

Linguistics 100 Guest Lecture Series Presents:

An Introduction to
Grammatical Gender

Road Map

- ❖ What is grammatical gender?
 - ❖ Indo-European (German)
 - ❖ Niger-Kordofanian (Shona)
- ❖ Typology of grammatical gender
 - ❖ WALS
- ❖ Why do we have it?
 - ❖ Promissory Note

What is Grammatical Gender

- ❖ A morphological specification of a given noun
- ❖ Expressed in verbal or nominal (concord)
- ❖ Can be linked to polyexponence
- ❖ Not to be confused with “noun classifiers”

What is Grammatical Gender

❖ Ein	Knabe	schreibt	seinem	Vater
a.M.SUBJ	boy.M	writes	his-M.IDO	father.M
einen	Brief			
a.M.DO	letter.M			

A boy writes a letter to his father.

❖ Eine	Mädel	gibt	ihrer	Freundin
a.F.SUBJ	girl.F	gives	her-F.IDO	friend.F
eine	Rechnung			
a.F.DO	invoice.F			

A girl gives an invoice to her friend.

What is Grammatical Gender

Feminine Semantic; Feminine Formal

Feminine Semantic; Neuter: Formal

- ❖ Die Müllerstochter war ein schönes und frommes Mädchen und lebte die drei Jahre in Gottesfurcht und ohne Sünde. Als nun die Zeit herum war, und der Tag kam, wo sie der Böse holen wollte, da wusch sie sich rein und machte mit Kreide einen Kranz um sich.
-Das Mädchen ohne Hände (The Girl Without Hands)
- ❖ *The miller's daughter was a beautiful and pious little girl and lived the three years in piety and without sin. When the time drew near, and the day came, when the evil one wanted to take her, she washed herself and made a circle with chalk around herself.*

What is Grammatical Gender

Feminine Semantic; Feminine Formal

Feminine Semantic; Neuter: Formal

- ❖ Bald darauf bekam **sie ein Töchterlein**, das war so weiß wie Schnee, so rot wie Blut, und so schwarzhaarig wie Ebenholz, und ward darum **das Schneewittchen** (Schneeweißchen) genannt. Und wie **das Kind** geboren war, starb **die Königin**.
-Schneewittchen (Snow White)
- ❖ *Soon thereafter **she had a little daughter**, who was so white as snow, so red as blood, and so black-haired as ebony, and therefore was named **the little Snow White**. And as **the child** was born, **the queen** died.*

Shona

- ❖ Belongs to the Niger-Kordofanian family
 - ❖ Niger-Congo → Bantu
- ❖ Shona: Southern Zone (S10)
 - ❖ Spoken in Zimbabwe by ~10,749,200 speakers

Gender	Noun	Gloss	Class Prefix	Subject Marker
1	mukadzi	woman	mu-	a-
2	vakadzi	women	va-	va-
3	muti	tree	mu-	u-
4	miti	trees	mi-	i-
5	dombo	rock	Ø ~ i-	ri-
6	matombo	rocks	ma-	a-
7	chitima	train	chi-	chi-
8	zvitima	trains	zvi-	zvi-
9	imbwa	dog	N-	i-
10	imbwa	dogs	N-	dzi
11 (6 or 10 pl)	ruimi	tongue	ru-	ru-
12	tumbwa	small dogs	tu-	ka-
13	kambwa	small dog	ka-	tu-
14	usiku	night	u-	hu-
15	kufunda	to learn	ku-	ku-
16	pasi	The ground (on)	pa-	pa-
17	kunze	Outside (about)	ku-	ku-
18	mukati	In the middle (in)	mu-	mu-

	Noun	Gloss	Class Prefix	Subject Marker
1	Human Singular		mu-	a-
2	Human Plural		va-	va-
3	muti	tree	mu-	u-
4	miti	trees	mi-	i-
5	dombo	rock	Ø ~ i-	ri-
6	matombo	rocks	ma-	a-
7	chitima	train	chi-	chi-
8	zvitima	trains	zvi-	zvi-
9	imbwa	dog	N-	i-
10	imbwa	dogs	N-	dzi
11 (6 or 10 pl)	ruimi	tongue	ru-	ru-
12	Diminutive Plural		tu-	ka-
13	Diminutive Singular		ka-	tu-
14	usiku	night	u-	hu-
15	Infinitive		ku-	ku-
16	on		pa-	pa-
17	about		ku-	ku-
18	in		mu-	mu-

What is Grammatical Gender

❖ Shona (Fortune 1957)

Mi-ti	i-cha-kura	no-ku-bereka	mu-cherero
4-tree.4	4- FUT-grow	and-15-bear.15	3-fruit.3

The trees will grow and bear fruit.

