

UC Berkeley

UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

A Humanistic Theory of Gender in Language

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4zf9066f>

ISBN

9798293892907

Author

Papadopoulos, Benjamin John

Publication Date

2025-08-01

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

A Humanistic Theory of Gender in Language

by

Ben Papadopoulos

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Hispanic Languages and Literatures

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Gender and Women's Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Justin Davidson, Chair

Professor Paola Bacchetta

Professor Isaac Bleaman

Summer 2025

A Humanistic Theory of Gender in Language

Copyright 2025

by

Benjamin John Papadopoulos

Abstract

A Humanistic Theory of Gender in Language

by

Ben Papadopoulos

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

with a Designated Emphasis in Gender and Women's Studies

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Justin Davidson, Chair

In the field of linguistics, the terms *linguistic* or *grammatical gender* are somewhat of a misnomer. Instead of placing focus on the complex human quality of gender, they point to a particular theory of morphosyntax entitled *agreement-based systems of nominal classification*, more commonly referred to as the feature of *gender*. Any language in which every noun falls into one of two or more nominal classes, in which there is a semantic basis for those nominal classes, and in which morphosyntactic agreement is evidenced qualifies as a language with the feature of gender, while nonqualifying languages are referred to as "genderless" (Corbett, 1991; Dixon, 1982; Kramer, 2015). While there is evidence to suggest that (minimally) masculine-feminine languages like Spanish and Greek give this feature its most commonly-used name (Corbeill, 2015), the concept includes languages whose systems of nominal classification have no basis on the human quality of gender, and it cannot detect normatively gender-specific meanings and distinctions in the other languages of the world.

This dissertation presents an alternate definition and theory of the term *linguistic gender* (disambiguated here using the reordered term *gender in language*) that is equipped to identify normatively gendered meanings and distinctions in the domain of personal reference. The crux of this theory is that there is probably no such thing as a genderless language, meaning that every language contains some feature of gender that meaningfully bears upon the gender of the person being referenced. The theory is supported by a featural typology with data from a great number of typologically distinct world languages and presents eight features, some of which are underresearched or unstudied: lexical gender,

pronominal gender, affixal gender, classifier gender, orthographic gender, sign gender, particle gender, and (minimally) masculine-feminine morphosyntactic gender. These features are arranged along a scale of embeddedness, revealing two extremes: the grammatically unembedded feature of lexical gender and the most highly embedded feature of (minimally) masculine-feminine morphosyntactic gender.

Throughout the text, special focus is placed on the communities of people who face challenges expressing their gender identities linguistically, including but not limited to nonbinary, trans, and other gender nonconforming people. For this reason, the mechanism behind the use of gender in language is also interrogated and described as a moment of snap judgment in which speakers make a decision about how to gender the referent in lieu of the referent's formal declaration about which gendered linguistic forms they would like to be addressed with. For this reason, normative masculine and feminine forms are described in detail along with gender-neutral forms and gender-inclusive forms adopted by members of the queer and genderqueer communities for the purpose of adequate linguistic gender self-expression. Relatedly, the consequences of misgendering are described and cited as being hazardous to gender nonconforming people and access to gender-inclusive language is defended as a fundamental human right.

Contents

Abstract	1
Contents	i
List of Figures	iii
Dedication	v
Acknowledgments	vi
1 Gender	1
1.0 "Biological Sex"	6
1.1 Gender	8
1.2 Gender in Language	13
1.3 Conclusion	16
2 Gender in Language	17
2.0 Introduction	17
2.1 Agreement-Based Systems of Nominal Classification	20
2.1.1 Terminological and Conceptual Challenges for the Study of Gender within Agreement-Based Systems of Nominal Classification	32
2.1.2 Place of Gender within Agreement-Based Systems of Nominal Classification	36
2.2 Classifier Languages	38
2.2.1 Place of Gender within Classifier Languages	45
2.3 Language and Gender Subfield	46
2.4 Structural Gender Linguistics	50
2.5 Conclusion	52

3	A Humanistic Theory of Gender in Language	55
3.0	Introduction	55
3.1	A Humanistic Theory of Gender in Language	58
3.2	About the Typology	61
3.3	Lexicosemantic Gender and the Myth of the "Genderless" Language	67
3.4	Embedded Features of Gender in Language	74
3.4.1	Affixal Gender	76
3.4.2	Pronominal Gender	82
3.4.3	Classifier Gender	87
3.4.4	Orthographic Gender	93
3.4.5	Particle Gender	97
3.4.6	Sign Gender	102
3.5	Masculine-Feminine Morphosyntactic Gender, the Most Highly Embedded Feature	107
3.6	Conclusion	111
4	Gender-Inclusive Language	112
4.0	Introduction	113
4.1	Misgendering and Linguistic Gender Affirmation	116
4.2	Gender-Inclusive Language	120
4.2.1	Germanic	120
4.2.2	Romance	123
4.2.3	Other Languages	128
4.3	Analysis of Extant Gender-Inclusive Forms	132
4.4	Conclusion: Gender-Inclusive Language as a Form of Resistance	134
	References	138

List of Figures

2.1.1	The general shape of a language with an agreement-based system of nominal classification	21
2.1.2	Example systems of agreement-based nominal classification	22
2.1.3	The masculine-feminine system of Spanish	23
2.1.4	Evidence of gender agreement with English personal nouns	25
2.1.5	Examples sentences with pronominal gender and the absence of a noun	30
2.2.1	The general function and distribution of classifiers	39
2.2.2	Examples of sortal and mensural numeral classifiers in Mandarin Chinese	41
2.2.3	Examples of noun classifiers in Chuj (Mayan)	42
2.2.4	Examples of possessed classifiers in Ponapean (Austronesian)	43
2.2.5	Examples of verbal classifiers in Imonda (Papuan)	43
2.2.6	Examples of locative classifiers in Dâw (Naduhup)	44
2.2.7	Examples of deictic classifiers in Kadiwéu (Guaicuruan)	44
2.2.8	Jacaltec classifiers	46
3.0	Scale of embeddedness of gender in language	55
3.2	Values of gender in featural typology	63
3.2.1	Transformation of grammar based on nominal class values into grammar of normative gender values (Greek)	64
3.2.2	Creation of grammar of normative gender values (English)	64
3.2.3	Typology of the features of gender in language	66
3.3	Abbreviated matrix of English kinship terms	68
3.3.1	Abbreviated matrix of Hungarian kinship terms	68
3.3.2	Abbreviated matrix of Farsi (Persian) kinship terms	69
3.3.3	Abbreviated matrix of Vietnamese kinship terms	70

3.3.4	Basic personhood terms in Aymara	73
3.4.1	Affixal inflection for normative gender	78
3.3.4.1	Traces of morphological gender in English	80
3.4.2	Third-person singular personal pronouns in the top twenty most spoken languages of the world	85
3.4.2.1	Third-person pronouns in Modern Greek	86
3.4.3	Classifier gender in Jacaltec	89
3.4.3.1	Baniwa classifiers used in personal reference	90
3.4.3.2	Classifier gender in Baniwa	92
3.4.4	Orthographic gender in scripts of the ancient world	94
3.4.4.1	Chinese words with the 'female radical' 女	96
3.4.4.2	Japanese words with the 'female radical' 女	97
3.4.5	Particle gender in Japanese	99
3.4.5.1	Particle gender in Thai	100
3.4.6	Normative gender inflection in American Sign Language	104
3.4.6.1	The lexical gender equivalent in American Sign Language	105
3.4.6.2	Normative gender hand shapes in Japanese Sign Language	106
3.5	Sentence in English, Palestinian Arabic, Spanish, Greek, and Hebrew with gendered forms in bold	109
4.0	Related case and article forms of English personal pronouns	114
4.2.1	Partial grammar of gender-inclusive English	122
4.2.2	Partial grammar of gender-inclusive Spanish	125
4.2.2.1	Partial grammar of gender-inclusive Italian	127
4.2.3	Third-person singular personal pronouns in Mandarin Chinese	130
4.2.3.1	Inclusive sign gender in American Sign Language	131

To my mother, Becky Roberts, who gave me life
and continues to give me life every single day.
You are the reason I made it past the finish line.

To the trans, nonbinary, gender nonconforming, genderqueer, and
broader queer communities. This dissertation is for you.

Acknowledgments

My immediate family has been my biggest system of support throughout my life. I hold in the highest regard my parents Becky Roberts and George Papadopoulos as well as my brother Nicholas Papadopoulos, all of whom are geniuses in their own right. My parents worked so hard for me to go to college in a place where I could truly flourish. The words “thank you” are simply not enough.

I have been extremely grateful to have some of the best friends anybody could ask for. Thank you to Claudia Valdivia, Gal Tabachnik, and Elle Gordon for your support of me throughout my entire academic journey. You’re the best thing that Berkeley gave me.

Completing my doctorate would not have been possible without my amazing committee members who have been with me through every major milestone. Thank you to Isaac Bleaman for your exacting and encouraging feedback. I’m grateful you witnessed me progress from barista to Doctor of Philosophy. Thank you to Paola Bacchetta for exposing me to worlds that I couldn’t imagine not inhabiting now. Your constant encouragement, kindness, and genius kept me going throughout all the challenges I faced in my doctorate. I hope we run into each other again soon at Andronico’s. Finally, I would like to thank Justin Davidson, who I studied with for over eight years, even before my doctorate. I cannot count the times that you helped me overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Your level of dedication to your students is truly unmatched and it made all the difference for me. I would also like to thank Jhonni Carr, who served as an advisor to me throughout my time at Berkeley, including during my undergraduate career.

I was lucky enough to be in such an inspirational and intellectually rich environment at Berkeley where I learned from so many of my colleagues. Thank you to Alejandra Decker, Ernesto Gutiérrez Topete, Annie Helms, Anahit Manoukian, Gabriel Lesser, Cameron Flynn, Jonathan Jones-Edwards, Luisina Gentile, Gladys Rivas, Karol Alzate, Marlena Gittleman, Marguerite Morlan, Jennifer Kaplan, Haley Stewart, Jhonni Carr, Román Luján, and Mâsi Santos.

I proudly took on the role of welcoming committee for the visiting scholars in my vicinity and ended up making amazing colleagues and lifelong friends because of it. I am

truly indebted to Miriam Zapf and Evelin Balog for letting me be your guide. It was so rewarding to watch you thrive at Berkeley and I cannot thank you enough for welcoming me to Germany in return. I am eternally grateful to Laura Álvarez López, who later sat on the committee of my qualifying exams and then brought me to Stockholm University for a magical week that I will never forget. Thank you also to Nicolai Witthøff, who took wonderful care of me in Stockholm. Finally, thank you to Uri Mor and Eran Inbar for allowing me to see the San Francisco Bay Area through new eyes and for continuing to be guardians of my ascent. I appreciate you and I continue to learn so much from you. See you all soon.

Through the Lavender Languages and Linguistics community, I have been privileged to find my interests reflected in scholars with brilliant minds, including but not limited to Ártemis López, Julia Donnelly Spiegelman, Montreal Benesch, Max Reuvers, Ehm Hjorth-Nebel Miltersen, Inés de la Villa Vecilla, and Joey Andrew Lucido Santos.

I have some really powerful and caring colleagues at the University of Southern California. Thank you to Liana Stepanyan, María Mercedes Fages Agudo, and Evgeny Dengub.

Outside of my regular teaching, I had the high privilege of mentoring several scholars who worked with me to develop the Gender in Language Project (genderinlanguage.com): Gabí Agramont-Justiniano, Cooper Bedin, Carmela Blazado, Sol Cintrón, Sebastian Clendenning-Jiménez, Caitlin Clift, Keira Colleluori, Jesus Duarte, Julie Duran, Chandler Fliege, Julie Ha, Clio Hartman, José Iñíguez, Zaphiel Kiriko Robinson, Ina Nierotka, Alexandra Rankin, Kalinda Reynolds, Drew Ruscignuolo, Grant Santos, Serah Sim, Chelsea Tang, Xuedi Yang, and Irene Yi. It was the pleasure of a lifetime to work with you and to help launch you into the world of academia. You gave me my highest sense of purpose at Berkeley. It is an honor to be in your lives. You make me so proud!

The hundreds of students that I had the pleasure of teaching will remain in my heart forever. Thank you for allowing me to understand my purpose. As I look back on your names, I wanted to list some that I have vivid memories of engaging with and learning from. From my Spanish 1 course in 2020, thank you to Anna Chau, Cameron Black, Deena Sabry, Dominique Cope, Jihyeong Lee, Peyton Brooks, and Pilar Jefferson, some of my first students! From my Spanish 1 course in 2021, thank you to Audrey Phan, Fiwasewa Ogundipe, Helen Bui, Ken Wu, Pam Hernández, Michelle Higa, Sarah Han, and Sonali Singh. From my Spanish 2 course in 2021, thank you to Mylo Florencia, Kazuki Furuya, Jaeden Quintana, and Stephanie Wenclawski. From my Spanish 2 course in 2022, thank you to Preston Hong, Katie

Rodríguez, Terrell Thompson, and Rachel Woody. From my LGBT 20AC course in 2022, thank you to Vivienne Bridges, Xander Fleming, Kat Fosse, Rose Goyette, Alorah Kanyer Palacios, Jonathan Monroe, Aly Montiel, Katherine Rodríguez, Léa Roullier, Cynthia Salazar, Rico Velázquez Ángel, Sydney Wyma, and Wilfredo Zuloaga-Hernández. From my Spanish 100 course in 2023, thank you to Alessi Ayvaz, Geo Castro, Ruby de Anda Enríquez, Kenneth Gallanosa, Michelle Hernández, Luz Limón, Yaritza López, Belén Mendoza, Katherine Menendez, and Charles Alex Paltzer. And finally, from my Spanish 179 course in 2025, I thank the following students for participating in my signature course: Everett Anderson, Sarah Axelrod, Emma Berman, Viry Flores, Raquel Gass, Anoushka Ghosh, Kat Hodge, Stephanie Monroy, Silveria Ortíz Germán, Saidy Reyes, Citlali Romero, Jenny Rosales-Andia, Darleen Salazar, Victoria Soriano-Izarraras, and Roberto Yip Huang.

A special paragraph in these acknowledgments is reserved for Rita Dana (Ρίτα Δανά), the phenomenal teacher that taught me Greek and connected me to my heritage throughout the latter half of my PhD. I am incredibly grateful to you, Rita, for giving me this gift and for helping me while I lived abroad in Athens.

