

Lecture 5: **Nominal morphology – Number and Gender****1. Gender**

Gretchen: Wilhelm, where is the turnip? [die Rube]

Wilhelm: She has gone to the kitchen

Gretchen: Where is the accomplished and beautiful English maiden? [das Mädchen]

Wilhelm: It has gone to the opera

Mark Twain ‘The Awful German language’ in *A Tramp Abroad*

- German distinguishes 3 genders – masculine, feminine and neuter
- Found on nouns, adjectives, articles and pronouns
- Articles and adjectives ‘agree’ with noun
- e.g. *la vieille femme est assise* ‘the old woman is seated’
- The names hide the distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘grammatical’ genders
- Gender from Latin *genus* ‘type’
- But from early grammatical descriptions it was confused with ‘natural’ gender
e.g. Protagoras: $\pi\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\xi$ ‘helmet’ should not belong to the feminine gender
- Grimm (19th century) believed that there was a connection
masculine: earlier, larger, firmer, quicker, more inflexible, active, moveable, creative
feminine: later, smaller, softer, quieter, suffering/passive, receptive
- Gender assignment different in every language
- Always a semantic core i.e. some overlap with natural gender
- Some strictly semantic
e.g. Tamil (and other Dravidian langs):

God/male human	masc	aaŋ	man
		civan	Shiva
Goddess/female human	fem	peŋ	woman
		kaa j	Kali
Other	neut	maram	tree
		viitu	house
- Other types: human/non-human, animacy/inanimacy
- But culturally determined e.g. Ojibwa snow, snowshoes and cooking-pots are animate
- Some more ‘arbitrary’ – inanimate objects without biological sex are assigned to the same class as masculine or feminine animate objects.
- “There seems to be no practical criterion by which the gender of a noun in German, French or Latin could be determined” Bloomfield 1933: 280
- BUT - few mistakes
 - borrowed words are assigned a gender
 - invented words are assigned a gender

- Formal elements:
 e.g. German:
 feminine -ung, -heit, -erei, -schaft, -keit
 neuter -lein, -chen, ge-
 (*der Stauch* ‘bush’, *das Gesträuch* ‘shrubbery’)
- Sexist language?
- Dyrirbal – words for women, fire and dangerous things are classified as feminine
- English – hurricanes, boats, cars and countries referred to with feminine pronouns
- Upgrading and downgrading
 e.g. baby = it (*The baby lost its rattle*) = downgrading
 car = she (*Fill her up*) = upgrading
- But why feminine?
- “Hurricanes are destructive and irrational forces which ‘man’ needs to subdue. Similarly, cars, boats and planes, like women, are generally owned and controlled by men.” Romaine p. 8
- More things personified as feminine than masculine in English e.g. liberty, the soul, justice, the moon
- Abstract nouns from Greek mythology e.g. Muses?
- Some amount of cultural associations about women connected to feminine gender
- More of an issue in languages which distinguish grammatical gender e.g. French
 Elle est belle, le nouveau professeur
- Does sometimes work the other way round e.g. *la star* = pop-star of either gender
- Gender distinctions usually redundant from the semantic point of view
- Few nouns are distinguished:
 le mousse the cabin-boy
 la mousse the moss
- Rarely found in same context
- “The functional load of the difference in gender is therefore negligible”
 Lyons *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*
- Only relevant where natural gender is important
 le chien *la chienne*
 il ragazzo *la ragazza*
- Mostly, gender is inherent

2. Latin and Greek

- Sihler claims 3 way split of gender in Latin and Greek = *grammatical gender*
“gender of a word does not relate it with any particularly masculine or feminine features”
- However, most feminine animate objects are feminine, most masculine animate objects are masculine, while most neuters are inanimate
πατήρ ‘father’ masculine
μήτηρ ‘mother’ feminine
- ‘Epicene’ nouns = nouns that can be either masculine or feminine
fēlis ‘cat’ and *canis* ‘dog’,
αἴλουρος ‘cat’ and κύων ‘dog’
- Often derivational suffix indicates gender
e.g. suffix *-ēu-* = masculine:
βασιλεύς ‘king’, ἱερεὺς ‘priest’, ἀμφοροεὺς ‘amphora’ etc.
- But no inflectional feature in πατήρ and μήτηρ to show the gender.
- Few formal differences between masc and fem. Only in first/second declension
- Originally no feminine distinction?
- Hittite = oldest Indo-European language, with only two-way distinction
- 3-way system well established in Greek and Latin

3. Number

- Most common = distinction between singular and plural
- Simple enough division.
- But in fact “the lexical categorization of the world in terms of ‘countable’, ‘collective’ and ‘mass’ nouns varies considerably from language to language” Lyons *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*
grape in English = countable
German *Traube* and Russian *vinograd* = mass,
English *fruit* = mass
French *fruit* = countable
Some either– *wine* normally mass.
But ‘They drink 3 or 4 wines at every meal’
- Indo-European languages also had ‘dual’, denoting ‘two’ or ‘a pair’.
e.g. ἄμφω χεῖρε both hands
- The dual occurs in the earliest stages of several I.E. languages in all categories (verbs, pronouns, nouns)
- Latin *ambo* and *duo* = relics
- Tended to disappear

4. Case study: the neuter plural in Greek

1. A syntactic anomaly

- Neuter plural nouns take a singular verb:
πάντα ῥεῖ
τὰ φύλλα πίπτει
- Optional arrangement:
Homer Iliad O 713 πολλὰ δὲ φάσγανα...χαμάδις πέσον
- Just optional innovation in Greek?
- BUT Hittite neuter plural also takes 3sg verb

2. A morphological anomaly

- Certain nouns can be either neuter or masculine:

κύκλοι

Il. 1. 32-33 ἄν δ' ἔλετ' ἀμφιβρότην πολυδαίδαλον ἀσπίδα θοῦρον
καλήν, ἦν πέρι μὲν κύκλοι δέκα χάλκεοι ἦσαν,
And he took up his richly dight, valorous shield, that sheltered a man on both
sides, a fair shield, and round about it were ten circles of bronze.

κύκλα

Il. 5.722-723 Ἥβη δ' ἀμφ' ὀχέεσσι θοῶς βάλε καμπύλα κύκλα
χάλκεα ὀκτάκνημα σιδηρέω ἄξονι ἀμφίς.
And Hebe quickly put to the car on either side the curved wheels of bronze

Il. 18.375 χρύσεια δέ σφ' ὑπὸ κύκλα ἐκάστω πυθμένι θῆκεν,
And golden wheels had he set beneath the base of each.

μηρούς

Il. 1. 460 μηρούς τ' ἐξέταμον κατὰ τε κνίση ἐκάλυψαν
They cut out the thighs and covered them with a double layer of fat.

μῆρα

Il. 1. 464 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ κατὰ μῆρα κἀη καὶ σπλάγχνα πάσαντο,
But when the thighs were wholly burned, and they had tasted the entrails

- Difference: when masculine = countable, when neuter = mass
- Neuter originally = collective, with no distinction between singular and plural
- Neuter plural ending same as feminine singular ending
- Where does neuter singular come from?
- Neuter singular only differentiated from the masculine in nominative and accusative
- Ending = masculine accusative ending
- Originally different system?

Reading

- Lyons J 1969 *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*
 Sihler A, 1994 *New Comparative Grammar of Greek and Latin*
 Corbett, 1991 *Gender* (CUP)
 Corbett, 2000 *Number* (CUP)
 Romaine S 1997, 'Gender, grammar, and the space in between' at
<http://users.ox.ac.uk/~romaine.gendergrammar.pdf>