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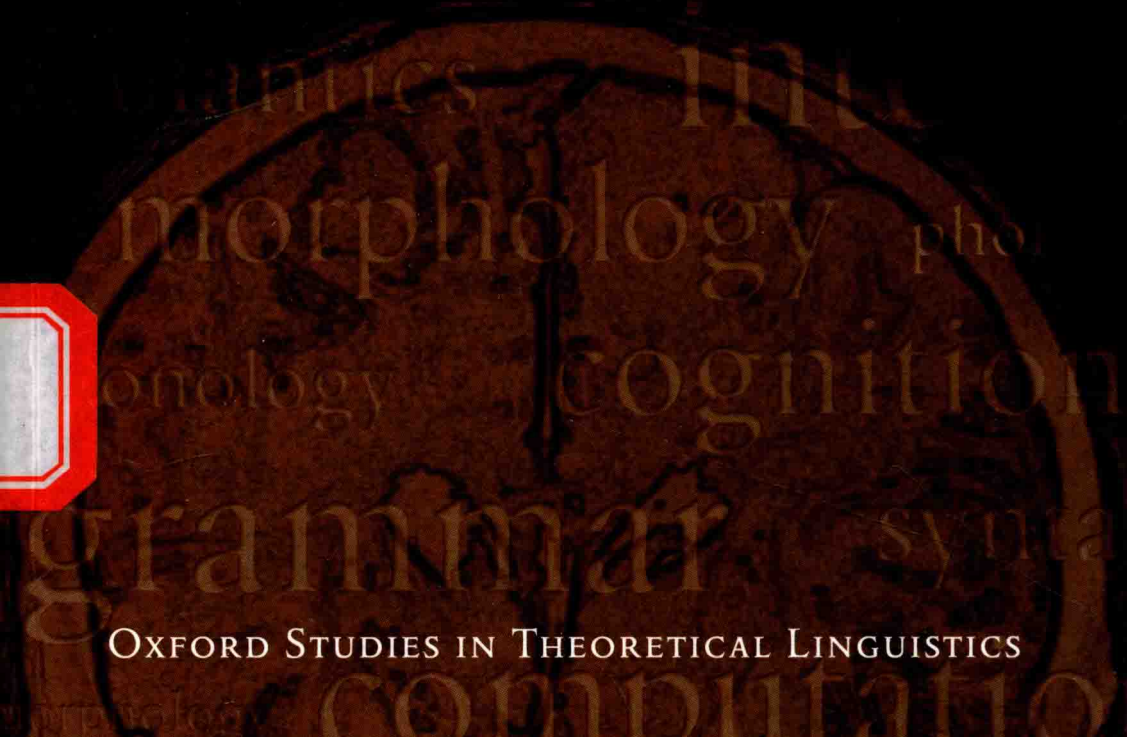
The Morphosyntax of Gender

RUTH KRAMER



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The Morphosyntax of Gender

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
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First Edition published in 2015

Impression: 1

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014958986

ISBN 978-0-19-967993-5 (Hbk)
ISBN 978-0-19-967994-2 (Pbk)

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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General preface

The theoretical focus of this series is on the interfaces between subcomponents of the human grammatical system and the closely related area of the interfaces between the different subdisciplines of linguistics. The notion of "interface" has become central in grammatical theory (for instance, in Chomsky's Minimalist Program) and in linguistic practice: work on the interfaces between syntax and semantics, syntax and morphology, phonology and phonetics, etc. has led to a deeper understanding of particular linguistic phenomena and of the architecture of the linguistic component of the mind/brain.

The series covers interfaces between core components of grammar, including syntax/morphology, syntax/semantics, syntax/phonology, syntax/pragmatics, morphology/phonology, phonology/phonetics, phonetics/speech processing, semantics/pragmatics, and intonation/discourse structure, as well as issues in the way that the systems of grammar involving these interface areas are acquired and deployed in use (including language acquisition, language dysfunction, and language processing). It demonstrates, we hope, that proper understandings of particular linguistic phenomena, languages, language groups, or inter-language variations all require reference to interfaces.