Lastly, I would like to express my eternal gratitude to the many members of my personal community and the academic community at large who helped me check the data for the many languages that are included in this dissertation. Thank you to Laura Álvarez López for reviewing the data on Swedish. Thank you to Miriam Zapf for reviewing the data on German. Thank you to Rita Dana (Ρίτα Δανά) for reviewing the data on Greek. Thank you to Evelin Balog for reviewing the data on Hungarian. Thank you to Tyler Méndez Kline for reviewing the data on Farsi. Thank you to Isaac Bleaman, Uri Mor, and Gal Tabachnik for your expertise in Hebrew. Thank you to Nguyễn Nguyệt Cẩm and Danny Tín Phạm for reviewing the data on Vietnamese. Thank you to Nataliia Goshlyk for reviewing the data on Ukrainian. Thank you to Sandra Cronhamn for reviewing the data on Baniwa, and for your exceptional dissertation that led me to the discovery of the concept of classifier gender. Thank you to Zaphiel Kiriko Robinson for reviewing the data on Japanese. Thank you to the brilliant and incredibly kind Chansak Siengyen (ชาญศักดิ์ เสียงเย็น) for your nuanced notes on the Thai language. Finally, I cannot thank enough Grant Santos and Emil Abu Salha for your contributions to the Palestinian Arabic content in this dissertation. I learned so much while working with you.

1 Gender

This dissertation covers the topic of *gender-inclusive language*, or specific words in any language that may be used by nonbinary, trans, gender nonconforming, or other types of people to self-identify, as well as to be referred to specifically or neutrally by others. It traces the issue through theoretical worlds as far back as necessary, including by identifying the known features of normative masculine and feminine gender in language, and by interrogating the very definition of *gender* in formal linguistic theory. Ultimately, it posits the issue of binary gender in language as hazardous to gender variant people around the world and establishes the use and acceptance of gender-inclusive language as a fundamental aspect of gender affirmation that must be defended. It is being filed in a time and place that make such arguments more timely and consequential than ever, and which illustrate the necessity of revisiting the most antecedent concepts of "*biological sex*" and *human* or *social gender* as a starting point.

* * *

For the United States, where this dissertation was written, the year 2025 marks the most widespread institutional attack on the concept of gender in the country's history. On January 20, 2025, a new regime entered the White House and immediately penned a number of executive orders meant to position the gender nonconforming subject as a target of the administration. The first was Executive Order 14168, entitled "Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government." This order depicts trans people as "men" who self-identify as "women" in order to gain access to "single-sex" spaces and attack women. It declared that the United States would recognize only two sexes, male and female, which are "not changeable and grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality" (Exec. Order No. 14168, 2025). It decreed that in federal documents, the word *gender* was to be removed and replaced by the word *sex*, and that any language that "promotes gender ideology" was to be abandoned (ibid). Following the signing of the order, the words *gender* and *transgender* were to be removed from the national archives, including from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where thousands of pages with the word *transgender* and the acronym *LGBT* were deleted, as well

as statistics about HIV within trans and racialized populations, and statistics about health outcomes for queer people more generally (Mandavilli & Rabin, 2025, Steenhuysen & Hessen, 2025). One week later, trans people in the Armed Forces were deemed not “mentally and physically fit for duty” and were intended to be dismissed in a second executive order that also called for the end of “invented and identification-based pronoun usage” (Exec. Order No. 14183, 2025). This same order implied that individuals with gender dysphoria do not live an “honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle,” that they do not live up to a “warrior ethos,” and because they require others to “honor the falsehood” of their true gender identity, they are not humble or selfless enough to serve in the military (ibid). The next day, a third executive order, entitled “Protecting Children From Chemical and Surgical Mutilation,” intended to halt gender-affirming care for trans children and teenagers, citing a particular concern about sterilization, as well as the basis of gender transition on “junk science,” implying that gender dysphoria is a disease that must be cured (Exec. Order No. 14187, 2025). Then, eight days later, a fourth executive order announced the government’s intent to defund educational programs that allowed trans people, referred to only as “men,” to participate in “women’s sports,” citing the protection of “opportunities for women and girls to compete in safe and fair sports” (Exec. Order No. 14201, 2025). These executive orders, all of which were legally challenged, aimed to pathologize gender nonconforming people as mentally ill predators under the guise of “protecting women.” They focus on a representation of trans women as predatory “men” whose gender dysphoria is just an excuse to prey on “women.” Conversely, the concept of a trans man (nor any other queer gender) is never specifically invoked. Of course, the logic presented in these orders is scientifically and empirically invalid. Intersex people are proof of the fact that there are not only two “biological sexes” (Blackless et al., 2000; Fausto-Sterling, 2020), and the establishment of the concept of gender and its distinction from “biological sex” is empirically and institutionally recognized as psychological, social, and medical reality.

At the same time as these orders explicitly targeting “gender ideology,” others were signed that attempted to attack diversity, equity, and inclusion [DEI] programs, which among other goals promote exposure to and the acceptance of diverse, intersectional human identities and lived experiences based on gender, sexuality, race, ability, place of origin, and other factors. The first executive order of this set, entitled “Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity,” reframes the issue of racial and gender-based discrimination as discrimination against white, cisheteronormative people, citing

"dangerous, demeaning, and immoral race- and sex-based preferences" in education and public-sector employment that "deny, discredit, and undermine the traditional American values of hard work, excellence, and individual achievement," and it instructed any federal agency that participated in these processes to cease related activity (Exec. Order No. 14173). It also foreshadowed an assault on public and private education, as well as the private sector of employment (ibid). Eight days later, another executive order entitled "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling" formalized the beginning of this assault and intended to eliminate federal funding for K-12 programs that educate children and teenagers on racism and sexism throughout American history (Exec. Order No. 14190). It also defined the concept of "social transition" as adopting a new gender identity "that differs from a person's sex," seeking counseling in school, changing one's name or pronouns, identifying as nonbinary, or using bathrooms or participating in sports "designated for persons of the opposite sex" (ibid). Any school that "supported" the social transition of a minor, including by having staff or teachers who would "deliberately [conceal] the minor's social transition from the minor's parents," was to be federally defunded. In the context of these executive orders targeting DEI programs, a white congressman in favor of abandoning them at the University of Texas at Austin responded, "I don't even know what that means, ma'am," to a Black congresswoman who quizzed him on intersex people in the Texas House of Representatives (Ruby, 2025). He also insisted that gender and "biological sex" are one and the same, citing the Bible (ibid). In her rebuttal, the congresswoman replied, "you want to defund a program about something that you don't understand," thereby gently underscoring the necessity of such education, especially among people who have benefitted from legacies of slavery, colonialism, genocide, evangelism, and other forms of white supremacy (ibid).

Naturally, other executive orders elaborated this dystopian worldbuilding by attempting to provide protections for radical Christian groups identified by the FBI as domestic terrorism threats (Exec. Order No. 14202, 2025), by intending to eliminate the Department of Education, which among other things, enforces Title IX, the statute that protects against sex-based discrimination in federally-funded educational programs (Exec. Order No. 14242, 2025), by seeking to censor representations of racism and sexism throughout American history in the Smithsonian Museums (Exec. Order No. 14253, 2025), and by designating English as the one "and only" official language of the United States, citing that such a move would "reinforce shared national values and create a more cohesive and efficient society" (Exec. Order No. 14224, 2025). Within these examples about the

federal attack on all types of social marginality, which also illustrate their intersections, many recurring themes appear: the barrage of assaults on the rights of gender nonconforming people, the intended erasure of histories of slavery, genocide, and racial and sexual discrimination, and the policing of language, including the codification of a national language and the enactment of an English-only policy. The most frequent site of these attacks is K-12 education, where children are socialized and minds are developed, as well as institutions of higher education, the vanguard of resistance and the place where empirical knowledge is made. For this reason, it is not hard to see the picture of America illustrated in these orders as a white, cisheteronormative, ignorant, Christian nationalist nation that systematically targets anyone who does not conform to the teachings of state propaganda. To take the most socially and institutionally marginalized of all marginalized subjects, the gender variant and/or racialized person, including children, and to turn them into a scapegoat for the blockage of the elite from freely torching the Earth and its citizens for their own personal gain can only be described a crisis. It is fortuitous and terrifying that a scholar seeking to explain the motivations for their dissertation on gender, its intersections, and language is delivered those motivations by a regime change in their own country that threatens to repress the knowledge they have created and to target it only because they wish to sensitize the public to one aspect of the suffering of multiply marginalized people around the world.

Ruth Ben-Ghiat (2024) notes that in authoritarian regimes, "meaning is inverted and hate speech is elevated into state dogma." The term *political propaganda* describes the manipulation of language by fascist and other types of anti-democratic regimes to change the way that citizens think and feel by linking a web of negative associations to the regime's targets, often relying on the fact that most citizens have never even met a member of the targeted population, as in the case of highly minoritized and marginalized populations who are targeted (ibid; Oddo, 2023). Political propaganda frequently relies on the spread of *disinformation*, or the intentional propagation of false or misleading information that serves to manipulate (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2015, p. 28). These tactics are displayed explicitly in the executive orders introduced in the paragraphs above. In them, we view an attempt to eradicate the words *gender*, *transgender*, and *nonbinary*, among others, to redefine and conflate the term *gender* with an incorrect definition of "biological sex," to associate DEI and the term "gender ideology" with radical indoctrination, and to invert the meaning of "discrimination" by redefining anti-discrimination initiatives as themselves discriminatory

toward privileged members of society. There is also a revealing deployment of the so-called “us-versus-them” positionality in the order declaring English as the one and only official language of the United States, citing the continuous use of English as the governmental language since the founding of “our Republic,” which clearly delineates white Americans from Native Americans and enslaved Africans, both of whom were disfranchised and persecuted to lethal effect by the fledgling Republic (Exec. Order No. 14224, 2025).

Relatedly, the codification of a national language is extremely worrisome because it could be used to define citizenship, as a reason to deny the right to an interpreter in legal settings, or to quell support for multilingualism in society in other ways. In all of these examples, it is plain to see how language, in addition to the gendered and/or racialized subject, is another target of the administration. Yet language is not just some immaterial, detached object that bears no connection to reality. Instead, the connection between language and real life can be seen in cases in which it effectuates adverse outcomes, such as trans and gender nonconforming people receiving incorrect passports that mark their sex assigned at birth instead of their previously petitioned marker (ACLU, 2025), or having all hormone therapy cut off and being given thirty days to socially detransition in a state prison (ACLU, 2024).

It is against the backdrop of this crucible that this dissertation is being filed. It has the explicit goal of visibilizing and uplifting the nonbinary, trans, intersex, or otherwise gender nonconforming person, as well as exposing how the challenges they face are emblemized and exaggerated by language. The remainder of this first chapter briefly outlines empirical theories about “biological sex” and gender before introducing the topic of gender in language that is to be problematized throughout the rest of the dissertation. Chapter 2 frames the treatment of the concept of gender in formal linguistic theory, arriving at the conclusion that the current definition of *linguistic gender* is both too broad and too narrow in addition to not triangulating the proper issue that would allow for the contextualization of gender-inclusive language. Chapter 3 intends to fill this gap by introducing a new definition and theory of *gender in language* based on the humanistic meaning of the word *gender* before enumerating a typology of the known features of gender found in different languages and proposing a scale of their embeddedness in the grammar. Finally, Chapter 4 chronicles the topic of gender-inclusive language by compiling the strategies and innovative forms used by gender nonconforming people around the world to self-identify in different languages.

1.0 "Biological Sex"

Even when not from within a quotation, the term "biological sex" appears in quotation marks throughout this dissertation because although it points to the desired concept of human sexual differentiation, it is contested for various reasons. The term "biological sex" entered the American legal system with a static definition in the 1970s in the context of debates about the right of transgender people to declare a different sex marker and subvert same-sex marriage bans (Clarke, 2022, p. 1839). The term *sex assigned at birth* or *assigned sex at birth* [ASAB] is preferred because it points to the medical creation and institutionalization of sexual dimorphism and describes its construction as an agentive process of manipulation and assignment by medical professionals. It is also preferred because such an understanding allows for the legal advocacy of intersex, trans, and other gender variant people, as it critiques the notion that "biological sexes" are discrete, and because of the argument that gender is also at least part biological, or in other words, no less natural (Clarke, 2022, p. 1821).

Intersex people are the best proof that sexual dimorphism, or the belief in two discrete "biological sexes," male and female, is indeed a construct. *Intersex* is an umbrella term for the spectrum of people who do not conform to an expectation of sexual dimorphism because of chromosomal differences, hormonal deviations, and/or differences in reproductive and sexual anatomy (OHCHR, 2019). By one estimation, approximately 1.7% of all live births fall into this category (Blackless et al., 2000). There are at least six chromosomal deviations—XXY, XO, XYY, XXYY, XX males, and 47,XXX females—from "normative" XY males and XX females, and a wide variety of contributing factors have been identified, such as androgen insensitivity syndrome and congenital adrenal hyperplasia (Blackless et al., 2000; Fausto-Sterling, 2020). In ancient times, intersex people were recognized by the now-disfavored term *hermaphrodite*, for instance in the Ancient Greek myths of Ερμαφρόδιτος *Ermafróditos*, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite who became fused with a female naiad (Delcourt, 1961). There is evidence for the legal incorporation of intersex people into Ancient Jewish society, as evidenced by their inclusion in parameters of inheritance set forth in the Talmud and the Tosefta (Greenberg, 1999, p. 277). In modern times, especially because social and legal structures are more rigidly dyadic, intersex babies who do not fall within the normal range of prototypical maleness or femaleness are frequently engineered to fit into one category or the other through surgical and hormonal

interventions before the infant is even two years old (interACT, 2021). These procedures are viewed as a social, not a medical imperative, following the logic that the child is better off being made to conform to one "biological sex" or the other rather than potentially being outcasted and subjected to lifelong discrimination. The interventions cause both profound psychological damage as well as physical damage described by intersex people themselves as mutilation, like scarring, the loss of sexual ability, and they can lead to many more surgical and hormonal interventions over the course of an intersex person's life (Fausto-Sterling, 2020). Because of this, the view held by most intersex rights organizations is that such interventions should be made only if they are medically necessary, and that the child should have the choice to make their own decisions later in life, especially because the great majority of intersex people are perfectly healthy without medical intervention (interACT, 2021; OHCHR, 2019).

Beyond the medical realm, intersex people are pressured to conform to a belief in sexual dimorphism in order to ensure their own legal rights, beginning with the issuing of their documents as being legally male or female. Legally, "biological sex," as well as the terms *male* and *female* are inconsistently defined and often undefined. For instance, the terms *male* and *female* are not defined in the Defense of Marriage Act, which banned the federal recognition of same-sex marriage from 1996 until 2013, allowing for its occasional subversion (Greenberg, 1999), nor in Executive Order 14168, where the terms are only defined as "adult and juvenile males/females," respectively (Exec. Order No. 14168, 2025). This is another reason that the framework of assigned sex at birth continues to be invoked legally; while the binary choice between M and F markers is generally unproblematic for binary transgender people, providing that there is a mechanism to change them, the X marker has never been issued in the United States at birth, even for intersex people, and it was only available for a short window of time for intersex, nonbinary, and other adults to opt into from 2022 until its discontinuation in 2025 (Lambda Legal, 2025). Thus, in order to exist legally in the United States, the modern intersex or nonbinary person, for example, must play into the medical and legal construct of sexual dimorphism against their will.

