



语言学范畴研究丛书

Gender

性 范 畴

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UNIVERSITY OF SURREY



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PREFACE

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Preface

taken from Corbett (1983a). Section 7.2 is appearing separately as Corbett (forthcoming a), and Chapter 9 takes some of its material from Corbett (1983b). The version here supersedes previous ones, and the integration of the material into a general account of gender is new.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	accusative	NEG	negative
AG	agreement marker	NEUT	neuter
ANIM	animate	NOM	nominative
AUX	auxiliary	NP	noun phrase
DAT	dative	OBJ	object
DEF	definite	PL	plural
ERG	ergative	POSS	possessive
FEM	feminine	PRES	present
FUT	future	REFL	reflexive
GEN	genitive	SG	singular
INAN	inanimate	SUBJ	subject
INS	instrumental	1ST	first person
LOC	locative	2ND	second person
MASC	masculine	3RD	third person
MASC_PERS	masculine personal		

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1

Introduction

Gender is the most puzzling of the grammatical categories. It is a topic which interests non-linguists as well as linguists and it becomes more fascinating the more it is investigated. In some languages gender is central and pervasive, while in others it is totally absent. One of its attractions for linguists is that there are interesting aspects of the study of gender in each of the core areas of linguistics. And work on it promises practical benefits, even in the short term, in meeting the problems which gender causes in second-language learning. In the longer term, research into gender will be important for at least two other areas: first, it can shed light on the way in which linguistic information is stored in the brain; and second, it has implications for natural language processing, notably for the elimination of local ambiguities in parsing. To understand what linguists mean by 'gender', a good starting point is Hockett's definition: 'Genders are classes of nouns reflected in the behavior of associated words' (1958: 231). A language may have two or more such classes or genders. The classification frequently corresponds to a real-world distinction of sex, at least in part, but often too it does not ('gender' derives etymologically from Latin *genus*, via Old French *gendre*, and originally meant 'kind' or 'sort'). The word 'gender' is used not just for a group of nouns but also for the whole category; thus we may say that a particular language has, say, three genders, masculine, feminine and neuter, and that the language has the category of gender.

1.1 Gender in the languages of the world

Discussions of gender as a category have tended to centre on relatively small numbers of languages, and often on selections which are not typical of the systems found in the world's languages. In contrast, we shall look at over 200 languages. Some will appear only briefly, because of some special point of interest, others will run like threads through the book showing how the different aspects of gender systems relate to each other. Grammatical gender is certainly widespread, and so a brief account of its distribution may

Introduction

prove helpful. Europe is dominated by the Indo-European language family, which also extends well into Asia. Many Indo-European languages show gender (some with three genders, others having reduced the number to two); a few have lost gender, while others, notably the Slavonic group, are introducing new subgenders. Uralic has some members in Europe (like Hungarian), and others in the northern area where Europe and Asia meet, and is devoid of grammatical gender. Joining Europe and Asia in the south we find the Caucasus, where the languages of the northern Caucasus, some thirty-five in number, show particularly interesting gender systems, which contrast markedly with those of Indo-European. Several of the major families of Asia provide no material for our investigation, but in south India we find the Dravidian family, which includes languages like Tamil and Telugu, which are of great importance for the typology of gender. Bridging Asia and Africa, the Afro-Asiatic family offers numerous two-gender systems, some of which are of special importance. The other three families of Africa, namely Nilo-Saharan, Niger-Kordofanian and Khoisan, all have languages with gender systems. Niger-Kordofanian provides some of the most extensive examples, in terms of the numbers of genders and the degree to which gender is reflected in syntax. Heine (1982: 190) estimates that 600 African languages (some two-thirds of all African languages) are gender languages. New Guinea has around 1,000 languages, a substantial proportion of the world's languages, and gender is widespread here too. In Australia gender is found in various languages, mainly in those of Arnhem Land and the North Kimberleys. Finally, in the Americas, the examples of gender languages are few and are generally isolated. The most important exception is the Algonquian family, whose two-gender systems will figure prominently in our study. In comparing data from languages of such variety we must be careful to ensure that we are comparing like with like. To do this we shall be explicit about the techniques used, the sources of data and, of course, the definitions of the terms we use.

