns: *taĩ* ('it, this'); *viskas* - 'everything' *šitai* ('it, this'), *vienalkita* ('one/another' for events), *visal visa tai* ('everything'), *kas* ('what'), *kaškas* ('something'), *niekas* ('nothing')

- This study analyzes gender and agreement properties in Lithuanian, with a focus on neuter pronouns and adjectives.

- We demonstrate that in Lithuanian, there exists what we call the Neuter Agreement Constraint (NAC):

– **Neuter Agreement Constraint:** *Neuter arguments are compatible with nominal predicates, but they fail to control agreement on adjectives, yielding ungrammaticality.*

(3) a. Karas padarė miest-ą tikra betvarke.
War.NOM.M.SG make.PST.3 city.ACC.M.SG real.INST.F.SG chaos.INST.F.SG
'The war made the city (into) real chaos.' Nominal Predicate

b. Karas padarė miest-ą neatpažįstamą/neatpažįstamu.
War.NOM.M.SG make.PST.3 city.ACC.M.SG unrecognizable.ACC.M.SG/INST.M.SG
'The war made the city unrecognizable.' Adjectival Predicate

(4) a. Karas padarė viską/taĩ tikra
War.NOM.M.SG make.PST.3 everything.ACC.NEUT/that.ACC.NEUT real.INST.F.SG
betvarke.
chaos.INST.F.SG
'The war made everything/that (into) real chaos.' Neuter + Nominal Predicate

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¹Don Ringe (p.c.) reports that Lithuanian is not unique in having a set of pronouns like this; the neuter in Tocharian was inherent only for pronouns referring to events or propositions, and Spanish has something similar.

- b. *Karas padarė viską/taĩ
 War.NOM.M.SG make.PST.3 everything.ACC.NEUT/that.ACC.NEUT
 neatpažįstama/neatpažįstamu/neatpažįstama.
 unrecognizable.ACC.M.SG/unrecognizable.INST.M.SG/unrecognizable.NEUT
 Int. ‘The war made everything/that unrecognizable.’ Neuter with Adjectival Predicate

- The existence of the NAC is striking because neuter forms exist in various positions and cases, indicating that the NAC is **not a result of the language lacking certain agreement forms**.

Proposal:

- (i) The NAC is due to a failure of obligatory agreement.
- (ii) When agreement is obligatory between an argument (‘controller’) and an agreeing expression (‘target’), the target must receive gender features. (terms from Corbett 1991, ia.)
- (iii) NAC agreement fails because neuter pronouns lack gender features altogether.
- (iv) Lacking gender is distinct from ‘default’ gender, which is masculine in the language.

- Our proposal has implications for the representation of gender: i.e., default vs. its absence.
- Our analysis also shows that **agreement failure** can result in **ungrammaticality** rather than in default forms. This is incompatible with the Failed Agree approach of Preminger 2011.

• **Road Map**

- Section 2 Neuter Pronouns and Neuter Adjectives
- Section 3 The Neuter Agreement Constraint
- Section 4 Analysis
- Section 5 Implications

2 Neuter Pronouns and Neuter Adjectives

- In this section, we demonstrate that both neuter pronouns and adjectives occur in different case positions and configurations.

2.1 Neuter Pronouns

- (5) Neuter pronouns: *taĩ* (‘it, this’); *viskas* - ‘everything’ *šitaĩ* (‘it, this’), *viena/kita* (‘one/another’ for events), *visa/visa taĩ* (‘everything’), *kas* (‘what’), *kaškas* (‘something’), *niekas* (‘nothing’)

- First, we demonstrate that neuter pronominal forms of *taĩ* and *viskas* inflect in all cases.

Table 1. Paradigms of *taĩ* and *viskas*

	taĩ - this/it.NEUT	viskas- everything.NEUT
NOM	taĩ	viskas
ACC	taĩ	viską
GEN	to	visko
DAT	tam	viskam
INST	tuo	viskuo
LOC	tame	viskame

- We provide neuter pronouns in NOM, ACC, and GEN in context. (See Appendix 1 for more cases)
- Copular Sentences, Nominative subjects

(6) **Viskas/tai** yra tikra nesamonė.
 Everything._{NOM.NEUT}/this._{NOM.NEUT} be.PRS.3 real.NOM nonsense.NOM
 'Everything/this is real nonsense.'

- Accusative object

(7) Jis valgė **viską/tai**.
 He.NOM eat.PST.3 everything._{ACC.NEUT}/that._{ACC.NEUT}
 'He ate everything/that.'