In addition to the concept of "biological sex" being itself nonbinary, it is also well-understood that it is not immutable. Beyond intersex people, many other types of gender variant people, such as (binary) trans men and trans women may voluntarily undergo gender-affirming therapies, including hormone replacement therapies, gender-affirming surgeries, or other feminizing or masculinizing procedures in order to medically transition

and achieve physiological conformity with bodies of the "opposite sex". Nonbinary people may use gender-affirming therapies to achieve a hormonal or physiological status that defies binary expectations, and it is also worth noting that cisgender people frequently avail themselves of gender-affirming therapies, such as laser hair removal, breast augmentation, and treatments for hair loss, including many of the most vocal opponents of the right of gender nonconforming people to exist. In its totality, "*biological sex*" can be understood as a continuum comprised of all human bodies and their hormonal, chromosomal, gonadal, and other biological differences. The imaginary of sexual dimorphism is a highly prevalent societal myth that is due in part to medical and legal institutions, and as we will see, it follows from a centuries-old colonial logic.

1.1 Gender

Crucially, intersex people, as well as trans and other gender nonconforming people, provide the basis for the distinction between "*biological sex*" and the concept of *gender identity*. Within the medical realm, this distinction was popularized by the sexologists John Money and Anke A. Ehrhardt (1972), who posited gender identity as the private experience of a gender role influenced by society as well as the biological process of sexual differentiation (p. 3-4). It is only with these additional realms of psychology and society that the concept of gender may be fully understood. The many layers of sexual differentiation begin to take place in the fetal stage and progress throughout adolescence and through the complete development of the adult brain (Money & Ehrhardt, 1972). This is the strictly biological realm, and as elucidated in Section 1.0, this process of sexual *differentiation* cannot successfully be described as sexual *dimorphism*. From very early on in life, infants and toddlers that are beginning their processes of socialization, or their multifaceted introduction into society, consciously or subconsciously compare themselves to people of all ages around them and observe their gender roles and gender self-presentation, among other factors. It is within this process that some children begin to experience gender dysphoria, which is defined as the distress produced when one's true gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth (Mayo Clinic, 2025). *Gender identity*, or more simply *gender*, may then be correlated with the psychological realm, which may be viewed as the intervening layer between the body and gender roles in society. In this way, the concept of psychosexual differentiation not only separates the biological and psychological layers, but it nullifies the ideas that

“biological sex” and gender are one and the same and that they necessarily have a neat one-to-one correspondence, especially because gender is also *not* a binary phenomenon. For binary trans people, these feelings of gender dysphoria may result in people assigned male at birth identifying as a woman or people assigned female at birth identifying as a man. For intersex people, this may result in identifying as nonbinary or with a gender that does not align neatly with their sex assigned (and/or constructed) at birth, and for other gender variant people, as for each group mentioned above, this may result in identification with any possible gender, and these identifications can change throughout one’s life, as is the case with “biological sex.”

It is possible that without society (in other words, if we all were the only person on Earth), gender would not exist. Bodies acquire a gender when the expectation of a particular gender role is placed upon them. The idea of a gender role includes a nebulous web of concepts including reproductive capacity, sexual ability, sexuality, and others’ perceptions of one’s “biological sex,” among many others. In a simplistic, pre-feminist sense, two gender roles could be identified as a mother and a father, each associated with a discrete biological category and each with particular functions in society. Whereas a mother is normatively viewed as a child-rearing person assigned to the domestic realm of homemaking, a father is normatively viewed as a non-child-rearing person whose function is to participate in the economy and protect the nuclear family unit. In the Western imaginary of the binary gender system, these gender roles are the basis of an understanding of *men* and *women*, the gender identities frequently conflated with the biological constructs *male* and *female*, respectively. The broader purpose of the binary gender system and the belief in sexual dimorphism (which were not conceptualized as separate for most of human history) was to advance the human race through procreation, hence the longstanding societal preoccupation with non-cisheteronormative people of all kinds.

In addition to the understanding of gender identity that originated in the field of sexology, many scholars worked to proliferate the concept during the latter half of the 20th century. For instance, psychologists Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna worked to further an understanding of how exactly the process of gender attribution functions, or in other words, how different genders are assigned to different bodies. In their influential “overlay” perception study, Kessler & McKenna (1978) created 96 figures from all possible combinations of 11 plastic overlays: long hair, short hair, wide hips, narrow hips, breasts, a flat chest, body hair, a penis, and a vagina, with some figures clothed and others unclothed

(p. 145). 960 participants (ten for each figure) were then asked if these figures represented a male or a female. For the clothed figures, almost all of the attributes tested produced a great deal of variation in participants' attributions, though in the presence of more stereotypically masculine cues like short hair and a flat chest, participants were more likely to declare that these figures were male. For the unclothed figures, the presence of a penis produced near-categorical responses (96%) from participants declaring the figure to be male, while not even the presence of a vagina produced a categorical response (64%) from participants declaring the figure to be female (ibid, p. 151). In other words, where genitals were not exposed, almost all of the correlates tested could be made sense of as more masculine or feminine in combination, which more clearly points to the concept of gender, except the presence of more stereotypically masculine traits, which skewed participants toward responses declaring the figures to be male. In the presence of a penis, not even a stereotypically feminine combination of the other features tested shook participants from a deterministic understanding of that body as male. For Kessler & McKenna, "gender attribution is, for the most part, genital attribution, and genital attribution is basically penis attribution" (1978, p. 153). While within this early perceptual study, the terms *male* and *female* are used to isolate the concept of gender, revealing the potency of their conflation throughout time, its utility exists in its discovery of the fact that most combinations of stereotypically male or female physiological traits could be understood as belonging to a woman or a man, but once genitals were revealed, especially a penis, not even all the other correlates being stereotypically feminine could override participants' view of the figure as male, thereby demonstrating how strongly "biological sex" is correlated with stereotypically gendered associations of the body.

Following the empirical establishment of the entanglement of the concepts of "biological sex" and gender, Judith Butler's phenomenological theory about the constitution of the gendered body has been perhaps the most prevalent in the present day. Butler (1988) argues against the idea that gender is predetermined by "biological sex" and instead asserts that gender is created through the repetition of acts against a backdrop of societally-imposed assumptions and expectations. Butler (ibid) explains that some concepts believed to be natural, such as sexual dimorphism, are themselves the result of the repetition of certain acts that have constituted a belief in them as natural over time. Some of these acts have already been introduced in this chapter, such as the medical and legal coercion of intersex people to conform to a belief in sexual dimorphism and the constant

assignment of binary categories to people based on known or perceived information about their "biological sex." Another can be conceptualized as the everyday use of language to reify the belief in binary gender categories with gendered pronouns, gender-specific nouns (e.g. *father/mother, son/daughter*), and other linguistic devices, including discourse. Butler draws on speech act theory and phenomenological theories of constitution to outline the discursive construction of gender as a performative accomplishment which is reinscribed habitually through language, culture, and other symbolic acts, and then believed by social actors to be prediscursive or preexisting. For Butler (1988), "biological sex" is not antecedent to anything; instead, the genesis of gender is performative and a result of the repeated "stylization of the body," for example dressing in particular clothes, applying makeup, displaying different forms of expressiveness through gesture, modulating the voice and specific speech styles, constructing the existence of gender in discourse, and reproducing certain gendered dynamics in interaction (p. 519). The theory of gender as a performance has proved highly pervasive and it is useful in aiming to completely delink the layers of "biological sex" and gender. It can also be illustrated to great effect, for instance in the world of drag performance, where Butler's theory reverberates in RuPaul's famous quote: "We're all born naked and the rest is drag."

In the 21st century, as knowledge about gender diverse communities continues to be created around the world, the thought that the binary gender system is found in all societies and has been continuous throughout human history has been usefully deconstructed, especially by decolonial scholars who have fruitfully compared colonizer societies, especially white imperial societies in Europe and the United States, to the Indigenous societies they have colonized. Just as there is proof that intersex people have been recognized in some ancient societies, there is also proof that gender variant people have existed throughout history. For instance, Paula Gunn Allen (1986) describes the acceptance of homosexuality, nonbinary genders, two-spirit people, and intersex individuals in numerous Native American tribes without assimilation to binary logics. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997) recounts the construction of binarily opposed categories of gender in Yoruba society that did not preexist colonization, as well as the inferiorization of anafemales (a term Oyěwùmí employs to gloss the Yoruba term for anatomically-defined females, which she does not understand as binarily opposed to anamales) by the imposition of race and gender differentials in colonization. These and other examples were taken up by the feminist philosopher María Lugones (2007; 2008), for whom these facts negated the assumption that

binary logics of gender necessarily preexisted colonization as a universal and fundamental principle of societal organization, and following from that, systems of cisheteropatriarchy did not necessarily exist, either. Speaking with reference to Latin America, she states that the acceptance of these elements as "metaphysically prior" to colonization was a prerequisite for the global Eurocentered capitalist system to be installed, in which the imposition of binary logics, compulsory heterosexuality, and patriarchal dominance ensured the reproduction of the coloniality of power and the epistemological implantation of European modernity/rationality, concepts drawn from the work of Aníbal Quijano (Lugones, 2008, p. 3). For Lugones, the binary system of European gender was not simply imposed in colonized zones; because the colonizers established a human/non-human distinction between themselves and the colonized, Indigenous peoples could not be gendered identically to the European system of binary gender, but rather, binary logics were applied to colonized peoples, who were racially gendered (Lugones, 2010, p. 743-745; Lugones, 2020, p. 26). In this way, gender was a colonial imposition, but the categories of 'men' and 'women' that were created could not have been the same as they were for the colonizers, an assertion built on the continuous dehumanization of people of color throughout history.

Within this cursory overview of the recent developments in the empirical theories of "biological sex" and gender, several recurring themes emerge: the fact that neither are binary, their interconnectedness, their perception as binary, discrete, and conflated variables, and their reinforcement in language. It is this latter theme that serves as a launchpad for this dissertation. Whereas the academic field of gender studies is a vital, prolific landscape, a robust theory of gender's integration into the grammar and lexicon of different languages cannot be said to exist within the field of formal linguistics, nor any other field. Theorizations about why and in what ways most of the world's languages are so rigidly gendered are not in any way central to linguistics, and a robust theory and featural typology of the many features of gender in language have not emerged. It is to this cause that this dissertation hopes to contribute. It contains just one caveat: the full complexity of gender and its embeddedness in language is impossible to explain in one document. This dissertation makes no attempt to be exhaustive, but rather to offer a typologically informed theory of gendered distinctions in a well-rounded sample of structurally distinct world languages. Although it has a descriptive focus on language, it cannot be understood without an establishment about what exactly is meant by "biological sex" and gender. These obligatory, humanistic understandings reverberate and prevail throughout the text, and for

that reason it is necessary to offer a concise definition of *gender* based on the above paragraphs that may serve as a basis for the concept of gender in language presented in this dissertation:

Gender is a complex form of human self-expression, a manner of self-positionality in society, and the social construction of the nexus of concepts including "biological sex," sex assigned at birth, gender roles, sexuality, and cisheteronormativity that originates in the psyche and is expressed through the body, among other sites, and is reinforced in language. It is not limited to a binary understanding and may change many times over the course of a lifespan.

1.2 Gender in Language

Within the academic field of formal linguistics, the term *linguistic gender* has a number of possible referents. The inception of the subfield of *language and gender* coincided with the publication of Robin Lakoff's (1975) influential monograph *Language and Woman's Place*, which posited the existence of a unique speech style utilized only by women that for Lakoff was a discursive representation of the subjugation of women and indicative of hegemonic patriarchy. Based in the context of U.S. English in the 1970s, the features of "women's language" included the use of tag questions and hedges involved in exaggerated expressions of politeness and deference, especially towards men, the use of hypercorrect grammar, and various forms of decorative language used to connote emotionality and interest, among other features (Lakoff, 1973; 1975). Lakoff's theory was indirectly invoked in the subsequent decade by sociolinguists seeking to explain gendered patterns of variation relative to a number of prestige and innovative linguistic variables. One of Labov's (1966) earliest observations was that women appeared to be the overall leaders of sound change, a finding not in alignment with Lakoff's intuition about women's linguistic conservatism. In 1989, Penelope Eckert critiqued Labov's notion, positing that in fact because women are subjugated by men economically, what they lack in economic capital, they make up for in symbolic capital by favoring prestige variants (Eckert, 1989, p. 256). In response, Labov broke down his original assertion into three principles more compatible with new empirical findings made before the year 1990, revealing what would later become enshrined as his gender paradox: "women conform more closely than men to sociolinguistic norms that are

overtly prescribed, but conform less than men when they are not" (Labov, 2001, p. 293). This second half of the paradox has never been successfully explained, and both Eckert and Labov subsequently dropped their deterministic views of the role of gender in sociolinguistic variation, with Labov finally admitting that the "mechanism of change is not linked to sex differences in any clear and simple way" (p. 284). However, even though it has been challenged to various degrees of success, the Labovian gender paradox remains one of most pervasive views on the role of "gender" in language variation and change, and is a remnant of the U.S.-centric, cisheteronormative bias that still prevails in the broader subfield of sociolinguistics. The portrayal of gender as a binary notion in the history of the field of sociolinguistics finds its counterpart in the reification of a belief in sexual dimorphism in sociophonetics. The gendered voice and its supposed acoustic determinants have been elevated to the level of empirical knowledge (Simpson, 2009) and are ironically used as a standard by which to explore the correlates of the queer voice (Munson, 2007), though these essentialist determinations have also been usefully interrogated (e.g. Benesch, in press; Zimman, 2017). In all of the above cases, the framework of indexicality (Eckert, 2008; Silverstein, 2003) is most often used to delink simple, one-on-one correspondences between linguistic variables and stable human identities, emphasizing identity as the result of stylistic bricolage taking into consideration multiple interrelated variables and their dynamic associations within changing, inextricable contexts. Yet in general, the field of sociolinguistics, as well as the field of linguistics more generally, still has a lot of unlearning left to undertake with respect to its postulates about "biological sex" and gender.