The series is open to work by linguists of all theoretical persuasions and schools of thought. A main requirement is that authors should write so as to be understood by colleagues in related subfields of linguistics and by scholars in cognate disciplines.

Gender features stand at the intersection of syntax, semantics, and morphology, and how their role is divided between these three domains has long been a puzzle. In this monograph, Ruth Kramer develops a new theory of the morphosyntax of gender, arguing that gender features appear not on lexical roots or on elements high in the structure of noun phrases, but on the nominalizing head *n*. She defends a particular theory of gender features based on the notions of interpretability and bivalence, and shows how this theory predicts the attested typological variation in gender systems, drawing on fascinating data from a number of lesser studied languages. Overall, the book proposes the first comprehensive theory of gender as a phi-feature in generative linguistics.

David Adger
Hagit Borer

Acknowledgments

This project has been through various stages of development for many years, and it is a challenging task to acknowledge all of the generous people who have assisted along the way. Nevertheless, I will do my best since they all greatly deserve it.

The core of this book originates in my dissertation (Kramer 2009), and I can never thank my committee enough for their help and insights: Sandra Chung, Jorge Hankamer, and James McCloskey. I also thank my peers at Santa Cruz for their feedback and encouragement (especially the members of the Morphology Reading Group): Vera Gribanova, Boris Harizanov, Mark Norris, Kyle Rawlins, Anie Thompson, and Matthew Tucker.

I have presented portions of this book at the University of Pennsylvania, Yale University, the ST@R reading group at Rutgers University, the syntax–semantics reading group at New York University, the University of Delaware, the University of California, Santa Cruz, and George Mason University. I have also presented portions of it at the following conferences/workshops: the 15th International Morphology Meeting, the 30th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics, the 43rd and 45th Annual Conferences on African Linguistics, and the workshop on "Allomorphy: Its Logic and Limitations." I thank the audiences at all of these presentations for their invaluable feedback and suggestions, especially Pranav Anand, Karlos Arregi, Mark Baker, Ricardo Bermúdez-Otero, Amy Rose Deal, Marijke de Belder, Rose-Marie Déchaine, David Embick, Jane Grimshaw, Richard Kayne, Jean Lowenstamm, Andrew Nevins, Elizabeth Ritter, Peter Svenonius, Martina Wiltschko, Matt Wolf, and Raffaella Zanuttini.

Portions of Chapters 2 and 3 appear in "Gender in Amharic: a morphosyntactic approach to natural and grammatical gender," *Language Sciences* 43: 102–15. Portions of Chapters 3 and 8 are to appear in "A split analysis of plurality: evidence from Amharic," to be published in *Linguistic Inquiry*. I thank the four anonymous reviewers of these papers for comments and suggestions that have been integrated into this book as well. I also thank the members of the Seminar on Morphosyntax at Georgetown in Spring 2014 for reading "Gender in Amharic" and offering useful feedback: Melanie Ashkar, Colleen Diamond, Ava Irani, Morgan Rood, Brett Sutton, and Katherine Vadella.

I turn next to those who engaged with the book as a manuscript. First credit goes to Mark Norris, for reading almost the entire manuscript with incredible speed and cheer, and for assisting with Icelandic and Estonian data. I am also deeply grateful to the following readers/commenters on portions of the manuscript: Azeb Amha, Peter K. Austin, Joshua Birchall, Héctor Campos, Sandra Chung, Donka Farkas,

Christopher Green, Vera Gribanova, Boris Harizanov, Heidi Harley, Bryce Huebner, Donna Lardiere, Eric Mathieu, Jason Merchant, Francesca Merlan, Doris Payne, Paul Portner, Conor Quinn, James Rupp, Angela Terrill, and Katherine Vadella. None of these people are responsible for errors of fact or interpretation.

I am also profoundly thankful to all the consultants whose insight has shaped this work: Senayit Ghebrehiywet, Girma Demeke, Bekale Seyum, Betselot Teklu, Hileena Eshetu, Harya Tarakegn, Mehret Getachew Tadesse, Meriem Tikue, Azeb Amha, Marta Baffy, Héctor Campos, Angela Donate Velasco, Donka Farkas, Paula Ganga, Nagarajan Selvanathan, and Esther Surenthiraraj.