- Genitive objects under negation

(8) Jis ne-valgė **visko/to**.
 He.NOM NEG-eat.PST.3 everything._{GEN.NEUT}/that._{GEN.NEUT}
 'He didn't eat everything/that.'

2.2 Neuter Adjectives

- We demonstrate that neuter adjectives can appear in different case environments when substantivized.²
- Nominative subjects³

(9) **Gėra** eina toli, **blōga** dar tōliau.
 Good._{NOM.NEUT} go.PRS.3 far, bad._{NOM.NEUT} still farther
 'Good goes far, evil goes still farther.'

(Ambrasas et al. 1997:136)

- Accusative objects

(10) Jis matė **gėra** ir **blōga**.
 He.NOM see.PST.3 good._{ACC.NEUT} and bad._{ACC.NEUT}
 'He saw good and bad.'

- Genitive objects under negation

(11) **Blōga** ne-patyr-ęs, **gėra** ne-pažin-si.
 Bad._{GEN.NEUT} NEG-experience-ACT.PRT.NOM.M.SG, good._{GEN.NEUT} NEG-know-FUT.2.SG
 'Having experienced no evil, you cannot recognize good.'

(Ambrasas et al. 1997:136)

INTERIM SUMMARY: Forms exist for both neuter pronouns and neuter adjectives in various cases. There are **no morphological gaps**.

²This is not ellipsis, which takes on the gender of the antecedent.

(i) Aš mėgstu žalią automobilį labiau nei raudoną/*raudona.
 I.NOM like.PRS.1.SG green._{ACC.M.SG} car._{ACC.M.SG} more than red._{ACC.M.SG}/red._{NEUT}
 'I like the green car more than I like the red.'

³Note that the neuter adjectives resemble the NOM.FEM.SG in form, but the two have distinct accentuations: *gėra* 'good' is neuter while *gerà* 'good' is feminine.

3 The Neuter Agreement Constraint

- **NAC:** While both neuter pronouns and neuter adjectives exist independently in different case positions, they cannot co-occur in agreement environments.
- Neuter pronouns fail to control obligatory agreement in gender and number with adjectival predicates.
- We demonstrate that this results in ineffability in various environments.

3.1 Neuter Pronouns + Adjectives

3.1.1 Nominative

- Depictives – agree in gender, number, and case (GNC) with NOM subjects. Neuter pronouns do not allow depictives.

(12) Čeburekai atkeliavo šalti.
 chebureki. [NOM.M.PL] arrive.PST.3 cold. [NOM.M.PL]
 ‘The chebureki arrived cold.’

(13) **Viskas/tai** atkeliavo
 Everything. [NOM.NEUT] /that. [NOM.NEUT] arrived.PST.3
 (*šalta/*šaltas/*šaltà).
 cold. [NEUT] /cold. [NOM.M.SG] /cold. [NOM.F.SG]
 ‘Everything/that arrived cold.’

3.1.2 Accusative

- Depictives agree in GNC with ACC objects. Neuter pronouns do not allow object depictives.

(14) Jis valgė daržoves žalias.
 He.NOM eat.PST.3 vegetables. [ACC.M.PL] raw. [ACC.M.PL]
 ‘He ate the vegetables raw.’

(15) a. Jis valgė **viską** (*žalia/*žalią/*žalią).
 He.NOM eat.PST.3 everything. [ACC.NEUT] raw. [NEUT] /raw. [ACC.M.SG] /raw. [ACC.F.SG]
 ‘He ate everything (raw).’

b. Jie valgė **tai** iš vienos lėkštės
 They.NOM eat.PST.3 that. [ACC.NEUT] from one plate
 (*žalia/*žalią/*žalią)
 raw. [NEUT] /raw. [ACC.M.SG] /raw. [ACC.F.SG]
 ‘They ate that from one plate (raw).’

- Causative ‘make’ constructions require GN(C) agreement between object causees and resultative adjective. Neuter pronouns cannot occur with resultative adjectives.⁴

(16) Karas padarė miestą neatpažįstamą/neatpažįstamu.
 War.NOM.M.SG make.PST.3 city. [ACC.M.SG] unrecognizable. [ACC.M.SG] / [INST.M.SG]
 ‘The war made the city unrecognizable.’

(17) *Karas padarė **viską/taį**
 War.NOM.M.SG make.PST.3 everything. [ACC.NEUT] /that. [NEUT]
 neatpažįstamą/neatpažįstamu/neatpažįstama.
 unrecognizable. [ACC.M.SG] /unrecognizable. [INST.M.SG] /unrecognizable. [NEUT]
 ‘The war made everything/that unrecognizable.’