As opposed to any of the above concepts, the focus of this dissertation is the appearance of normatively gendered distinctions and meanings in the grammar and lexicon of different world languages, or what is meant by the term *grammatical gender* in a language like Spanish or German. The reason for this (as revealed in the following chapter) is because such a definition of the concept cannot be said to exist currently in the field of formal linguistics. The concept known best as *grammatical gender* in all actuality places no particular focus on the concept of social gender, but rather on a particular theory of morphosyntax that analyzes languages with a particular grammatical structure in which classes of nouns are formed and evidenced through combinatory effects of agreement with dependent elements. Such a definition includes languages like French and Greek with a masculine-feminine(-neuter) system, but also languages like Swahili whose fifteen

"genders" have no basis on the concept of social gender whatsoever. The current definition also excludes languages like English, which despite containing some of the most emblematic features of gender in language, such as gendered distinctions in personal pronominal forms (e.g. *he* and *she*) and normatively gender-specific meanings throughout the lexicon (e.g. *brother* and *sister*), is considered "genderless" and not offered a typological framework with which to understand its important features of gender. It is this type of featural, typological, and structural analysis of features of gender in language that is undertaken by this dissertation. Along the way, it builds an alternative, more humanistic definition and theory of the concept of linguistic gender that may be used to contextualize and theorize the rise of gender-inclusive language around the world in the present day.

It is worth noting that this line of inquiry has occasionally been taken up in the fields of psychoanalysis, feminist philosophy and phenomenology. For example, androcentricity in language is a recurring theme in the work of feminist psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray (1985a; 1985b; 1993). Throughout her career, she repeatedly invoked the concepts of the erasure of women in discourse and the positioning of women as the object, not the subject, as well as the "other." Referencing her native French, her claims cite the "operation of the grammar," such as the rules of masculine generics that stipulate the use of masculine forms in plural reference and other forms of markedness of women in the language (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 75; Irigaray, 1993, p. 67-74). Relatedly, the feminist philosopher Monique Wittig elaborated on this premise in her English-language manifesto entitled "The Mark of Gender" (1985). First assailing the view of grammatical gender as an accidental, harmless, and fictive representation of sex, Wittig (1985) faults grammarians who fall short of explaining gender's significance in language by focusing on form and function alone (p. 3). In contrast, she denies the separability of linguistic gender from social gender, synthesizing that "gender is the linguistic index of the political opposition between the sexes and of the domination of women" (Wittig, 1985, p. 4). Using her native French as an example, Wittig (1985) cites personal pronouns and the masculine-feminine system in general in order to argue that women's markedness in language is analogous to their markedness in society (p. 5-7). Finally, in the second edition of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler (1999) argues that the linguistic sedimentation of binary gender norms may be challenged: "If gender itself is naturalized through grammatical norms, as Monique Wittig has argued, then the alteration of gender at the most fundamental epistemic level will be conducted, in part, through contesting the grammar in which gender is given" (p. xix). This dissertation can be

considered a step in this direction, especially where the concept of gender-inclusive language is invoked.

1.3 Conclusion

Although the concept of *human* or *social gender* has been refined and fruitfully distinguished from the interrelated concept of "biological sex," the two concepts are too often viewed as determinants of one another and conflated. Biological, psychological, phenomenological, and decolonial analyses of the social construction of these concepts (among others) have resulted in an understanding of gender which is nondeterministic, nonbinary, and which is situated in a web of other related concepts that contribute to its fullest understanding. Just as in society, where features of gender in language appear, they are more often than not rigidly binary and assigned to different human referents based on an instantaneous judgment that conflates the concepts of "biological sex," gender, and all others involved in making this determination. As a result, the expression of nonbinary gender identities is all but impossible in many of the world's languages, and just as in society, gender nonconforming people face discrimination, alienation, and the erasure of their multifaceted identities. Especially against the current political backdrop in which it is being filed, this dissertation is dedicated to gender nonconforming people around the world and is firmly committed to ensuring their canonization into a body of linguistic theory and the social structure more broadly that has all but totally disenfranchised them.

2 Gender in Language

This dissertation outlines an alternative definition and theory of *linguistic gender* that is based on the complex human attribute described in Chapter 1. Elaborating a more humanistic understanding of the concept is necessary because in the field of formal linguistics, the most frequent referent of the terms *linguistic*, *grammatical*, and *morphological gender* is not gender's reflection in language, but rather a particular feature of morphosyntax: agreement-based systems of nominal classification (Corbett, 1991; Dixon, 1982; Kramer, 2015), interchangeably and more commonly referred to as "gender" systems. Currently, determining the presence or absence of the feature of "gender" in a given language is based on the shape of its grammar rather than the identification of any meaningful reflections of social gender categories found therein. While agreement-based systems of nominal classification include masculine-feminine languages like Spanish, Greek, and Arabic (and there is evidence to suggest that this is where the tradition of naming the feature "gender" comes from), this body of research places no particular focus on the quality of human gender, and in fact describes many languages whose systems of nominal classification have nothing to do with gender at all. In addition to causing great terminological and conceptual confusion, it becomes clear that the other linguistic features that reflect the human quality of gender have not been identified and unified by any overarching theory, preventing us from forming a complete picture of how and to what degree the expression of gender is constrained by different languages. To this end, the goal of this dissertation is to elaborate a new theory, disambiguated here using the reordered term *gender in language*, that describes the embeddedness of socially gendered meanings and distinctions in the grammar and lexicon.

2.0 Introduction

In popular imagination, perhaps the most common referent of the terms *linguistic* or *grammatical gender* is a language like Spanish, which features two 'genders', or *noun classes*, explicitly named *masculine* and *feminine*. In Spanish, an overwhelming majority of words describing men fall neatly into the masculine gender, just as the majority of words

describing women fall neatly into the feminine gender. For inanimate nouns, assignment to one gender or the other is usually not meaning-based; instead, the morphological form of the word might explain its gender assignment. For instance, most nouns ending in the suffix *-o* are masculine and most nouns ending in the suffix *-a* are feminine. Yet when studied in isolation, the systematic assignment of words for men and women to masculine and feminine linguistic genders, as well as the names of those genders, lead us to find usefulness in the use of the term *gender* to describe the linguistic system: it approximates the humanistic definition of the term. The logical extension of this line of thought, however, is that the average person might understand a *gendered language* to be one just like Spanish with a rigid masculine-feminine system of nominal classification, and that human and linguistic gender are perhaps one and the same.

In the case of masculine-feminine languages, the close association of the concepts of human and linguistic gender (as currently defined) is rational because human gender is indeed the underlying semantic basis behind the classification systems of these languages. Yet, as shown in the case of inanimate nouns in Spanish, the two are not one and the same, leading to various consequences impacting gender-inclusive language movements in the present day. For instance, psycholinguists have tried to find meaning in the class assignments of inanimate nouns (e.g. Boroditsky et al., 2003; Kurinski & Sera 2011), which in some cases is used as “evidence” to deny the proximal relationship between human and linguistic gender in a language like Spanish, and by extension, to claim that our use of gender in language is never discriminatory toward human referents (RAE, 2020). Additionally, the fact that a language may have the feature of gender implies that another language may lack it, or in other words, be “genderless.” The use of the term “genderless” to describe a language that lacks a system of agreement-based nominal classification might lead one to believe that no important features reflecting the human quality of gender may be found therein, and that people with marginalized gender identities who speak those languages suffer no societal discrimination or challenge expressing their identities linguistically. Within this discussion about the conflation of the concepts of human gender and nominal classification, we are offered a window into the terminological and conceptual confusion that permeates the study of this topic both inside and outside of the world of formal linguistic theory.

It is surprising that a body of linguistic theory named for the quality of gender places no particular focus on the attribute at all, not even within masculine-feminine languages,

which give the theory its name. Many languages with the feature of "gender" have no particular basis on the quality, including common-neuter, animate-inanimate, and human-nonhuman languages, as well as languages with other semantic bases and as many as twenty or so nominal classes. Lying outside of current definitions of linguistic gender are classifier languages, another referent of the terms *linguistic gender* and *nominal classification*, as well as all languages that lack a formal system of nominal classification, including English, a language whose features of gender (e.g. titles like *Mr.* and *Mrs.*, the pronouns *he* and *she*) have inspired decades of feminist and queer reform. In fact, the skyrocketing visibility of the singular pronoun *they*, used by many nonbinary people (among others) to self-identify, has made English perhaps the most emblematic language of the worldwide gender-inclusive language movement.

The example of English makes especially clear that the body of theory entitled *linguistic gender* is ironically unable to identify and analyze the linguistic features that embed gendered meanings and distinctions in the languages of the world beyond one very particular feature of morphosyntax. Outside of this body of literature, only a modest bibliography more fully describing the realization of gendered meanings and distinctions in various languages exists. It is not unified by a common theory or framework of study, and very few typological studies that compare the realization of gender across languages exist. Moreover, the individual linguistic features of gender themselves, including *pronominal*, *morphological*, and *morphosyntactic gender*, have not been fully theorized, or as alluded to before, they have been analyzed within frameworks unconcerned with the social reality of gender. The goal of this dissertation, then, is to offer a framework that may be used to analyze languages of all kinds for the ways in which they reflect the human quality of gender, as achieved by the elaboration of a more humanistic theory of gender in language and a featural typology that both identifies the known features of gender in language and draws a series of preliminary generalizations about the embeddedness of gender crosslinguistically (the focus of Chapter 3).

To that end, this chapter presents a literature review with the narrow scope of identifying the extant threads of research on this topic within the field of formal linguistic theory. Section 2.1 covers the topic of agreement-based systems of nominal classification, the feature better known as linguistic "gender," with additional sections documenting the terminological and conceptual challenges created by this body of literature (Section 2.1.1) and the true place of human gender therein (Section 2.1.2). Section 2.2 describes the other

major referent of the term *nominal classification*, classifier languages, and similarly provides a reading that highlights the feature of gender within this concept (Section 2.2.1). Then, the subfield of formal linguistics entitled *language and gender* is analyzed and the origins of modern research on the topic are identified (Section 2.3). Finally, the most closely-related research to this dissertation, the study entitled *structural gender linguistics*, is explored (Section 2.4). The relevant knowledge recovered from these bodies of literature will be unified by the alternative theory and definition of *gender in language* established in the following chapter.

2.1 Agreement-Based Systems of Nominal Classification

Agreement-based systems of nominal classification, also referred to as the feature *morphosyntactic, grammatical, or linguistic gender* (or simply *gender*), are possible configurations of language's grammar (Corbett, 1991; Dixon, 1982; Greenberg, 1978; Hockett, 1958, p. 231-233; Kramer, 2015). This morphosyntactic feature describes the sorting of nouns into different classes (also referred to as *genders*) and the relationship between those nouns and certain dependent elements (i.e. other grammatical categories) which with they must agree. In order for a language to be identified as having such a system, it must fulfill three basic criteria (Dixon, 1982, p. 160-166; adapted from Kramer, 2015, p. 70):

1. Each noun in the language belongs to one of two or more nominal classes;
2. There is a semantic basis for the assignment of nouns to nominal classes;
3. Class membership is reflected by patterns of morphosyntactic agreement on certain dependent elements of the noun (e.g. adjectives, articles, etc.).

Put differently, in qualifying cases, every noun is assigned to one of the language's morphological classes based on semantic criteria in combination with formal criteria, and the class assignment of a given noun is revealed in the behavior of certain parts of speech with which it combines. The general shape of the grammar of a language with an agreement-based system of nominal classification is visualized in Figure 2.1.1, where the x-axis represents the number of nominal classes, the left-hand column represents all nouns in the language, and the right-hand column represents the parts of speech which are agreement targets, based on idiosyncratic rules of morphosyntactic agreement. Some common

agreement-based systems of nominal classification include masculine-feminine, masculine-feminine-neuter, common-neuter, and those found in the Bantu languages of Africa with ten or more nominal classes (Corbett, 2013a). More typologically rare are languages with a strict animate-inanimate, rational-irrational (a division pertaining to theology), or human-nonhuman distinction (see Dixon, 1982, p. 170; Kramer, 2015, p. 106). The frequent semantic bases of gender, animacy, humanness, and other distinctions pertaining to the worldview of speakers

(e.g. animality, terrestriality, celestuality) may be combined in different ways, producing languages with combined systems (Dixon, 1982, p. 176), like Czech, a masculine-feminine-neuter language that features an animacy distinction within the masculine class, and Swahili, a Bantu language with classes partially based on the concepts of humanness, animality, vegetation, and abstractness, among others (see Figure 2.1.2). In general, these categories also govern the parts of speech which are targets of morphosyntactic agreement, structuring all applicable parts of the grammar. The feature of agreement-based nominal classification is highly combinatory and can interact with number, case, and other language-specific features of nouns, as well as person, number, tense, aspect, and mood, where verbal systems are targets of morphosyntactic agreement; of these, number is most frequent (Corbett, 1991, p. 132; Dixon, 1982, p. 168-169).