❖ Class 3

❖ Class 4

❖ Class 15

Typology of Grammatical Gender

- ❖ Rare cross-linguistically
- ❖ According to Nichols (2008) four major language families have grammatical gender
 - ❖ Indo-European (Indic, Iranian, Slavic, Germanic)
 - ❖ Niger-Kordofanian (Atlantic, Bantu)
 - ❖ Afro-Asiatic (Semitic, Chadic, Cushitic)
 - ❖ Nahk-Dagastani (Dagastani)
- ❖ Other language areas include Australia and the Americas

Typology of Grammatical Gender

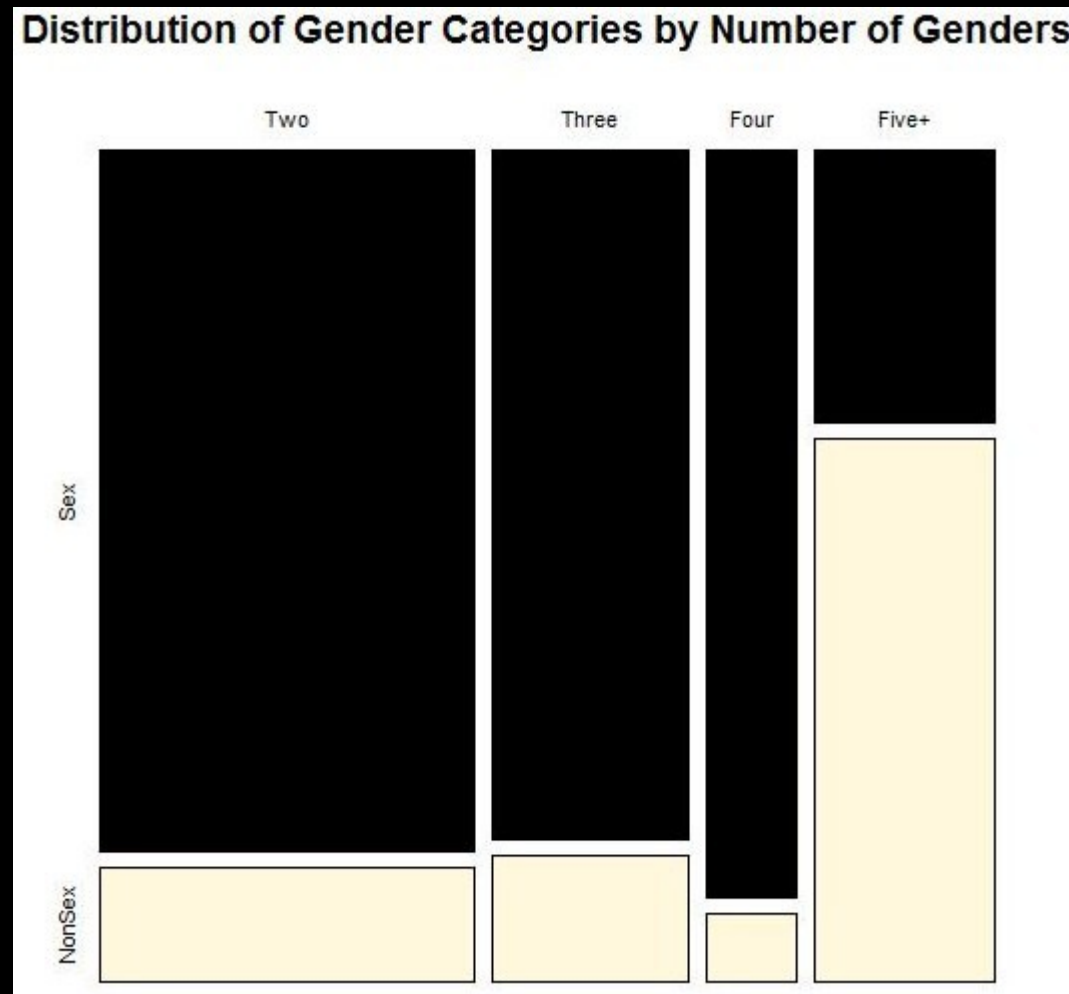
In WALs, Corbett (2011 a, b, c) provides three metrics for measuring gender x-linguistically

- ❖ Number of Categories (Two, Three, Four, Five+)
- ❖ Sex Based vs Non-Sex Based System
- ❖ Semantic vs Semantic/Formal Assignment (Mixed)

Using WALs, we can try to understand how these three interact pairwise.

Does the Number of Genders Predict Gender Type?