⁴Note that (17) is ungrammatical with both masculine and feminine inflections of the adjective in both accusative and instrumental.

3.1.3 Accusative/Instrumental

- Small Clauses with ACC objects and INST adjectives. With neuter pronouns, adjectival predication is ungrammatical (19).

(18) Mes laikėme jį išmintingu.
 We.NOM consider.PST.1.PL him.ACC.M.SG wise.INST.M.SG
 ‘We considered him wise.’

(19) *Mes laikėme tai/viską gražu/graziu/grazia.
 We.NOM consider.PST.1.PL it.ACC.NEUT/everything.ACC.NEUT
 beautiful.NEUT/beautiful.INST.M.SG/beautiful.INST.F.SG
 ‘We considered that/everything beautiful.’

3.1.4 Genitive

- Genitive of Negation: While object depictives can bear genitive case, neuter pronouns yield ungrammaticality with depictives.

(20) Jis ne-valgė daržovių žalių.
 He.NOM NEG-eat.PST.3 vegetables.GEN.M.PL raw.GEN.M.PL
 He didn’t eat the vegetables raw.

(21) Jis ne-valgė visko/to
 He.NOM NEG-eat.PST.3 everything.GEN.NEUT/that.GEN.NEUT
 (*žalia/*žalio/*žalios).
 raw.NEUT/raw.GEN.M.SG/raw.GEN.F.SG
 ‘He didn’t eat everything/that raw.’⁵

3.1.5 Dative

- ‘Let’ takes dative objects. Neuter pronouns are ungrammatical with agreeing secondary predicates.

(22) a. Jie leido jam būti veinam.
 they.NOM let.PST.3 him.DAT.M.SG be.INF alone.DAT.M.SG
 ‘They let him be alone.’
 b. *Jie leido viskam būti šalta/šaltam/šaltai.
 Jie.NOM let.PST.3 everything.DAT.NEUT be.INF cold.NEUT/cold.DAT.M.SG/cold.DAT.F.SG
 ‘They let everything be cold.’

3.2 Neuter Pronouns + Nominal Predicates

- However, neuter pronouns can occur in the same environments when the agreeing predicate is nominal rather than adjectival.
- This is because the gender and number of the nominal predicate do not come from the neuter pronoun.

⁵Adding ‘in the kitchen’ before the depictive aids the relevant interpretation. The reduced relative reading is possible, but irrelevant.

3.2.1 Accusative (Instrumental)

- (23) Karas padarė miest-ą tikra betvarke.
 War.NOM.M.SG make.PST.3 city.ACC.M.SG real.INST.F.SG chaos.INST.F.SG
 ‘The war made the city (into) real chaos.’
- (24) Karas padarė **viską/tai** tikra betvarke.
 War.NOM.M.SG make.PST.3 everything.ACC.NEUT/that.ACC.NEUT real.INST.F.SG
 chaos.INST.F.SG
 ‘The war made everything/that into real chaos.’

3.2.2 Accusative Instrumental

- (25) Mes laikėme jį išminčiumi.
 We.NOM consider.PST.1.PL him.ACC.M.SG wise.man.INST.M.SG
 ‘We considered him a wise man.’
- (26) a. Mes laikėme **tai** savaime suprantamu dalyku.
 We.NOM consider.PST.1.PL it.ACC.NEUT self understood.INST.M.SG thing.INST.M.SG
 ‘We considered that an understandable thing.’
- b. Jis laikė **viską** visiška nesamone.
 He.NOM consider.PST.3 everything.ACC.NEUT absolute.INST.M.SG nonsense.INST.M.SG
 ‘He considered everything absolute nonsense.’

3.2.3 Genitive Instrumental

- (27) Mes ne-laikėme jo išminčiumi.
 We.NOM NEG-consider.PST.1.PL him.GEN wise.man.INST.M.SG
 ‘We did not consider him a wise man.’
- (28) Jis ne-laikė **to** savaime suprantamu dalyku.
 He.NOM NEG-consider.PST.3 it.GEN.NEUT self understood.INST.M.SG thing.INST.M.SG
 ‘He did not consider that an understandable thing.’

3.2.4 Dative

- (29) Jie leido miestui sugriūti į šipulius.
 they.NOM let.PST.3 city.DAT.M.SG fall.INF to pieces.ACC
 ‘They let the city fall to pieces.’
- (30) Jie leido **viskam** sugriūti į šipulius.
 they.NOM let.PST.3 everything.DAT.NEUT fall.INF to pieces.ACC
 ‘They let everything fall to pieces.’