Areally, languages with agreement-based systems of nominal classification can be found on most continents, but they are much more rare in East Asia, where classifier languages are more prevalent, and in the Indigenous languages of North, Central, and South America, of which very few feature such a system (Corbett, 1991, p. 2). This distribution is related to typology; while agglutinating or inflecting languages are able to have this feature, analytic and isolating languages with no inflectional morphology are generally unable to employ it (Dixon, 1982, p. 218; Aikhenvald, 2016, p. 16). Most, if not all, Austronesian, Turkic,

Figure 2.1.1 The general shape of a language with an agreement-based system of nominal classification

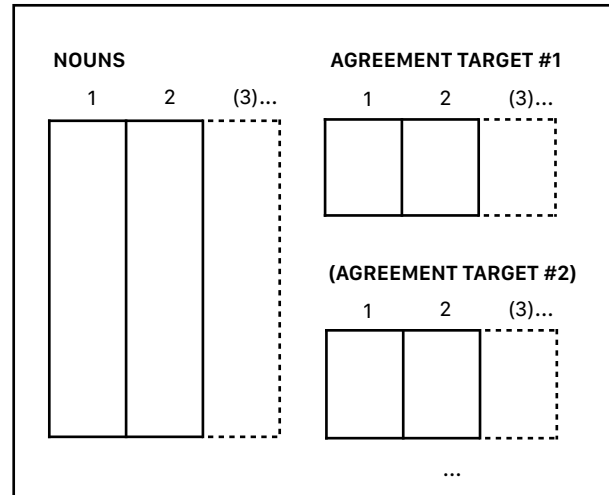


Figure 2.1.2 Example systems of agreement-based nominal classification

Amharic¹		Greek²		
MASCULINE	FEMININE	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER
ወገኗም 'brother'	እህት 'sister'	άντρας 'man'	γυναίκα 'woman'	παιδί 'child'
ፊጅ 'boy'	ፊጅት 'girl'	θείος 'uncle'	θεία 'aunt'	μωρό 'baby'
በግ 'sheep'	በግት 'ewe'	καφές 'coffee'	τέχνη 'art'	τηλέφωνο 'telephone'
ጅብዱ 'adventure'	ፀሐይ 'sun'	εκτυπωτής 'printer'	οθόνη 'screen'	αλάτι 'salt'

Swedish³		Czech⁴			
COMMON	NEUTER	MASCULINE ANIMATE	MASCULINE INANIMATE	FEMININE	NEUTER
far 'father'	barn 'child'	otec 'father'	hrad 'castle'	matka 'mother'	děvče 'girl'
mor 'mother'	äppelträd 'apple tree'	kamarád 'friend'	vlak 'train'	kamarádka 'friend'	štěně 'puppy'
bil 'car'	faktum 'fact'	učitel 'teacher'	čaj 'tea'	osoba 'person'	město 'town'
dator 'computer'	leende 'smile'	kluk 'boy'	stroj 'machine'	řeka 'river'	náměstí 'square'

Swahili⁵

1/2 human	mtu 'person'	mtoto 'child'	9/10 animal	ndege 'bird'	simba 'lion(s)'
	watu 'people'	watoto 'children'		ndege 'birds'	paka 'cat(s)'
3/4 vegetative	mmea 'plant'	mti 'tree'	11	uhuru 'freedom'	umoja 'unity'
	mimea 'plants'	miti 'trees'	15	kusoma 'reading'	kupa 'giving'
5/6	jicho 'eye'	jiwe 'stone'	16/17/18 locative	mahali 'location'	(pa-)
	macho 'eyes'	mawe 'stones'			(ku-)
7/8	kijiko 'spoon'	kitabu 'book'			
	vijiko 'spoons'	vitabu 'books'			

¹ Leslau (2000)

² Holton, Mackridge, & Philippaki-Warbuton (2012)

³ Holmes & Hinchliffe (2013)

⁴ Naughton & von Kunes (2021)

⁵ Almasi, Fallon, & Wared (2014); Marten (2013)

and Uralic languages, as well as most pidgins and creoles, lack the feature entirely (Aikhenvald, 2016, p. 71). It is most prevalent in the languages of Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa (Dixon, 1982, p. 166-167). European colonization has been responsible for spreading languages with masculine-feminine systems, especially Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Italian, to geographical zones whose Indigenous languages did not feature such a system, as exemplified by the spread of Spanish, Portuguese, and French throughout the Americas and the spread of French and Italian throughout Africa (Stolz et al., 2008).

A language like Spanish fulfills the three criteria for the identification of a language with an agreement-based system of nominal classification listed above (Dixon, 1982, p. 160-166; Kramer, 2015, p. 70) because all of its nouns, whether animate or inanimate, are assigned to one of the language's two nominal classes, explicitly named *masculino* 'masculine' and *femenino* 'feminine'. The names of these classes, established by grammarians over the course of several centuries, reveal the semantic basis of the nominal classification system, observable in the assignment of nouns with personal reference: the vast majority of nouns normatively referring to men are assigned to the class entitled *masculine*, and the vast majority of nouns normatively referring to women are assigned to the class entitled *feminine*. Finally, rules of morphosyntactic gender agreement apply to almost every grammatical category in the language, except for the verbal system, causing the nominal class assignment of the noun to affect the morphology of its dependent elements, most often through inflection (see Figure 2.1.3).

Figure 2.1.3 The masculine-feminine system of Spanish

NOUNS [SG.]		PERSONAL PRONOUNS	
MASCULINE	FEMININE	MASCULINE	FEMININE
hermano 'brother'	hermana 'sister'	él 'he'	ella 'she'
hombre 'man'	mujer 'woman'	nosotros 'we'	nosotras 'we'
lobo 'wolf'	loba 'she-wolf'	vosotros 'you all'	vosotras 'you all'
—	comida 'food'	ellos 'they [PL.]'	ellas 'they [PL.]'
paraguas 'umbrella'	—		

ARTICLES [SG.]		ADJECTIVES [SG.]	
MASCULINE	FEMININE	MASCULINE	FEMININE
el 'the'	la 'the'	fantástico 'fantastic'	fantástica 'fantastic'
un 'a/an'	una 'a/an'	rápido 'fast'	rápida 'fast'
		bueno 'good'	buena 'good'

Él^M es un^M hermano^M fantástico^M. 'He is a fantastic brother.'

Ella^F es una^F hermana^F fantástica^F. 'She is a fantastic sister.'

El^M león^M es muy rápido^M. 'The lion is very fast.'

La^F leona^F es muy rápida^F. 'The lioness is very fast.'

Nuestro^M coche^M es muy bueno^M. 'Our car is very good.'

Nuestra^F música^F es muy buena^F. 'Our music is very good.'

A language like English, on the other hand, fails at least two of the criteria. While it is possible to isolate small groups of English nouns according to different semantic bases, such as gender, all nouns are not assigned a value of class membership that might be indicated in a prescriptive language resource, like a dictionary. Because there are no nominal classes that encompass the entire English lexicon, it is disqualified as having an agreement-based system of nominal classification. As for the third criterion, when different animate and inanimate nouns in the same grammatical number are replaced in a sentence containing the same dependent elements, we do not observe any morphological transformations, and this holds true for all grammatical categories in the language. However, in some forms of gender-specific personal reference, we do observe agreement phenomena in nouns, personal pronouns, and to a lesser extent, adjectives (see Figure 2.1.4). Yet, while it has important features of gender, Modern English does not have an agreement-based system of nominal classification (Dixon, 1982, p. 164-165; 169), even though Old English was a masculine-feminine-neuter language (Jurczyk, 2017). In contrast with the case of Spanish, all English nouns cannot be divided into classes, and therefore the two grammars do not share the same basic shape.

Figure 2.1.4 Evidence of gender agreement with English personal nouns

The <u>man</u> is tall and strong.	He ^M is a handsome ^M <u>man</u> ^M that respects himself ^M .
The <u>woman</u> is tall and strong.	She ^F is a pretty ^F <u>woman</u> ^F that respects herself ^F .
The <u>giraffe</u> is tall and strong.	They ^N are a beautiful ^N <u>person</u> ^N that respects themself ^N .
The <u>flagpole</u> is tall and strong.	

The canonical work on agreement-based systems of nominal classification is Greville G. Corbett's *Gender* (1991), which surveys the feature in more than 200 typologically distinct languages. A tenet of this work is that there is always a semantic basis, or what Corbett (1991) terms a "semantic core" (p. 8; Aksenov, 1984, p. 17-18) of the linguistic system, observable in the class assignments of a subset of the lexicon. Crosslinguistically, the most common subtypes are systems based on the qualities of gender, animacy, and humanness; for this reason, the operability of these different semantic cores is often particularly visible in the subset of animate nouns (Dahl, 2000). Relatedly, Corbett argues that the assignment system of a given language may be modeled with a series of rules, beginning with semantic rules, which may operate more strongly or more weakly on the subset of nouns to which they can apply, in combination with formal rules, which target the morphological or phonological form of a noun in question. For example, Corbett (1991) offers the following semantic assignment rules for Russian, a masculine-feminine-neuter language for which semantic rules are theorized to govern parts of the masculine and feminine classes (p. 34):

1. Sex-differentiable nouns denoting males (humans and higher animals) are masculine: отец 'father', дядя 'uncle', лев 'lion';
2. Sex-differentiable nouns denoting females are feminine: мать 'mother', тетя 'aunt', львица 'lioness'.

In addition to this and other languages deemed "strictly" or "predominantly" semantic, where the class assignment of a noun is largely predictable from its meaning relevant to the assignment system, Corbett (1991) also describes languages with more "formal" systems in which formal criteria weigh more heavily, though there exists no language with an agreement-based system of nominal classification that does not have some sort of observable semantic basis, according to this theory (Corbett, 1991, p. 34; Kramer, 2015, p.

70). For this reason, agreement-based systems of nominal classification have long captured the interest of psycholinguists, who have investigated their usefulness and the meanings and mental associations produced by them, as well as the relative ease and invisibility of the acquisition process for native speakers and the difficulties faced by adult learners in acquiring languages with the feature, especially those who do not have such a system in their native language(s). Left behind by the semantic assignment rules are the subset of nouns to which the rules do not or can not apply, constituting Corbett's (1991) concept of "semantic residue" (p. 13), or those nouns which are assigned a nominal class value in a manner not governed by positive semantic criteria. There are, additionally, almost always nouns with unexpected or exceptional nominal class assignments in languages with such a system.

As established by Hockett (1958, p. 231), morphosyntactic agreement is the defining criterion for the linguistic feature and is what fundamentally distinguishes agreement-based systems of nominal classification from classifier languages (another potential referent of the term *nominal classification*, described in Section 2.2), which similarly group nouns into different classes but do not exhibit patterns of morphosyntactic agreement between the noun and other parts of speech. Possible agreement targets are delimited by the particular grammatical categories found in a given language (Corbett, 1991, p. 106-115). In the modern Romance languages, almost all grammatical categories except for the verbal system are agreement targets, including adjectives, articles, personal pronouns, and even ordinal numerals, whereas the weakening masculine-feminine system of Modern Irish evidences agreement only in morphophonological mutations produced when noun phrases include definite or possessive articles (Colleluori, 2025). In this way, languages may vary in the number of parts of speech that are targets of morphosyntactic agreement, and not all lexical items or forms of a lexical item in a given grammatical category must be targets (Corbett, 1991, p. 123). In addition to defining the linguistic feature, evidence of agreement also determines the number of nominal classes a given language has (Corbett, 1991, p. 105). In straightforward cases, morphosyntactic agreement extends the nominal class identification of the noun, which is theorized to originate the property, to its dependent elements, ensuring that they share this value, whether or not those dependent elements are overtly marked, for instance through inflection. As a result, the same class values identified for nouns are also used to describe the grammatical categories which are targets for agreement. Devoid of confounding interactions with other grammatical features, it is rare

for the number of classes to vary between nouns and their agreement targets in a given language, though it is possible, as in the case of Spanish neuter articles and demonstratives (e.g. *lo, ello, esto, eso*), which are a remnant of the masculine-feminine-neuter system of Latin (Penny, 2002, p. 133). In the presence of an interaction between this linguistic feature and grammatical number, there can arise disparities between the number of classes of nouns which take the same agreements, or the sets into which nouns are divided, termed *controller "genders,"* and the number of classes of agreement forms, termed *target "genders"* (Corbett, 1991, p. 45). For instance, German singular nouns appear with one of three definite articles depending on their status as masculine (e.g. *der Tisch* 'the table'), feminine (e.g. *die Nacht* 'the night'), or neuter (e.g. *das Fenster* 'the window'), but all nouns in the plural number are preceded by the article *die* (e.g. *die Tische, die Nächte, die Fenster*). Yet the data from the agreement patterns of singular nouns leads to the identification of three controller classes, or nominal classes, and for agreement targets, a different number of target classes for singular and plural nouns.

In general, inanimate nouns present less theoretical complications than animate nouns, especially those which are distinguished by gender in a given language. Each noun in an agreement-based system of nominal classification is generally theorized to have one fixed class value that does not change, with exceptions for poetic usage and dialectal variation (Hockett, 1958, p. 231). This is enumerated as the canonical case in Corbett & Fedden's (2018) "Canonical Gender Principle." Relatedly, the fixed class value is imagined to be inherent to the noun, or somehow language-internal. These assumptions weaken with reference to nouns described by Corbett as "sex-differentiable," or human and zoological nouns. The classical analysis of a masculine-feminine language like Spanish is that many words for people and animals have two forms of the *same* noun which are distinguished by gender (Hockett, 1958, p. 230). This holds whether the noun features an overt marker of gender or, put differently, the distinction is formal (morphological and/or phonological) in addition to semantic (e.g. *niño* 'boy', *niña* 'girl'), or whether it is covert and revealed only through dependent elements (e.g. *el estudiante* [M.], *la estudiante* [F.] 'the student'). With reference to the former case, nouns with inflectional gender morphology in masculine-feminine languages are almost never described as the source of separate lexical entries, rather, just as with different number and case forms, these are considered gender-distinguished forms of the same lexical item. In the latter case, where the two forms are phonologically identical, it is even harder to argue that they are separate lexical items

(Kramer, 2015, p. 27). Moreover, the fact that many nouns can change their class values according to some quality of the person or animal referenced makes it difficult to reconcile how the property could be static or language-internal in this case. Instead, the nominal class value is dynamic and inherited from some feature in the outside world. To theoretically account for the morphological complexities of personal nouns, a number of terms are introduced in Corbett (1991) under the subheading "Problematic Nouns" (p. 66-68):

- "Hybrid" nouns, described as personal nouns with one prescriptive nominal class assignment that can take different forms of agreement depending on the meaning of the noun (Corbett describes the case of the German neuter noun *das Mädchen* 'girl', which can take feminine agreements due to its meaning, in addition to prescriptive neuter agreements);
- "Double" and "multiple gender" nouns, described as the case in which a single noun form produces different meanings depending on its nominal class assignment. For personal nouns in masculine-feminine languages, these are often referred to as "common gender" nouns. This is the case of Spanish *estudiante* 'student'; when paired with grammatically masculine agreements, it normatively refers to a male, and when paired with grammatically feminine agreements, it normatively refers to a female;
- "Epicene" nouns, described as the case in which a single noun with a single nominal class value and expected agreements can be used to refer to any person, as in the case of the Spanish feminine noun *persona* 'person'. Corbett notes that the invariability of the nominal class assignment distinguishes "epicene" from the term "common gender," which is frequently used synonymously.

When these terms are redescribed in a later section, English nouns are provided as examples; for instance, *baby* and *doctor* are "multiple gender" nouns, and "boat nouns," or "various expressions denoting ships" are of "hybrid gender," as they may take either inanimate or feminine agreements, especially the personal pronoun *she* (Corbett, 1991, p. 180-184; Malone, 1985). But this data is peculiar: English is not recognized to have an agreement-based system of nominal classification. And as for the case of Spanish *niño* 'boy' and *niña* 'girl', which are among the most canonical gender-distinguished nouns in the language, these are not treated in the volume at all, only given the label "motion nouns"

(Corbett, 1991, p. 44; 67), which is introduced but never elaborated¹. Ironically, these and other types of "sex-differentiable" nouns are deeply exceptional to the tenets of this theory: they do not have one fixed nominal class value whose assignment can be attributed to language-internal semantic and formal factors. Instead, many inflectional and common gender nouns with personal or zoological reference adopt different class values depending on some attribute of the referent, and then this value is reflected linguistically. The description of these nouns as "problematic," including "motion nouns" which are so problematic that they are never described in Corbett (1991), reveals something crucial: this theory is not well-equipped to describe (human) gender in languages with or without an agreement-based system of nominal classification, and in many ways, gender itself weakens the tenets of the theory which takes its name.

