GENDER ACROSS LANGUAGES

VOLUME I

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Gender Across Languages

The linguistic representation of women and men

VOLUME I

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Preface

The series *Gender across languages* is an ongoing project with potential follow-up publications. Our main goal has been to provide a comprehensive collection of in-depth descriptions of gender-related issues in languages with very diverse structural foundations and socio-cultural backgrounds. The project is designed to have an explicit contrastive orientation in that basically the same issues are discussed for each language within the same terminological and methodological framework. This framework, whose central notion is, of course, the multidimensional concept of "gender", is discussed in the introductory chapter of "Gender across languages – The linguistic representation of women and men". Care has been taken not to impose a narrow western perspective on other languages.

This is the first of three volumes which comprise a total of thirty languages: Arabic, Belizean Creole, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Eastern Maroon Creole, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Icelandic, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Oriya, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Turkish, Vietnamese, Welsh.

All contributions were specifically written for this project, in close collaboration with the editors over a period of three years. Unfortunately, a few languages (Bulgarian, Hungarian, Korean, Portuguese, and one Native American language) dropped out of the project for various reasons. These languages should be included in a potential future volume.

The basis on which particular languages should be brought together in one volume has been a problematic one to define. Rather than categorizing languages according to language family (areal, typological or historical), or according to whether the language has or does not have grammatical gender, or using an overall alphabetical ordering, we decided – in agreement with the publisher – that each volume should contain a balanced selection of languages, so that each volume will provide readers with sufficient material to illustrate the diversity and complexity of linguistic representations of gender across languages. Thus, each volume will contain both languages with grammatical gender as well as "genderless" languages, and languages with different areal, typological and

historical affiliations.

"Gender across languages" is, of course, a selection, and no claims can be made that the three volumes will cover all language groups adequately. Critics will find it easy to identify those language areas or families that are under-represented in the project. In particular, future work should consider the immense number of African, Asian and Austronesian languages which have so far received little or no attention from a gender perspective.

Though we are aware of the fact that most languages of the project have developed a number of regional and social varieties, with different implications for the representation and communication of "gender", we supported authors in their unanimous decision to concentrate on standard varieties (where these exist). This decision is particularly well-founded for those languages for which gender-related issues are being described here for the very first time. Only in the case of English, which has developed major regional standards with consider-able differences in usage, did we decide to make explicit reference to four different varieties (British English, American English, New Zealand English and Australian English).

We took care that each chapter did address most of the questions we had formulated as original guidelines which, however, were not intended (nor inter-preted by authors) to impose our own expectations of how "gender" is repre-sented in a particular culture. Thus, chapters basically have the same overall structure, with variation due to language-specific properties as well as to the state of research on language and gender in the respective country. In some cases, we encouraged authors to include some of their own empirical research where this has implications for the analysis of "gender" in the respective language.

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Marlis Hellinger, Frankfurt am Main   Summer 2001
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List of abbreviations

ABL	ablative		INESS	inessive
ACC	accusative		INF	infinitive
ADJ	adjective		INSTR	instrumental
ADV	adverb		IPF	imperfective
AGR	agreement		LOC	locative
ALLAT	allative		MASC/m	masculine
ANIM	animate		N	noun
ANT	anterior		NEG	negation
AOR	aorist		NEUT/n	neuter
ASP	aspect		NOM	nominative
ATT	attributive		NP	noun phrase
AUX	auxiliary		OBJ	object
CAUS	causative		OBL	oblique
CL	classifier		PART	participle
COM	comitative		PARTT	partitive
COMP	comparative		PASS	passive
COND	conditional		PAST	past
CONJ	conjunction		PERS	personal pronoun
COP	copula		PF	perfective
DAT	dative		PL/pl	plural
DEF	definite		POL	polite
DEM	demonstrative		POSS	possessive
DER	derivational affix		PREP	preposition
DET	determiner		PRES	present
DUR	durative		PROG	progressive
ELAT	elative		PRON	pronoun
ERG	ergative		PRT	particle
ESS	essive		REFL	reflexive
EVID	evidential		REL	relative pronoun/affix
EXPL	expletive		SG/sg	singular
FEM/f	feminine		SUBJ	subject
FUT	future		TOP	topic
GEN	genitive		TRANS	transitive
GER	gerund		TRNS	translative
HAB	habitual		VERB	verb
ILLAT	illative		VOC	vocative
IMP	imperative		1	first person
INAN	inanimate		2	second person
INDEF	indefinite		3	third person