3.3 Primary versus Secondary Predication

- It may seem that the NAC only applies to instances of secondary predication. However this is not the case.
- Evidentials take genitive quirky subjects⁶ and allow primary predication.

⁶Evidence for the subjecthood of the genitive comes from binding of the subject-oriented anaphor *savo* (Šereikaitė 2017).

(i) Inga_i nuramin-ta vaikas savo_i namuose.
 Inga.GEN calm.down-NEUT child.NOM self.GEN house.LOC
 ‘Inga_i must have calmed the child down in her_i own house.’

- (31) Jo būta nuostabaus.
He._{GEN.M.SG} be.NEUT wonderful._{GEN.M.SG}
'He must have been wonderful.'

- While neuter pronouns can appear as evidential subjects (32-33), copular adjectives yield ungrammaticality in the construction (34).

- (32) Juk kiekvieno jaunystėje visko būta.
of.course each youth.LOC everything._{NEUT} be._{NEUT}
'And of course a lot of things must have happened in each of our youths.'

- (33) To tikrai būta mano gyvenime.
That._{NEUT} definitely be._{NEUT} me.GEN life.LOC
'That definitely must have happened in my life.'

- (34) *Visko/to būta
everything._{GEN.NEUT}/that._{GEN.NEUT} be._{NEUT}
nuostabu/nuostabaus/nuostabios.
wonderful._{NEUT}/wonderful._{GEN.M.SG}/wonderful._{GEN.F.SG}
'Everything must have been wonderful.'

3.4 Summary

- We summarize the adjectival agreement facts below.

Table 2. Agreement facts for *viskas* and *tai*

Type of Agreement	viskas - ev- everything	tai - that/it	regular DP
NOM or ACC depictive	*	*	✓
ACC or INST adjective predicate in small clause	*	*	✓
INST adjective predicate with 'consider' verbs	*	*	✓
GEN adjective predicate in evidentials	*	*	✓
GEN adjective predicate with negation	*	*	✓
DAT adjective predicate with 'let'	*	N/A	✓

- Neuter pronouns cannot co-occur with adjectives, but allow nominal predicates.

4 Analysis

- Given these facts, we propose the following:
 - We analyze the NAC as “agreement failure.”
 - We propose that adjective agreement requires gender to be transmitted from the controller to the target.
 - Crucial to this account is the idea that ‘neuter’ is the absence of gender in Lithuanian.
 - Neuter pronouns lack gender and therefore fail to transmit gender features to the adjective.

4.1 Neuter as the absence of gender

- Neuter adjectives lack gender. Evidence comes from:

- Nonfinite subjects. Cross-linguistically, clauses take default morphology and (when not nominalized) have been analyzed as lacking gender. (See Kramer 2015 and references therein.)

(35) Pavargti už tėvynę (yra)
suffer.INF for homeland.ACC be.PRS.3
gražu/*gražus/*graži.
beautiful.NEUT/beautiful.NOM.M.SG/beautiful.NOM.F.SG
'To suffer for one's homeland is beautiful.' (adapted from Ambrazas et al. 1997:643)

- Adjectival subjects, which we assume lack *n* (Bošković 2013), and therefore lack gender (Kramer 2015)

(36) a. Saldù (yra) gardù/*gardus/*gardi.
sweet.NOM.NEUT be.PRS.3 delicious.NEUT/delicious.NOM.M.SG/delicious.NOM.F.SG
'Sweet is delicious.'
b. Raudóna (yra) gražù.
red.NOM.NEUT be.PRS.3 beautiful.NEUT
'Red is beautiful.' (adapted from Ambrazas et al. 1997:136)

- Sentences that lack projected subjects

(37) (Lauke) šalta.
Outside.LOC cold.NEUT
'It is cold (outside).'

(38) (Miške) tamsu.
Forest.LOC dark.NEUT
'It is dark (in the forest).'

- Note, however, that neuter is distinct from the default gender in the language.

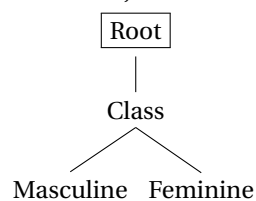
- The default gender is masculine, as shown by coordination of gender-mismatched DPs.

(39) Kėdė ir stalas yra
chair.NOM.F.SG and table.NOM.M.SG be.PRS.3
purvini/*purvinos/*púrvina.
dirty.NOM.M.PL/dirty.NOM.F.PL/dirty.NEUT
'The chair and the table are dirty.'