1.2 General approach and outline of the book

The book is designed for various types of readers. First, for the student of linguistics, it is an introduction to an area of obvious interest, one which is poorly represented in the standard texts. And through this topic the book attempts to give an insight into the richness and variety of the world's languages. Second, it is intended to help those doing research on specific languages or groups of languages, whether for an undergraduate dissertation or a major research project. Seeing a familiar language analysed in the broader context of languages with comparable but different systems can give a new perspective on familiar material. For some languages, the accounts of gender

1.2 *General approach and outline*

set in their particular grammatical tradition obscure similarities to other genetically distant or unrelated languages. An overview of this type seeks to highlight such similarities and to suggest new ways of approaching old problems. References to work on specific languages can be found by checking relevant sections identified using the language index. Of those researching individual languages, field-workers are a special category. It is hoped that the definitions provided will help to ensure that the invaluable work done in the field – particularly on languages with uncertain futures – will not be undermined through the contradictory use of terms (which has hampered this topic in the past) or the failure to obtain data which are of special value for understanding gender more generally. There will also be readers, from various disciplines, concerned with sexism in language. This is a topic on which several interesting studies have appeared recently, but not one which is central to this book. However, it is hoped that material presented here will contribute to that debate in two ways. First, the systematic presentation of linguistic data from many different languages may help to broaden a discussion which has tended to centre on English. It will also show how divisions into animate and inanimate, or human and non-human, function in language exactly as does the division into female and male. Second, by drawing attention to languages where the feminine rather than the masculine is in some sense favoured, it may suggest possible comparative approaches. The book is therefore planned to be a source book as well as a textbook, with extensive references for those who wish to go further, whether into particular topics or into particular languages.

Different readers will have different requirements, so it will be useful to outline the structure of the book, to make clear which parts will be most relevant to particular needs. Chapters 2–5 are all concerned with gender assignment, that is, the way in which native speakers allocate nouns to genders. The type of question at issue is how speakers know that, for example, the word for 'house' is masculine in Russian, feminine in French and neuter in Tamil. In chapter 2 we analyse languages where the meaning of a noun is sufficient to determine its gender: thus 'house' in Tamil is neuter because it does not denote a human. Then in chapter 3 we move to languages where meaning is not adequate to determine gender on its own, but has to be supplemented by formal criteria. These additional criteria may be morphological, that is, relating to word-structure: 'house' can be assigned to the masculine gender in Russian, given the declensional type to which it belongs. Or the criteria may be phonological, relating to sound-structure: hence 'house' is feminine in French because of the phonological shape of the word. In these two chapters we look at the straightforward linguistic evidence, and we find that the regularities which justify the analyses offered are striking. In

Introduction

chapter 4 we go on to examine other types of evidence which support the rules proposed, suggesting that they do indeed form part of the native speaker's competence. The evidence comes from the way in which nouns borrowed from one language into another gain a gender, children's acquisition of gender, psycholinguistic experiments, the curious effects of the residual meaning of gender, and from the investigation of the way in which gender systems change over time. This fourth chapter will be of central interest to some readers but can safely be skipped by those wishing to gain an initial outline of the subject. In chapters 2-4 we assume that we can determine analytically the number of genders in a given language and the gender of a particular noun; our task is to determine how the native speaker assigns nouns to genders (and so can produce the examples which form our data).

In many languages there is no dispute as to the number of genders, but there are other languages where the question is far from straightforward; consequently it is important to investigate how we solve such cases. While nouns may be classified in various ways, only one type of classification counts as a gender system; it is one which is reflected beyond the nouns themselves in modifications required of 'associated words'. For example, in Russian we find: *novyj dom* 'new house', *novaja gazeta* 'new newspaper' and *novoe taksi* 'new taxi'. These examples demonstrate the existence of three genders, because the adjective *nov-* 'new' has to change in form according to the gender of the noun. There are many other nouns like *dom* 'house', making up the masculine gender, many too like *gazeta* 'newspaper' (the feminines) and numerous nouns like *taksi* 'taxi' (the neuters), each requiring the appropriate ending on the adjective. There are various other ways in which nouns could be grouped: those denoting animals, those which are derived from verbs, those whose stem has three syllables or more, those whose stress changes from singular to plural. These groupings are not genders in Russian because they do not determine other forms beyond the noun; they are classifications internal to the class of nouns.

All this means that the determining criterion of gender is agreement; this is the way in which the genders are 'reflected in the behavior of associated words' in Hockett's definition given earlier. Saying that a language has three genders implies that there are three classes of nouns which can be distinguished syntactically by the agreements they take. This is the generally accepted approach to gender (other suggestions prove unsatisfactory, as we shall see). Given its importance for the analysis, agreement in gender is considered in detail in chapter 5, and it turns out to be varied and complex. It is not only adjectives and verbs which can show agreement in gender, but in some languages adverbs agree, in others numerals and sometimes even conjunctions