

DIGITAL ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP AT HARVARD
DASH.HARVARD.EDU

HARVARD LIBRARY


Plural/Pluralia tantum

Citation

Marinis, Michail I. (2026). Plural/Pluralia tantum. In Encyclopedia of Greek language and linguistics, ed. by G. Giannakis, M. Arapopoulou, E. Crespo, P. Filos, B. D. Joseph, & T. Markopoulos. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/2666-6421_GLLO_COM_058558

Published version

https://doi.org/10.1163/2666-6421_GLLO_COM_058558

Link

https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/42737047

Terms of use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Open Access License Articles (IOAL), as set forth at

https://harvardwiki.atlassian.net/wiki/external/NGY5NDE4ZjgzNTc5NDQzMGIzZWZhMGFlOWI2M2EwYTg

Accessibility

https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/digital-accessibility-policy

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story

Accepted Author Manuscript (AAM)
Please cite the published version: Marinis, Michail I. (2026). Plural/Pluralia tantum. In *Encyclopedia of Greek language and linguistics,* ed. by G. Giannakis, M. Arapopoulou, E. Crespo, P. Filos, B. D. Joseph, & T. Markopoulos. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/2666-6421_GLLO_COM_058558

Plural/Pluralia tantum

Michail I. Marinis

Abstract

The entry briefly discusses the extent of pluralia tantum (nouns forming only the Plural) in Medieval Greek and Modern Greek.

1. Plural

Throughout the history of the Greek language, nouns and verbs employ inflected forms to express the singular and the plural. In Ancient Greek (AG), however, the morphological system offered another choice. With different inflectional suffixes, it coded the singular when reference was made to one entity, the plural when the lexical reference was made to more than two entities, and, with distinct inflectional suffixes, it could also code the dual for reference to only two entities. Today, the distinction between dual and plural has been lost in favor of the plural, which now expresses two or more entities (see Table 1).

	SINGULAR	DUAL	PLURAL
ANCIENT GREEK	ποιητοῦ *poiētoû*	ποιηταῖν *poiētaîn*	ποιητῶν *poiētôn*
MODERN GREEK	ποιητή *piití*		ποιητών *piitón*

Table 1: *The genitive of ποιητής 'poet' in Ancient and Modern Greek.*

2. Pluralia tantum

2.1. Identifying the Phenomenon

The term 'pluralia tantum' is of Latin origin referring to groups of nouns that only occur in the plural number. However, the morphology of Greek has inflectional suffixes for the formation of the singular number. Table 2 compares the nouns άροτρο *árotro* 'plow' and δίδακτρα *ðíðaktra* 'fees' regarding their inflectional morphology. Since both belong to the same inflectional class, we would expect them to have a similar inflectional paradigm (Marinis 2020). However, δίδακτρα *ðíðaktra* 'fees' belongs to the class of pluralia tantum since it has no singular number. This property of the word δίδακτρα *ðíðaktra* could also be described as a case of defectiveness in terms of number (Marinis 2024).

NOM.SG.	άροτρο *árotro*	
ACC.SG.	άροτρο *árotro*	
VOC.SG.	άροτρο *árotro*	
GEN.SG.	αρότρου *arótru*	
GEN.PL.	αρότρων *arótron*	διδάκτρων *ðiðáktron*
NOM.PL.	άροτρα *árotra*	δίδακτρα *ðíðaktra*
ACC.PL.	άροτρα *árotra*	δίδακτρα *ðíðaktra*
VOC.PL.	άροτρα *árotra*	δίδακτρα *ðíðaktra*

Table 2: *The inflectional paradigms of the nouns άροτρο and δίδακτρα.*

2.2. Cases of pluralia tantum Nouns

In both Medieval Greek and Modern Greek, many nouns exhibit this phenomenon. As Marinis (2024) shows, many pluralia tantum are toponyms (e.g., Παξοί *Paksí*, Λίμνες

Límnes, Βουναλάκια *Vunalákia*, Πηγές *Piɣés*, Βρύσες *Vríses*, Υψηλά *Ipsilá*, Μήλοι *Míli*, etc.). The pluralia tantum category also includes many names of religious holidays, either Christian (Χριστούγεννα *Xristúɣena* 'Christmas', Θεοφάνεια *Θeofánia* 'Epiphany') or those that trace their origin to antiquity (Ίσθμια *Ísθmia*, Νέμεα *Némea*, Ολύμπια *Olímpia*). Some refer to anatomical terms, such as εντόσθια *endósθia* 'entrails', σπλάχνα *spláxna* 'guts', έγκατα *égata* 'bowels', χολάδες *xoláðes* 'intestines'. Another group comprises words relating to money, such as δίδακτρα *ðíðaktra* 'fees' (see Table 1), ναύλα *návla* 'boat fare', διόδια *ðióðia* 'tolls', and other words like μαθηματικά *maθimatiká* 'mathematics', μάγια *máɣia* 'spells', etc.

Some pluralia tantum nouns can also have a singular form. However, in these cases, the singular gives a different extratextual reference from that of the plural of pluralia tantum (Marinis 2024). For example, the village Λίμνες *Límnes* in Corinth is a pluralia tantum, but as a common noun, the word has both singular and plural forms (λίμνη *límni* 'lake' and λίμνες *límnes* 'lakes').

The phenomenon occurs not only in individual words or groups of words, but it may also occur in derivational morphology. In Greek, the toponymic suffix -αίικα *-éika* is particularly productive in the linguistic varieties of the Peloponnese. It is combined with bases indicating 'the area in which the family members reside', which is indicated by the base of the formation. For example, in Ancient Corinth, Μαρινάίικα *Marinéika* is where the Marinis family members live. Such toponyms occur in many areas, such as Κακουράίικα *Kakuréika*, Παυλάίικα *Pavléika*, Βραχνάίικα *Vraxnéika*, etc.

2.3. Diachrony and Lexicalization

This phenomenon is found throughout the diachrony of the Greek language, and it is also noted in cross-linguistic observations (for a typological account of pluralia tantum, see Corbett 2019). At first sight, the pluralia tantum appear to concern only words with

a general meaning (e.g. λεφτά *leftá* 'money') or words with intrinsic reference to a plurality entity (e.g. γυαλιά *yialiá* 'eyeglasses'). Nevertheless, a closer look reveals that the phenomenon is quite complex. A noun created at one time with reference to several entities, but may, over time, have lost its plural reference. For example, the toponym Μυκήνες *Mikínes* was formed in the plural because, historically, the specific village was created through the unification of several communities. For the native speaker of Modern Greek, however, the reference to the plural is lost, but the city's name remains lexicalized, preserving its plural morphology.

References

Corbett G. G. (2019). Pluralia tantum nouns and the theory of features: A typology of nouns with non-canonical number properties. *Morphology* 29: 51-108.

Marinis, M. I. (2024). On the morphology of toponyms: What (Greek) inflectional paradigms can teach us. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 123(1): 77-96. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-968X.12313

Marinis, M. I. (2020). Κλίση και κλιτικά παραδείγματα [Inflection and inflectional paradigms]. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Patras, Greece.