Additionally, I am grateful for the research support that I have received during the creation of this book. I thank Georgetown University for a Junior Faculty Research Fellowship and Summer Academic Grant that supported several months of writing, and I also thank Carole Sargent and the book club members of Summer 2014 for helping me keep up the momentum. Credit is also due for research assistance to Lindley Winchester, Morgan Rood, Laura Siebecker, and Lauren McGarry.

Finally, this book could never have been completed without the patient support of my family and of Bryce Huebner. This book is dedicated to them.

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List of abbreviations

1	1st person
2	2nd person
3	3rd person
ABS	absolutive
ACC	accusative case
ACT	action particle
ADJ	adjectivalizer
AFFIRM	affirmative
AN(IM)	animate
ANA	anaphoric
ANT	anterior verb suffix
AUX	auxiliary
CAUS	causative
CL	classifier
COLL	collective
COP	copula
D	determiner
DAT	dative
DEF	definite marker
DIM(IN)	diminutive
DIS	distant demonstrative
DM	Distributed Morphology
DUR	durative
EMPH	emphatic particle
ERG	ergative case
F	feminine
F/N	feminine or neuter
FEM	female natural gender
FOC	focus
GC	gender clitic
GEN	genitive case

HAB	habitual
HON	honorific
IMP	imperative
INAN	inanimate
INF	infinitive
INFL	inflection
INT	intensive
LOC	locative case or locative marker
M	masculine
M/F	masculine or feminine
M/N	masculine or neuter
N	neuter
n	'little' n, nominalizing head
NEG	negation
NF	non-feminine
NMLZ	nominalizer
NOM	nominative case
NONFIN	non-finite
.O	object agreement/marker
PAST	past tense
PC	past continuous
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
POSS.ART	possessive article
PP	past punctual
PREP	preposition
PRES	present tense
PROD	product verbalizer
PROP	proprietive case
RED	reduplicant
REFL	reflexive
RF	realis future
RP/P	realis past/present
S	singular
.S	subject agreement/marker

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STA	stative
SUP	supine
T	tense
TOP	topic
TV	theme vowel
VBLZ	verbalizer
VICIN	vicinity

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1

Introduction

1.1 Major themes

Gender is regularly defined as the sorting of nouns into two or more classes, as reflected in agreement morphology on determiners, adjectives, verbs and other syntactic categories (e.g. Hockett 1958: 231, Fodor 1959: 2, Corbett 1991: 1, Comrie 1999: 457, Matasović 2004: 19–20). Consider the Amharic examples in (1)ab.

(1) a. ya säw dägg näw
that.M man good be.3MS.S
'That man is good.'

b. yatʃtʃ set dägg nat
that.F woman good be.3FS.S
'That woman is good.' (Leslau 1995: 66, 67)

In (1)a, the demonstrative is *ya* and the copular verb is *näw*, whereas in (1)b, the demonstrative is *yatʃtʃ* and the copular verb is *nat*. Since the demonstrative and the copular verb formally differ depending only on the head noun of the subject, it is clear that *säw* 'man' belongs to one gender (masculine) and *set* 'woman' belongs to another gender (feminine).[1]

Gender has been called "a time-honored subject of linguistics" (Unterbeck and Rissanen 2000: ix), and Matasović (2004: 13) dubs it "the only grammatical category that ever evoked passion." Corbett calls gender the "most puzzling of the grammatical categories" (Corbett 1991: 1). Unsurprisingly then, there are rich and significant literatures on the sociolinguistics of gender (see e.g. Hellinger and Bußmann 2001), the acquisition and processing of gender (see e.g. Franceschina 2005), the typology of gender systems (see e.g. Corbett 1991), and the diachronic development and loss of gender systems (see e.g. Matasović 2004).

However, there has been less research on the morphological and syntactic aspects of gender. There are clear, thorough descriptions of gender assignment in many languages (see e.g. Corbett 1991: chs 2 and 3), but the most basic questions for a morphosyntactic analysis of gender assignment remain controversial: where is gender located in the hierarchical structure? How is gender assignment

[1] See Chapter 4 for a refinement of this definition of gender.

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