Typology of Grammatical Gender



Typology of Grammatical Gender

- ❖ Significant correlation between values and cells which they occupy (Fisher $p=9.535e-06$)
- ❖ Two-Four: 2/3 of the entire data set is sex based
- ❖ Five+: Non sex based is a small percentage total, but within the category of Five+ encapsulates 66% of observances.

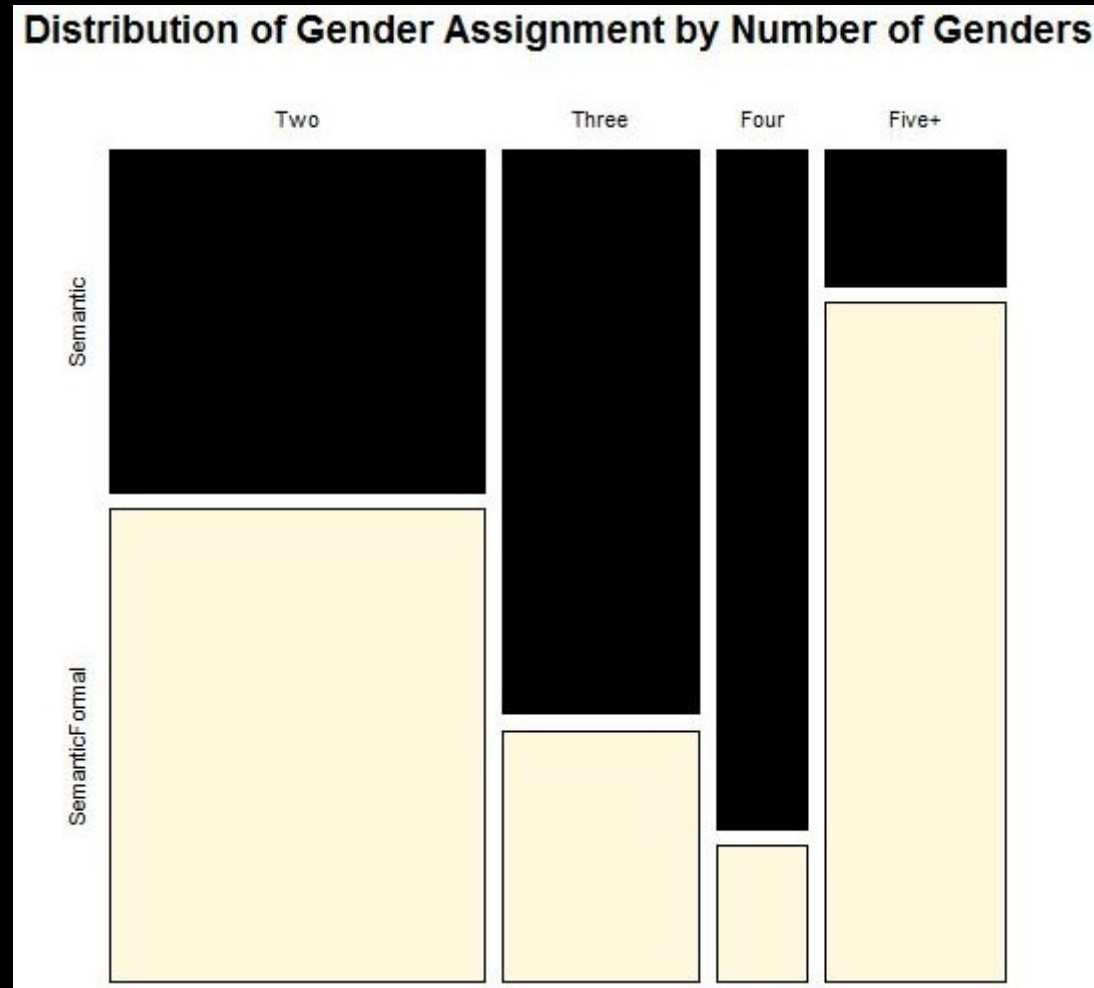
Issues:

- ❖ Potential family bias from Niger-Kordofanian

WALS Gender Number and Gender System

Does the Number of Genders Predict Assignment Type?