Contents

Gender across languages

The linguistic representation of women and men[*]

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1.   Aims and scope of "Gender across languages"

"Gender across languages" systematically investigates the linguistic representation of women and men in 30 languages of very different structural and socio-cultural backgrounds. Fundamental to the project is the hypothesis that the formal and functional manifestations of gender in the area of human reference follow general, and perhaps universal principles in the world's languages. We will outline these principles and specify the theoretical and empirical foundations on which statements about gendered structures in languages can be made.

A major concern of "Gender across languages" is with the structural properties of the individual language:

–   Does the language have grammatical gender, and – if so – what are the consequences for agreement, coordination, pronominalization and word-formation, and more specifically, for the linguistic representation of women and men?
–   In the absence of grammatical gender, what are possible ways of expressing female-specific, male-specific or gender-indefinite personal reference?
–   Can asymmetries be identified in the area of human reference which may be interpreted as the result of the choice of the masculine/male as the default gender?
–   What is the empirical evidence for the claim that in neutral contexts masculine/male expressions are perceived as generic and bias-free?
–   Does the language contain idiomatic expressions, metaphors, proverbs and the like which are indicative of gender-related socio-cultural hierarchies or stereotypes?

In addition, the project will outline gender-related tendencies of variation and change, and – where applicable – language reform, seeking to identify the ways in which the structural/linguistic prerequisites interact with the respective social, cultural and political conditions that determine the relationships between women and men in a community.

"Gender across languages" will focus on personal nouns and pronouns, which have emerged as a central issue in debates about language and gender. In any language, personal nouns constitute a basic and culturally significant lexical field. They are needed to communicate about the self and others, they are used to identify people as individuals or members of various groups, and they may transmit positive or negative attitudes. In addition, they contain schemata of, e.g., occupational activities and (proto- or stereotypical) performers of such

activities. On a psychological level, an appropriate use of personal nouns may contribute towards the maintenance of an individual's identity, while inappropriate use, for example identifying someone repeatedly (either by mistake or by intention) by a false name, by using derogatory or discriminatory language, or by not addressing someone at all, may cause irritation, anger or feelings of inferiority. And since an individual's sense of self includes an awareness of being female or male, it is important to develop an understanding of the ways in which gender is negotiated in a language. This understanding must, of course, be based on adequate descriptions of the relevant structural and functional properties of the respective language.

In communication, parameters like ethnicity, culture, social status, setting, and discourse functions may in fact be as important as extra-linguistic gender, and none of these parameters is represented in a language in any direct or unambiguous way (cf. Bing & Bergvall 1996:5). Only a multidimensional theory of communication will be able to spell out the ways in which these parameters interact with linguistic expressions. By interpreting linguistic manifestations of gender as the discursive result of "doing gender" in specific socio-cultural contexts, the analysis of gender across languages can contribute to such a theory.

Structure-oriented gender research has focused primarily on formal, semantic and historical issues. On a formal level, systems of gender and nominal classification were analyzed, with an emphasis on the phonological and morphological conditions of gender assignment and agreement (cf. Section 4.2).[1]

From a semantic perspective, a major issue was the question as to whether the classification of nouns in a language follows semantic principles rather than being arbitrary.[2] While gender assignment in the field of personal nouns is at least partially non-arbitrary, the classification of inanimate nouns, e.g. words denoting celestial bodies, varies across languages. Thus, the word for 'sun' is grammatically feminine in German and Lithuanian, but masculine in Greek, Latin and the Romance languages, and neuter gender in Old Indic, Old Iranic and Russian. Correspondingly, metaphorical conceptualizations of the sun and the moon as female or male deities, or as the stereotypical human couple, will also show variation.