As alluded to above, the English language represents another rupture point for the ability of this theory to describe features of gender crosslinguistically. Throughout the literature on agreement-based systems of nominal classification, where it is not identified as a "genderless" language, English is deemed a "pronominal gender language," defined by Corbett (1991) as "[a language] in which pronouns present the only evidence for gender" (p. 5). As will be explained in Chapter 3, this is not the case: nouns, pronouns, possessive articles, adjectives, and honorifics display features of gender (as defined in this dissertation) in English, though it most certainly does not have an agreement-based system of nominal classification that encompasses the entire lexicon. Yet Corbett (1991) does seemingly make this claim about English nouns: "At the bottom of the scale, with covert gender, are languages like English, with semantic assignment and with almost no formal clues" (63). This conjecture is antithetical to the first and second criteria (Dixon, 1982, p. 160-166; Kramer, 2015, p. 70), which state that every noun in a given language must have a nominal class assignment and that there must be a recognizable semantic basis to the assignment system. In lieu of a stronger argument about nouns, Corbett's (1991) claim about English, then, must revolve around the concept of agreement, which is presumed to have survived from the masculine-feminine-neuter system of Old English: because English third-person singular personal pronominal forms (e.g. *she, her, hers, herself*) change based on the referent and agree with each other phrase-internally, Corbett argues that English "should be recognized as having a gender system" (p. 5). This begs the question of how a sentence in

¹ In older literature, the concept of "motion" is described as stems shared by multiple nominal classes, and is also used to describe the prefixal inflection found in Bantu languages (Greenberg, 1978, p. 53).

any language with no noun, only a personal pronoun, can be said to acquire the property of "gender" in languages with or without a system of agreement-based nominal classification (see Figure 2.1.5):

Figure 2.1.5 Examples sentences with pronominal gender and the absence of a noun

SPANISH	(Él ^M) es dedicado ^M y talentoso ^M .	'He is dedicated and talented.'
GREEK	(Αυτή ^F) είναι εργατική ^F και έξυπνη ^F .	'She is hard-working and smart.'
MANDARIN CHINESE	他 ^M 年轻而且专业。	'He is young and professional.'
ENGLISH	She ^F is intelligent and well-respected.	

It could be argued that the personal pronoun's antecedent is a noun or a proper name that supposedly forms part of the lexicon, but in any case, the choice of linguistic gender representation is language-external and dependent upon some quality of the person being referenced. These ideas are related to Corbett's (1979; 1991, p. 225-260) concept of the *agreement hierarchy*: when the agreement target is a personal pronoun, the likelihood of semantic agreement versus syntactic agreement is at its highest. In other words, semantic and pragmatic considerations, such as the gender identity of a referent, can override rules of morphosyntactic agreement that stipulate that the target must agree with the class assignment of the noun, where these two qualities are not aligned. Corbett's claims are repeated by Audring (2008), who also distinguishes "pronominal gender languages" from others like Mandarin Chinese that similarly feature gender-distinguished personal pronouns by delimiting the term to languages descended from a system of agreement-based nominal classification that have lost their system of agreement morphology, leaving behind only semantic rules, which supposedly survive in this case (p. 113). In both Corbett's and Audring's literature, there are no sentential examples or other references to the status of nouns in "pronominal gender languages", only the confusing assertion that they must somehow apply to a theory about nominal classification. It is also unclear how English is different from a language like Mandarin Chinese, which shows similar features of gender even though it is not descended from a system of agreement-based nominal classification.

In a more recent volume based firmly in the world of formal morphosyntax, Kramer (2015) excludes many of these “gender-related puzzles” from her analysis, including hybrid nouns, gender resolution (the referent of Corbett’s *agreement hierarchy*), and so-called “pronominal gender languages” (p. 10; 69). Again, when called upon this body of theory to address complexities related to gender, it is largely unable to do so, especially within Chomskyan frameworks of minimalist syntax and distributed morphology which ignore social context in favor of language-internal analyses. However, Kramer (2015) usefully dismisses English as having a system of agreement-based nominal classification by referring back to the concept of agreement in cases of nominal ellipsis like those in Figure 2.1.5 above, stating that these examples “[do] not meet the locality restrictions on Agree” (p. 69), something also corroborated by Audring (2008, p. 95)². In other words, the antecedent noun is so far removed from the discourse that we cannot say that any agreement is made with a noun. Instead, as Kramer (2015) puts it, agreement is made “with the natural gender of the referent” (p. 69). Here, it becomes clear that any theory describing gender-specific language must stipulate that agreement is made with some quality of the person being referenced, and not necessarily a noun, since there is no manner for a gender-variable noun to acquire a value of gender in the absence of a personal referent.

Within these attempts to fit English into a theory describing a particular feature of morphosyntax that it does not have, we begin to see the terminological and conceptual confusion caused by the use of the word “gender” to describe this particular linguistic feature. Ironically, many of the most common forms of direct gendered personal reference in languages with an agreement-based system of nominal classification are deemed deeply noncanonical and violate the universally-accepted criteria that define the linguistic feature. And for languages without such a system, there is an attempt to use the concepts found within this body of literature to describe their features of gender in ways that make it clear that there are two distinct referents of the term: the human quality and the morphosyntactic feature, and while the two do overlap in some meaningful way, they are clearly not the same.

² This view is also shared by Dixon (1982), who notes that the term *noun class* “does not cover ‘gender’ in a language such as English, which is manifested solely through pronouns that can substitute for, but do not normally occur with, nouns” (p. 164).

2.1.1 Terminological and Conceptual Challenges for the Study of Gender within Agreement-Based Systems of Nominal Classification

At this point, it is worth restating that the use of the term *gender* in this dissertation is always oversimplistic, no matter if the referent is linguistic or humanistic. The word is imbued with so much polysemy, and much of that polysemy is due to the historical study of this particular linguistic feature. In the study of agreement-based systems of nominal classification, the word *gender* is used in three senses: to refer to the linguistic feature itself (e.g. "a language with *gender*"), to refer to one or all of the nominal classes contained by the system (e.g. "the common *gender*," "common and neuter *genders*"), and to refer to the individual nominal class values assigned to different nouns (e.g. "the *gender* of a noun"). These uses of the word *gender*, most often to the exclusion of more precise descriptors, have produced a set of unintended consequences that render it difficult to disambiguate the morphosyntactic feature from the more humanistic definition of the term. In other words, it can be challenging to research the linguistic features that reflect the complex human quality of gender because the predominant referent of the term *gender* within formal linguistic theory is the theory of agreement-based systems of nominal classification. Yet many languages with such a system do not feature (human) gender as any sort of semantic basis for the assignment of nouns to nominal classes, and in languages whose systems *are* based on the human quality, many nouns with masculine or feminine nominal class values, including most inanimates, have meanings unrelated to gender. The disambiguation of items bearing upon the gender of the referent from all other items in languages with this linguistic feature is discussed in Section 2.1.2. Moreover, this terminological and conceptual conflation of gender and nominal classification produces a formulation this dissertation seeks to combat: if a language does not have the feature of "gender," then it is said to be "genderless." This false descriptor is routinely used to refer to languages like English, Hungarian, and Tagalog, for example, which do not have an agreement-based system of nominal classification, but which certainly exhibit important features of gender, including traces of gender morphology. As this dissertation seeks to demonstrate, no language is genderless insofar as all languages have the expressive capacity to articulate this fundamental human distinction; to the contrary, perhaps *all* languages distinguish gender in some meaningful way, most simply in the meanings of words, and possibly also in more embedded ways, like morphosyntactically, pronominally, etc. Precisely because the

expression of gender in different languages is not just morphosyntactic, a broader theory of gender in language is required.

In the literature, a distinction is often made between Indo-European languages and Bantu languages, which serve as points of typological reference distinguishing traditional uses of the terms *gender* and *noun class*. Scholarly consensus suggests that Proto-Indo-European had a bipartite animate-inanimate system of nominal classification that later developed a gender distinction within the animate class to become the masculine-feminine-neuter system of Ancient Greek, Latin, and Proto-Germanic (Dixon, 1982, p. 171; Luraghi, 2009; 2011). This tripartite system is retained in Modern Greek and German, while it simplified into the masculine-feminine system of most of the modern Romance languages, and into the common-neuter system of Dutch, Danish, and Swedish, in which the masculine-feminine distinction is collapsed into one common gender, but gender survives as a semantic basis for the system in important ways (Kraaikamp, 2012). For this reason, Indo-European languages are the most frequent referent of the term "gender," especially because the term appropriately reveals the semantic core of the assignment systems of those languages. On the contrary, scholarly consensus suggests that Proto-Bantu had around 20 nominal classes, and none of them were based on gender; rather, the first class unit was reserved for human nouns, and this generalization holds true for the modern descendants of Proto-Bantu (Denny & Creider, 1986, p. 223; Dingemanse, 2006, p. 15). These languages with systems unrelated to gender are more likely to be referred to with the term "noun class," though in the present day, "gender" remains a superordinate term for all systems of agreement-based nominal classification. The ambivalence toward this terminological issue is summarized by Corbett (1991):

"There is little point in trying to maintain a strict distinction between 'gender' and 'noun class' since similar systems are described as genders in one language family and as noun classes in another." (p. 146)

We may assume that the term *gender* ultimately won out because of the historical prioritization of European thought and the ultimate dominance of the Western academic model in the modern world, the workings of which are carefully chronicled in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Relatedly, there is also evidence to suggest that following the onset of European colonial expansion into Sub-Saharan Africa, comparative philologists finally became interested in African languages, though they used the lack of a "sex-based

distinction" in the grammar of these languages to deem them irrational and the languages of savages (Irvine, 1995). For all of these reasons, Indo-European languages, especially Ancient Greek and Latin, appear to be a focal point for the study of gender within languages with an agreement-based system of nominal classification, as well as for the study of gender in language more generally.

The modern polysemy of the English word *gender* owes a lot to early Ancient Greek and Roman grammarians, and their "discovery" of nominal classification systems based on distinctions of gender and animacy. Historically, the Ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras (c. 490–420 BCE³) is recognized as the first to identify Greek nominal classes as ἄρρενα 'male, masculine', θήλεια 'female, feminine', and σκεύη 'thing' in the surviving writings of Aristotle (Aristotle, 4th c. BCE/2020, p. 374–375; see Huitink & Willi, 2021). In Modern Greek, this terminology is mostly preserved: modern grammarians label the nominal classes αρσενικό 'masculine', θηλυκό 'feminine', and ουδέτερο 'neuter', and the name for the system as a whole is the same as it was in the ancient language: (γραμματικό) γένος '(grammatical) gender, genus'. Protagoras' description of Greek nominal classes as τὰ γένη 'genders, genera', as well as the close association of those "genders" with the complex human quality, is supposedly an origin point of the polysemy of the word in Modern Greek, especially because φύλο 'sex, gender' is the term usually reserved for referring to the human quality without reference to the grammatical system. Etymologically, the word γένος is related to the Ancient Greek verb γίγνομαι, now γεννιέμαι in Modern Greek, meaning 'to be born'. Three centuries later, Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro (116–27 BCE⁴) refers to the feature as *sexus* 'sex' in the oldest known philosophical discussion of Latin, denoting the nominal classes as *virile* 'manly, masculine', *muliebre* 'womanly, feminine', and *neutrum* 'neuter' (Varro, 1st c. BCE/1938, p. 406–407). *Sexus* is believed to be the first known descriptor for the Latin grammatical system, further evidencing grammarians' close association of masculine–feminine linguistic and social genders, but Corbeill (2015) notes that grammarians later developed a preference for the term *genus* 'type, kind', the cognate that is also used in Greek, related to the verb *generō* 'give life, procreate' (p. 5–6). These terms similarly survive in the Modern Romance languages: to take the example of Spanish,

³ Bonazzi, M. (2024). Protagoras. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/protagoras>

⁴ Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024, April 12). *Marcus Terentius Varro*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marcus-Terentius-Varro>

nominal classes are entitled *masculino* 'masculine', *femenino* 'feminine', and for rare neuter forms, *neutro*, and the system as a whole is referred to as *género* (*gramatical*) '(grammatical) gender', the same polysemous word also used to refer to the quality of social gender in Spanish. Ultimately, the English language inherited the reconstructed Proto-Indo-European **ǵénh₁os*, the common ancestor of the Greek and Latin terms, as *gender*, already imbued with additional polysemy, through Old French *gendre*.

The multiple meanings of the word *gender*, including its prioritization as the recognized name for the feature of agreement-based nominal classification, and its resulting antonym *genderless*, are not the only sources of terminological and conceptual confusion within the study of gender in language. As the study of this feature has origins at least as far back as the time of Protagoras, it is logical that some of the terminology found in the literature is incompatible with the present, especially as the concept of social gender has been defined over the twentieth century and distinguished from the concept of "biological sex," and as the visibility of trans, nonbinary, and other gender non-conforming people in different societies around the world has bloomed. Corbett's (1991) set of "problematic nouns" are those which are described as "sex-differentiable". In this way, animals and humans are conflated and both are imagined to be divided cleanly into masculine and feminine nominal classes based on the concept of "biological sex," which is similarly conceptualized as a binary. As mentioned in Chapter 1, neither "biological sex" nor social gender are binary, although the claim that "biological sex" is the basis upon which animals are divided is less problematic because social gender is defined as a strictly human quality. For humans, however, the basis of masculine and feminine nominal class assignments is much more complicated. The normative human subject is imagined as either male or female (a reference to "biological sex"), and if social gender is also considered, as either a man or a woman, and these two qualities are imagined as being in alignment. The intersex and/or genderqueer human subject is imagined as lacking this neat alignment in some way because either "biological sex" or social gender, or both, push our understanding of these qualities beyond the binary and often outside of the confines of prescriptive language. While for Corbett (1991), "biological sex" is the basis of masculine-feminine systems, Kramer (2020) attempts to broaden this idea to "social gender for humans/ biological sex for animals" (p. 46). However, in many cases of misgendering, a speaker's perception of one's "biological sex" is often tellingly at play (Sevilla Requena, 2024), and especially in queer community settings, it is common for other qualities like sexuality to

form part of speakers' decisions about their use of gendered language, as we observe in many cases of linguistic gender play (Kulick, 2000). Ultimately, as proposed in Section 4.1, the target of our use of gender in language is not gender nor any aspect of the complex human quality at all; rather, queer and genderqueer communities inform us that the real target is desire of the referent—the set of linguistic forms with which the referent wishes to be addressed—yet it is clear that prescriptive language has been shaped by traditional, binary notions of “biological sex” that are incompatible with queerness in the present day.