4.2 Gender Representation

- We propose that in Lithuanian, neuter pronouns lack gender.
- Lacking gender is distinct from default gender in feature geometric terms (Harley and Ritter 2002).
- Neuter pronouns only have ROOT; they do not have CLASS, while masculine nouns do. This is consistent with the fact that neuter is not inherent to any lexical noun.

(40) a. Feature Geometry (modified from Harley and Ritter 2002)



b. Neuter Pronoun



- For coordination between unlike genders (including inanimates), the coordinate phrase will project the value shared by both conjuncts: CLASS. The Vocabulary will distinguish between CLASS (a ‘masculine’ form) and the neuter, which is the elsewhere item.
- Vocabulary Insertion proceeds by the familiar Elsewhere Principle (Halle 1997).

(41) a. Kėdė ir stalas yra purvini/*purvinos/*pūrvina.
 chair. [NOM.F.SG] and table. [NOM.M.SG] be.PRS.3 dirty. [NOM.M.PL] /dirty. [NOM.F.PL] /dirty. [NEUT]
 ‘The chair and the table are dirty.’

b. Chair [CLASS] + Table [CLASS] → CoordP [CLASS]
 | |
 [FEM] [MASC]

c. [+fem][+class][+pl] ↔ -os / {√PURVIN...} dirty.NOM.FEM.PL
 [+class][+pl] ↔ -i / {√PURVIN...} dirty.NOM.M.PL
 ∅ ↔ -a / {√PURVIN...} / dirty.NEUT

- This correctly predicts the coordination resolution facts: both conjuncts will have CLASS, and therefore the overall coordinate phrase will as well, triggering the masculine default on the agreement target.
- Because neuter pronouns lack gender, they give a rise to the NAC.
- The agreement between the neuter pronoun and the adjective fails and results in ungrammaticality.

(42) a. *Karas padarė viską/tai
 War.NOM.M.SG make.PST.3 everything. [ACC.NEUT] /that. [ACC.NEUT]
 neatpažįstama/neatpažįstamu/neatpažįstama.
 unrecognizable. [ACC.M.SG] /unrecognizable. [INST.M.SG] /unrecognizable. [NEUT]
 ‘The war made everything/that unrecognizable.’

b.

5 Implications and Remaining Issues

- The study also indicates that agreement can ‘fail’ in a way that yields ungrammaticality rather than default (cf. Preminger 2011).
- This study has broader implications for the representation of gender, particularly for ‘absence’ versus ‘default’.
- A remaining complication is that neuter pronouns can occur with neuter adjectives in copular constructions.

(43) Viskas/tai buvo gražu.
 Everything [NOM.NEUT] /this. [NOM.NEUT] be.PST.3 beautiful. [NEUT]
 ‘Everything/this was beautiful.’

- We speculate that *finiteness* is the relevant factor that ‘licenses’ neuter adjectives, allowing adjectives not to agree. This is supported by the fact that neuter pronouns are ungrammatical with predicative adjectives in gerunds.

(44) Viskam būnant nuolatiniame judesyje, daiktai atrodo santykinai
 Everything.NEUT.NOM be-GRN constant.LOC movement.LOC, things.NOM look relatively
 stabilūs.
 stable
 ‘Everything being in a constant movement, things look relatively stable.’ (Internet)

(45) *(Viskam būnant gražu), ne viskas yra gera.
 Everything.DAT.NEUT be-GRN beautiful.NEUT not everything be-PRS.3 good.NEUT
 ‘While everything is beautiful, not everything is good.’

- **Thanks for listening!**

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6 Appendix 1

- (46) Jis pritarė/prieštaravo **viskam/tam**.
 He.NOM admit.PST.3/contradict.PST.3 everything.DAT.NEUT /that.DAT.NEUT
 ‘He admitted/contradicted that.’ Dative Viskas/Tai
- (47) Jis naudojosi **tuo/viskuo**.
 He.NOM use.PST.3 this.INST.NEUT /everything.INST.NEUT
 ‘He used this/everything.’ Instrumental Viskas/Tai
- (48) a. **Viskame** aplink slypi dvasios.
 Everything.LOC.NEUT around be.hidden.PRS.3 spirits.NOM
 ‘In everything around us, spirits are hidden.’ Locative Viskas
- b. **Tame** yra tiesios.
 That.LOC.NEUT /that.LOC.NEUT be.PRS.3 truth.GEN
 ‘There is some truth to that.’ Locative Tai