Typology of Grammatical Gender



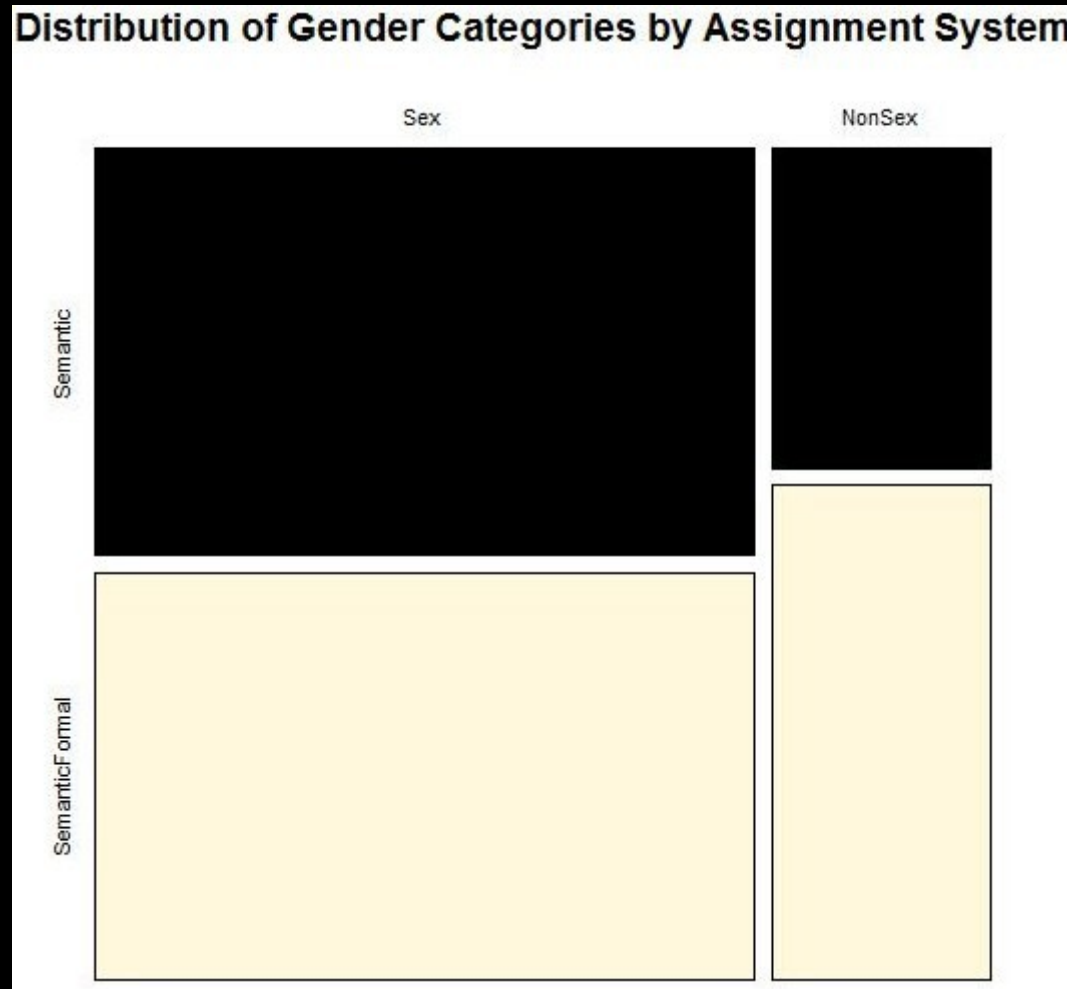
Typology of Grammatical Gender

- ❖ Strong correlation between values and the cells they fall in (Fisher $p=7.307e-05$)
- ❖ Two: 43% of data fall into this category and is a near even split. If you remove Two, then...
- ❖ Three-Four: 45% of the data is semantic assignment
- ❖ Five+: 32% of the data is mixed assignment.

WALS Gender Number and Assignment Type

Does Gender Type Predict Assignment Type?

Typology of Grammatical Gender



Typology of Grammatical Gender

- ❖ No strong correlation between values and the cells they fall in (Fisher $p=0.3854$)
- ❖ Sex based: Majority, near 50/50 in each category
- ❖ Non-Sex Based: Minority, near 50/50 in each category

Issues:

- ❖ Niger-Kordofanian, Nahk-Dagastani, Indo-European, and Afro Asiatic show mixed systems
- ❖ Americas and Australia show semantic system

WALS Assignment Type and Gender System

Why Grammatical Gender?

- ❖ It is rare x-linguistically
- ❖ How can gender be used?
 - ❖ Referent Tracking?
 - ❖ Semantic Binning of Nouns (cf. derivation)
- ❖ What is the locus of its meaning?
 - ❖ Abstract category (eg. Class 4)?
 - ❖ Semantic extension? (read Boroditsky et al. 2003)

References

- ❖ Boroditsky, Lera et al. 2003 Sex, Syntax and Semantics. Language and Mind: Advances in the study of Language and thought. Cambridge: MIT Press.
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