Relatedly, the terms “natural gender” and “semantic gender” are pervasive in extant literature and are used to describe systems which are referred to as “sex-based” (e.g. Gyga et al. 2019; McConnell-Ginet 2013; Dixon 1982; Corbett 1991). This idea purports the assumption that nominal class values in “natural gender languages” can be uncomplicatedly deduced and read off of the referent, resulting in assignment to one of two animate nominal classes, masculine or feminine. As alluded to above, queer theory reminds us that social gender is not apparent from human biology and a consideration of social gender, especially queer gender, helps us interrogate the mechanism with which our use of gendered language operates (Miller, 2022). Queer and trans language activists have disabused us of the notion that there is always a straightforward pathway from our perception of one's “biological sex” or gender to our use of gendered language. Put differently, just because someone uses normatively masculine linguistic forms does not necessarily mean that they are male or that they identify as a man, and just because someone appears to be male or a man does not mean we can predict what gendered forms they use. The mechanism behind the normative use of gendered language, termed here the *moment of snap judgment*, is the focus of Section 4.1. In general, our use of gender in language takes into account many qualities of the referent—all those that comprise the complex web of gender and related concepts—and pragmatic considerations, resulting in a lack of neat correspondences and the dynamic nature of the feature.

2.1.2 Place of Gender within Agreement-Based Systems of Nominal Classification

When considering the role of languages with an agreement-based system of nominal classification within a more humanistic theory of gender in language, masculine-feminine languages become an obvious point of focus. By Corbett's (2013b) own estimation, approximately 75% of all agreement-based systems are “sex-based.” In these languages

with (at least) masculine and feminine nominal classes, the semantic core of the system is the complex human quality of gender, and there is usually a relatively high degree of correspondence between the normative gendered meanings of personal nouns and their nominal class assignments as masculine or feminine. Such a system can be helpful in identifying content with normatively gendered meanings where it reinforces them; for instance, nouns which may hold either masculine or feminine class values depending on the referent, including same-stem nouns with inflectional gender morphology (occasionally termed *motion nouns* in the literature) and same-form common gender nouns (as defined by Corbett [1991, p. 66-68]), are likely to be personal nouns distinguished by gender, unless they are zoological nouns or inanimate nouns exhibiting dialectal or stylistic variation. However, except for the case of personal nouns that may be either masculine or feminine in value, all other nouns have just one nominal class value, which may be expected (i.e. in alignment with the normative meaning of the noun), unexpected, or unrelated to the noun in question. Unlike purely semantic classifier systems (discussed in the following section), systems of agreement-based nominal classification are usually part semantic and part formal, meaning that formal factors, such as the morphology and/or phonological shape of the noun in question may affect its assignment in a way that supersedes semantic assignment rules, resulting in unexpected assignments (e.g. the Greek neuter noun *κορίτσι* 'girl'). This means that even for languages with masculine-feminine systems, only semantic and pragmatic analyses can correctly identify content with gendered meanings, as in the case of epicene nouns, which may refer to anyone regardless of gender identity, but only if they are forms of personal reference.

For all other types of agreement-based systems, the nominal class values of nouns usually do not reveal their status as normatively masculine or feminine, and only semantics and pragmatics can accurately discern their normative gender values. These systems may similarly aid in narrowing down where gendered content may be found; for instance, within common-neuter and animate-inanimate systems, it is expected that personal nouns are most likely to be located within common and animate classes, and in Bantu languages, they might be found in the first class unit, which is reserved for human nouns. Yet, on the whole, languages with any agreement-based system of nominal classification are the same as all other languages in that gender is firstly a semantic and pragmatic phenomenon. Corbett's ideas about covert gender in English reinforce this notion: where gender is not marked overtly nor grammaticalized to any degree, it is covert and stored only in the meaning and

common usage of the word itself. Yet even in languages where gender is not grammaticalized to a high degree, it is possible to find formal exponents of gender, like gender morphology, as in the English suffixes *-ix* (e.g. *aviatrix*), *-ette* (e.g. *suffragette*), and *-ess* (e.g. *hostess*), and distinctions in personal pronominal systems, as in the English pronouns *he*, *she*, and *they*. In this way, in addition to being a result of semantics and pragmatics, gender may be embedded in a given language in many more ways than just an agreement-based morphosyntactic system, as explored in Chapter 3.

2.2 Classifier Languages

While it appears that the majority of systems of agreement-based nominal classification found in the world's languages have some basis on the complex human quality of gender, classifiers, another referent of the term *nominal classification*, have less to do with the concept, though they lead to the discovery of *classifier gender*, one of the many features of gender in language presented in Chapter 3. Classifier systems are another referent of the term *nominal classification*, though they are distinct from agreement-based systems in several ways. A classifier is a morpheme—either an independent word, affix, or fusional form—that highlights some salient characteristic of the noun it classifies, like humanness, animacy, or shape (Aikhenvald, 2000; Corbett, 1991; Croft, 1994; Craig, 2000; Kilarski, 2013; Kilarski & Allasonnière-Tang, 2021). Crucially, they do not participate in patterns of morphosyntactic agreement; instead, they are contained to a single clause, where they mark the noun in question just once (Dixon, 1982; 1986). For most classifier types, this container is a noun phrase, and in the case of verbal classifiers, the container is a verb phrase wherein the classifier categorizes a nominal argument of the verb (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 13). Craig (2000) designates classifiers as an “intermediate lexico-grammatical system” falling in-between the highly grammaticalized nominal classes of agreement-based systems and mere lexical entries; while classifiers are of lexical origin, they go beyond the noun they classify and constitute separate free or bound morphemes (p. 61; Kilarski, 2013, p. 9). Classifiers are much more numerous than agreement-based nominal classes, and in some languages and linguistic environments, almost any semantically-appropriate noun may be used as a classifier in the proper syntactic distribution (Dixon, 1982; 1986). Rather than structuring a language's grammar as agreement-based systems do, classifier systems function based on semantics and pragmatics in a manner akin to lexical selection. A

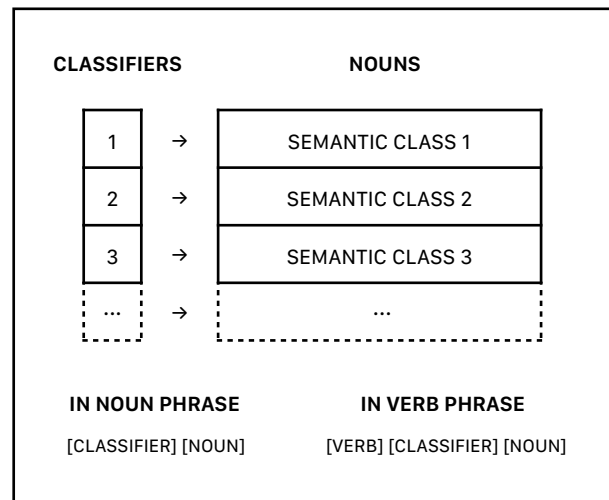
simplified depiction of this idea is presented in Figure 2.2.1.

Typologically, classifiers are more likely to be found in isolating languages, which cannot sustain an agreement-based system due to their lack of inflectional morphology (Dixon, 1982, p. 218-219). Fusional languages are more likely to feature an agreement-based system of nominal classification, and agglutinating languages may feature one or both systems, or none (ibid). In some cases, these tendencies have been contested (Cronhamn, 2025,

p. 33). In most typologies, classifier types are described according to their morphosyntactic locus, producing four common types—*numeral*, *noun*, *genitive*, and *verbal classifiers*—and two typologically rare types—*locative* and *deictic classifiers* (Aikhenvald, 2000; Craig, 2000). The semantics of each classifier type vary and range from more general to more specific; while for verbal and genitive classifiers, general concepts of animacy and humanness are most prevalent, other types of classifiers tend to be based on more specific physical or functional properties (Aikhenvald, 2016, p. 15). Crosslinguistically, classifiers differ in obligatoriness and need not exist for all nouns in a given language (Dixon, 1982; 1986). They participate in a range of discursive functions: they may be used in anaphoric reference, in pronominal reference, be omitted for semantic or pragmatic reasons, and may mark distinctions of formality (Craig, 2000; Kilarski, 2013).

Within a single language, many forms of nominal classification may be possible. In some cases, multiple classifier types may coexist (though no language has been found to feature all types), and a single classifier or set of classifiers may be used in multiple classificatory environments (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 184-204; Craig, 2000, p. 70). Classifier systems may coexist with separate systems of agreement-based nominal classification, and in some ambiguous cases, these systems, as well as individual classifier types, may blend (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 204; Craig, 2000, p. 81; Corbett, 1991, p. 136-143). In some cases of language change, there is minimal evidence that classifiers may be the source of agreement

Figure 2.2.1 The general function and distribution of classifiers



markers that may later develop into systems of agreement-based nominal classification (Corbett, 1991, p. 136-143).

Numeral classifiers, the most common and best described of all the classifier types, are found in quantifying phrases, where they are contiguous to a numeral or quantifier, and categorize the noun being quantified according to semantic bases of animacy, shape, size, and structure (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 98; 2019, p. 15; Kilarski, 2013, p. 33). They may be one of two types: *sortal classifiers*, which are usually a closed class of morphemes that classify count nouns according to some distinctive quality, and *mensural classifiers*, which are an open and much more numerous class of morphemes that both classify and specify a quantity of mass or count nouns (Craig, 2004, p. 1020; Her et al., 2022; Kilarski, 2013, p. 35). In quantification, the numeral itself acts as a multiplier, and numeral classifiers act as multiplicands: sortal classifiers hold a value of one, only highlighting some salient characteristic of the noun and preserving its countability (Her et al., 2022). Sortal classifiers have no equivalent in English. Their presence is the basis upon which a language is identified as having numeral classifiers (Her et al., 2022, p. 155). Mensural classifiers, on the other hand, are measure terms which similarly bear classificatory meaning and also multiply the numeral by some unit, measuring the mass or count noun according to physical properties, as in the English phrases "two *boxes* of cereal" or "three *gallons* of milk" (Her et al., 2022; Kilarski, 2013, p. 25). The presence of numeral classifiers in a given language signals the absence of obligatory plural marking (Kilarski, 2013, p. 34). Areally, numeral classifiers are found in many Indigenous languages of East and mainland Southeast Asia, including Mandarin Chinese and Japanese, as well as some Oceanic and Mesoamerican languages, and exceptionally, Hungarian and Kana, a Niger-Congo language (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 101; Craig, 2000, p. 63; Kilarski, 2013, p. 33). Examples of numeral classifiers in Mandarin Chinese, which are used with both numerals and demonstratives, including the generic sortal classifier 个 *gè* that may be used with almost any noun, are given in Figure 2.2.2.

Figure 2.2.2 Examples of sortal and mensural numeral classifiers in Mandarin Chinese

SORTAL			MENSURAL		
个 gè [generic]	张 zhāng flat	颗 kē small and round	公斤 gōngjīn kilogram	码 mǎ yard	加仑 jiālún gallon
本 běn books	辆 liàng vehicles	架 jià planes	群 qún group/crowd	块 kuài piece	滴 dī drop
三个手表 sān gè shǒubiǎo NUM.CL:generic.watch 'three watches'			两公斤苹果 liǎng gōngjīn píngguǒ NUM.CL:kilogram.apple 'two kilograms of apples'		
一颗珍珠 yī kē zhēnzhū DEM.CL:smallround.pearl 'a pearl'			一群人 qún rén DEM.CL:groupcrowd.person 'a group/crowd of people'		

Source: Po-Ching & Rimmington, 2021, p. 20-29

Noun classifiers are found in non-quantifying noun phrases, where they characterize the noun with which they co-occur. Kilarski (2013) notes that animacy frequently divides the semantics of noun classifiers; while for animate nouns, they may mark social status and even gender, for inanimate nouns, they characterize nouns based on functional or physical properties (p. 37; Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 15). While some languages have only as few as two noun classifiers, in others, any noun can be used as a classifier in the proper syntactic distribution (Kilarski, 2013, p. 36). In some languages, multiple noun classifiers are admissible in a single noun phrase, though their obligatoriness varies (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 81). Many sources liken noun classifiers to the lexeme *berry* in English (e.g. *strawberry*, *blueberry*, *raspberry*), though in requisite classifier languages, they are more grammaticalized, as evidenced by their range of syntactic functions, for instance in their use as determiners, pronouns, and in anaphoric reference (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 81; Craig, 2000, p. 65). Areally, noun classifiers are found in some Mesoamerican, Australian, Western Austronesian, and Amazonian languages (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 82). Examples of noun classifiers in Chuj, a Mayan language of Guatemala and Mexico, are provided in Figure 2.2.3. As explained in Section 3.4.3, Chuj exhibits the crosslinguistically rare feature of classifier gender, as exemplified by the examples *ni unin* 'boy' and *uch unin* 'girl'.

Figure 2.2.3 Examples of noun classifiers in Chuj (Mayan)

nok' animal	te' wood, tree	lum earth	k'en stone, metal	winh male	ix female	naj/ni young male	uch young female
Saksak k'en uj. white CL:stonemetal moon 'The moon is white.'			te' jukup' CL:woodtree bowl 'wooden bowl'			ni unin CL:youngmale child 'boy'	
Saksak nok' tz'i'. white CL:animal dog 'The dog is white.'		lum jukup' CL:earth bowl 'ceramic bowl'				uch unin CL:youngfemale child 'girl'	

Sources: Hopkins, 2012; Royer, 2019

Genitive classifiers (also referred to as *possessive*, *relational* or *attributive classifiers*) are found in possessive constructions. They are divided into three more specific types: *possessed classifiers*, which characterize the possessed noun, *relational classifiers*, which characterize the semantic nature of the relationship between the possessed noun and the possessor, and *possessor classifiers*, which characterize the possessor (Aihkenvald, 2000, p. 125-126). Possessed and relational classifiers may co-occur in a single language, either as one fusional system, or as separate classifier sets (Aihkenvald, 2000, p. 140-144). Nouns with which genitive classifiers co-occur are usually small in number and of high cultural significance (Craig, 2000, p. 66). The concept of alienable versus inalienable possession is relevant for the distribution of nouns and genitive classifiers: for instance, relational classifiers are only used with alienably possessed items, or "optionally" possessed items which do not require an inherent relationship of possession as do body parts and kinship terms, which are examples of inalienable possession (Kilarski, 2013, p. 39). Areally, possessed classifiers are found in some Indigenous languages of the Americas, Hmong-Mien, and Papuan languages (Aihkenvald, 2000, p. 147). Relational classifiers are a characteristic feature of Oceanic languages, and possessor classifiers, which are rarest of all, have been attested only in a few Naduhup languages of the Amazon, like the Dâw language (Aihkenvald, 2000, p. 139; Craig, 2000, p. 66; Kilarski, 2013, p. 38). Examples of possessed classifiers in Ponapean are offered in Figure 2.2.4.