Nominal class membership may be determined by conceptual principles according to which speakers categorize the objects of their universe. The underlying principles may not be immediately comprehensible to outsiders to a particular culture. For example, the words for female humans, water, fire and fighting are all in one nominal category in Dyirbal, an Australian language (cf.

Dixon 1972). The assignment of, say, some birds' names to the same category can only be explained by recourse to mythological association.[3] – Finally, historical issues in the study of linguistic gender concerned the origin, change and loss of gender categories.[4]

Corbett's account of over 200 languages is a major source for any discussion of gender as a formal category. However, since Corbett analyzes entire noun class systems, while we concentrate on personal nouns and pronouns, "sexism in language" (Corbett 1991:3) is not one of his concerns. But Corbett does in fact contribute to that debate in various ways, in particular, by introducing richness and diversity to a field which has been dominated by the study of a few Western languages.

2.   Gender classes as a special case of noun classes

Considering the lack of terminological precision and consistency in the debate about language and gender, the terms "gender class" and "gender language" need to be defined more precisely and with a more explicit reference to the wider framework of nominal classification. Of course, it must be noted that not all languages possess a system of nominal classification. In the project, Belizean Creole, Eastern Maroon Creole, English, Finnish and Turkish[5] represent this group of languages. Other languages may divide their nominal lexicon into groups or classes according to various criteria. Among the languages which exhibit such nominal classification, classifier languages and noun class languages (including languages with grammatical gender) constitute the two major types.[6]

2.1 Classifier languages

A prototypical case of classifier systems are numeral classifiers. In languages with such a system, a numeral (e.g. 'three') cannot be combined with a noun (e.g. 'book') directly, but requires the additional use of a classifier. Classifiers are separate words which often indicate the shape of the quantified object(s). The resulting phrase of numeral, classifier, and noun could, for example, be translated as 'three flat-object book' (cf. Greenberg 1972:5). Numeral classifiers are thus independent functional elements which specify the noun's class membership in certain contexts. In addition, the use of classifiers may be indicative of stylistic variation.

In languages with (numeral) classifiers, nouns do not show agreement with other word classes, although classifiers may perform discourse functions such as reference-tracking, which in gender languages are achieved by agreement. On average, classifier languages have from 50 to 100 classifiers (cf. Dixon 1982: 215).[7] Classifier systems are rather frequent in East Asian languages, and in "Gender across languages" are represented by Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Oriya and Vietnamese.

2.2 Noun class languages

While in numeral classifier systems the class membership of nouns is marked only in restricted syntactic contexts (mainly in the area of quantification), class membership in noun class languages triggers agreement on a range of elements inside and outside the noun phrase. Noun class languages have a comparatively small number of classes (hardly more than 20). These classes consistently structure the entire nominal lexicon, i.e. each noun belongs to one of these classes (there are exceptional cases of double or multiple class membership). French, German, Swahili and many others are noun class languages, but we find these languages also referred to as "gender languages".[8] In accordance with Craig (1994), we will not use the terms "gender language" and "noun class language" synonymously, but will define them as two different types of noun class languages based on grammatical and semantic considerations. This distinction is also motivated by our interest in the linguistic representation of the categories "female" and "male".

"Gender languages"
This type is illustrated by many Indo-European languages, but also Semitic languages. These languages have only a very small number of "gender classes", typically two or three. Nouns do not necessarily carry markers of class membership, but, of course, there is (obligatory) agreement with other word classes, both inside and outside the noun phrase. Most importantly – for our distinction – class membership is anything but arbitrary in the field of animate/personal reference.

For a large number of personal nouns there is a correspondence between the "feminine" and the "masculine" gender class and the lexical specification of a noun as female-specific or male-specific. Languages of this type will be called "gender languages" or "languages with grammatical gender".[9] The majority of languages included in the project belong to this group: Arabic, Czech, Danish,