Figure 2.2.4 Examples of possessed classifiers in Ponapean (Austronesian)

kene <i>edible things</i>	nime <i>drinkable things</i>	sapwe <i>land</i>	imwe <i>buildings</i>	were <i>vehicles</i>	kiseh <i>relatives</i>	wahwah <i>nieces, nephews</i>
kene uht CL: <i>edible</i> banana 'his/her/their/its banana'		were pwoht CL: <i>vehicle</i> boat 'his/her/their boat'		wahwah serepein CL: <i>niecenephew</i> girl 'his/her/their niece'		
kene mahi CL: <i>edible</i> breadfruit 'his/her/their/its breadfruit'		were sidohsa CL: <i>vehicle</i> car 'his/her/their car'		wahwah pwutak CL: <i>niecenephew</i> boy 'his/her/their nephew'		

Sources: Rehg, 1981, p. 179-185

Verbal classifiers are found in verb phrases, where they classify an argument of the verb (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 13). They classify subjects and objects mostly based on physical properties, such as shape, consistency, size, and structure (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 149). They may be realized in one of two major ways: in what is termed an incorporated classifier construction, wherein the classifier is recognized as a generic noun incorporated into the verbal argument that produces an extra-predicative argument, or the verbal classifier may be affixed to the verb (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 150; Kilarski, 2013, p. 40). A really, they are found in some Indigenous languages of the Americas, Australia, and some Papuan languages (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 150-151; Kilarski, 2013, p. 40-43). Examples of verbal classifiers in Imonda (Papuan) may be seen in Figure 2.2.5.

Figure 2.2.5 Examples of verbal classifiers in Imonda (Papuan)

l- <i>edible greens</i>	u- <i>small animals</i>	fët- <i>objects put in fire</i>	lëg- <i>clothing, flat objects</i>
iahaf kam l'aihu tulip me CL: <i>ediblegreens</i> .give 'Give me the tulip!'		töbtö kam fëtaihu fish me CL: <i>putinfire</i> .give 'Give me the (cooked) fish!'	
	töbtö kam u'aihu fish me CL: <i>smallanimals</i> .give 'Give me the (live/uncooked) fish!'	maluõ kam lëgaihu clothes me CL: <i>clothing</i> .give 'Give me the clothes!'	

Sources: Seiler, 1985, p. 119-134; Merlan et al., 1997, p. 93-97

Most rare of all typologically are *locative* and *deictic classifiers*. Locative classifiers are found in locative noun phrases, where they classify the argument of a locative adposition (Kilarski, 2013, p. 45). In all known cases, the locative classifiers themselves are actually fused with these adpositions according to semantic parameters of shape, dimensionality, and boundedness (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 172). They constitute a small inventory in the languages in which they are found, which include Palikur and Lokono, two Indigenous languages of South America (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 172). Deictic classifiers, found in some Siouxan (North America) and Guaicuruan (South America) languages, as well as Yuchi (North America) and Eskimo (Aleut; Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 172-176), are used in deictic constructions with articles and demonstratives, where they classify the noun according to semantic parameters of shape, orientation, position, and animacy (Kilarski, 2013, p. 44). Examples of both locative and deictic classifiers may be found in Figures 2.2.6 and 2.2.7, respectively.

Figure 2.2.6 Examples of locative classifiers in Dâw (Naduhup)

kɛd <i>inside bounded object</i>	mĩ' <i>inside liquid or fire</i>	ʃaʃ <i>inside mixture</i>	bit <i>underneath</i>	wəʔ <i>above</i>
xoo.kɛd canoe.CL: <i>insideboundedobject</i> 'in a canoe'		nââx.pis.mĩ' water.small.CL: <i>insideliquid</i> 'in a small river'		

Sources: Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 174-175; Martins, 1994, p. 53

Figure 2.2.7 Examples of deictic classifiers in Kadiwéu (Guaicuruan)

-d:a- <i>standing/vertical</i>	-n:i- <i>sitting</i>	-n:a- <i>coming</i>	-d:i- <i>lying/horizontal</i>	-jo- <i>going away</i>	-ka- <i>out of sight</i>
i.jo.wa MASC.CL: <i>goingaway.PL</i> 'the cows going'	waka cow		i.na MASC.CL: <i>coming</i> 'the cows coming'	waka.li cow.PL	

Source: Sandalo & Michelioudakis (2016)

2.2.1 Place of Gender within Classifier Languages

As opposed to languages with masculine-feminine agreement-based systems of nominal classification, languages with classifiers that select for gender have less irrelevancies; in other words, it is more likely to find nouns unrelated to gender in masculine and feminine nominal classes than it is in languages with classifiers that select for normative masculine or feminine gender. This is because classifiers are a purely semantic device; they do not select for formal characteristics of nouns, only meaning, yet classifiers themselves represent a formal, grammaticalized linguistic feature. Despite the fact that classifiers that select for gender appear to be relatively rare crosslinguistically, the feature of *classifier gender* depicts a strictly-semantic system that neatly illustrates the process of identifying gender in language.

In the literature, relatively few languages have been identified as having classifiers based wholly or partially on the complex human quality of gender. These include four Mayan languages (Jacaltec, Acatec, Chuj, and Q'anjob'al), six Arawakan languages (Baniwa, Tariana, Warekena, Bahuana, Achagua, and Yucuna), and Bora, a Witotoan language of Northern Peru (Aikhenvald, 2000; Aikhenvald, 2016; Craig, 1986a; Craig, 1986b; Cronhamn, 2025; Day, 1967; Day, 1973; Hopkins, 2012; Thiesen & Weber, 2012; Seifart, 2018). Among these languages, a mix of noun, verbal, and numeral classifiers that select for gender may be found. Jacaltec (Craig, 1986a, p. 245; 1986b, p. 264) provides a strikingly clear example of noun classifier gender; of twenty-four noun classifiers in the language's inventory, distinctions of animacy, age, respect, kin status, and gender produce 10 noun classifiers that select for normative gender and may even be used anaphorically (see Figure 2.2.8).

Gender distinctions within classifier systems have not been well researched, perhaps due to their rarity and the scarcity of documentation available for the languages in which they are found, which exist in varying stages of vitality. While the classifiers themselves have been documented to a degree, there do not appear to be specific resources which compile the nouns to which they may apply, only a few example phrases. A more detailed look at classifier gender can be found in Section 3.4.3.

Figure 2.2.8 Jacaltec classifiers

ANIMATE		INANIMATE	
cumam	<i>male deity</i>	no?	<i>animal</i>
cumi?	<i>female deity</i>	metx'	<i>dog</i>
ya?	<i>respected human</i>	te?	<i>plant</i>
naj	<i>male non-kin</i>	ixim	<i>corn</i>
ix	<i>female non-kin</i>	tx'al	<i>thread</i>
naj ni?an	<i>young male non-kin</i>	tx'an	<i>twine</i>
ix ni?an	<i>young female non-kin</i>	k'ap	<i>cloth</i>
ho?	<i>male kin</i>	tx'otx'	<i>soil, dirt</i>
xo?	<i>female kin</i>	ch'en	<i>rock</i>
ho? ni?an	<i>young male kin</i>	atz'am	<i>salt</i>
xo? ni?an	<i>young female kin</i>	ha?	<i>water</i>
unin	<i>infant</i>	k'a?	<i>fire</i>

xil **naj** *xuwan* **no?** *lab'a*
 saw CL: *male non-kin* John CL: *animal* snake
 'John saw the snake.'

Sources: Craig 1986a, p. 245; 1986b, p. 264

2.3 Language and Gender Subfield

As mentioned before, the study of the embeddedness of socially gendered meanings and distinctions in the grammar and lexicon is not a flourishing area of research, neither in the field of formal linguistics generally, nor in its most relevant subfield entitled *language and gender*. As echoed by Motschenbacher (2016), it remains a modest, decentralized, and highly marginalized body of literature (p. 150-151). Though many of the world's largest languages have been documented extensively for centuries by lexicographers, grammarians, linguists, and other scholars, gender is almost never documented in particular detail. In dictionaries, definitions may be preceded by a label of *masculine* or *feminine*, but for languages with an agreement-based system of nominal classification, these are

descriptors of the class values of nouns and not always the normative gendered meanings of those nouns. Discrepancies are almost never indicated. In grammars published by major universities and language academies of the world, gender-specific features are usually merited a mention, but not offered a complete description, especially for traditionally open classes, like nouns, which are a locus of the issue⁵. In this way, the work of documenting gender-specific features of language requires sifting through prescriptive language documents and weaving together relevant points of information found in disparate bodies of literature. This dissertation seeks to bridge this theoretical gap by locating extant threads of research on the topic (this chapter), offering the foundations of a more humanistic theory of gender in language and providing a feature-based, typological description (Chapter 3), and by theoretically situating the concept of gender-inclusive language as well as its motivations and the stable gender-inclusive variants that have been attested.

Most scholars consider the origin point of the language and gender tradition to be Berkeley professor emerita Robin Lakoff's manifesto entitled *Language and Woman's Place* (1973; 1975), written in the context of the second wave of the women's rights movement in the United States. Lakoff (1975) proposed the existence of a marked variety of "women's language" for American English defined stylistically by the use of "empty" adjectives, hedging, hypercorrect grammar, and superpoliteness, among other features (p. 78-81). In their totality, Lakoff describes these discursive practices as diagnostic of hegemonic patriarchy, positing that these inequities constitute evidence of women's subjugation by men and reveal the masculine default value of standard language. This concept of a style-based *genderlect*, with special focus on discursive practices and pragmatic considerations, has been studied in many languages, including Japanese, where it is also helpful for grammatical analysis in highlighting the normative usage of sentence-final particles along gendered lines (Inoue, 2002). Yet since the inception of the language and gender subfield, its canon has mostly been based in white feminism and has favored studying the construction of gender as a function of sociolinguistic style over lexicographic and grammatical analyses of gender's embeddedness in language. A foundational text more relevant to this latter definition of the term *gender-specific language* is Ann Bodine's (1975) "Androcentrism in Prescriptive Grammar," a case study about the historical decline of the English singular personal pronoun *they*. Bodine (1975) describes that even though the

⁵ An interesting exception to this are documents produced by European language academies that list words that have been feminized over time, meaning that those institutions have legitimated their use in society by adding them to their dictionaries (e.g. RAE, 2020).

gender-neutral pronoun's usage with a singular referent has survived from at least the time of Chaucer in the 14th century, over time, male grammarians have "corrected" it in favor of the generic use of the masculine pronoun *he*. In chronicling how grammarians have repeatedly declared the masculine gender (both in language and in society) to be superior and insisted that it is somehow inclusive of women, Bodine (1975) is similarly helpful in establishing the concept of linguistic sexism and illustrating it as an agentive phenomenon. It is this latter thread of language and gender research that is more likely to analyze the grammar and lexicon of a given language.

Linguistic sexism is broadly defined as the set of linguistic practices, forms, and prescriptive grammatical rules that invisibilize, subjugate, or denigrate women and gender minorities, such as the use of masculine forms to represent all subjects, the prescriptive lack of feminine forms of occupational terms, and the disproportionate amount of slurs for women and gender and sexual minorities, including cases where a given language's inventory of profanity is partially or entirely based on the abuse of women (e.g. *hija de la chingada* 'daughter of the fucked woman' from the verb *chingar* 'to fuck' and the historical figure *La Malinche* in Mexican Spanish). Throughout the 1980s, the anti-sexist English language movement produced a number of anti-sexist writing manuals, including Miller & Swift's (1980) *Handbook of Nonsexist Writing*, which contained various proposals like eliminating the use of masculine generic forms (e.g. the root *man* [*spokesman*, *congressman*], generic use of the pronoun *he*) and advocating for the use of singular *they* and the title *Ms.* to collapse a distinction based on marital status within the inventory of English honorifics. Other important monographs published in the 1980s include Spender's (1980) *Man Made Language*, which reiterated similar themes and theorized the naming traditions of women in marriage, and Baron's *Grammar and Gender* (1986), which among other topics, placed lexicographic focus on traces of feminine gender morphology in English, for instance the suffixes *-ess* (e.g. *waitress*, *stewardess*), *-ette* (e.g. *suffragette*, *majorette*), and *-ix* (e.g. *aviatrix*, *dominatrix*). Beyond English, research on linguistic sexism is available for Spanish (Bengoechea, 2008; Adolarkey Lomotey, 2011), French (Abbou, 2023), Italian (Robustelli, 2000), Japanese (Inoue, 2002), Chinese (Farris, 1988), and a handful of other larger world languages to a lesser extent.

In the present day, the language and gender subfield has largely abandoned studies of the embeddedness of gender in language in favor of the study of gender as a function of sociolinguistic style and of discourse. The former research agenda was established by

Eckert's (2008) "Variation and the Indexical Field," in which the author argues for the analysis of sociolinguistic variation as a result of style-shifting rather than a set of stable one-to-one correspondences indicating simple membership in a particular group. Drawing on Silverstein's (2003) framework of indexicality, social constructions of masculinity and femininity are presumed to be the result of stylistic bricolage, wherein a map of ordered, non-stable indices gather meaning only in the context of distinct sociolinguistic styles. For instance, gender differences in Eckert's (1989) seminal study of "jocks" and "burnouts" in a Detroit high school and their participation in the Northern Cities Shift only become meaningful in the context of other variables, like the students' orientation toward or away from the school, and their proximity to the city center. Besides its usefulness in encouraging intersectional analyses that take into account several social factors at once, this work has been particularly useful in the emerging field of trans sociophonetics, where it has been used to delink gender identity from perceptions of masculinity or femininity in the trans voice (Zimman, 2017). However, while its usefulness in the field of sociophonetics has been well-documented, the study of gender as a function of sociolinguistic style has yet to be fruitfully applied to the production and perception of normatively gendered meanings in the grammar and the lexicon, where it could similarly be used to deconstruct the link between gender identity and the use of particular normatively gendered linguistic forms, like personal pronouns. In addition to sociophonetic studies, the language and gender subfield has also relied heavily on discourse analysis to explore the rhetorical conceptualization of masculinity and femininity, following in the tradition of Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble*. As put by Bucholtz (2003), "the study of language and gender has increasingly become the study of discourse and gender" (p. 43). Bucholtz (2003) goes so far as to say that discourse analysis, or the study of the co-constructedness of language and social reality, including language's role within categories of power, is a central approach of the field (p. 43; He, 2017). This body of research seeks to understand how gender dynamics are continually reinscribed in discourse, though not particularly at the lexicogrammatical level.

Within the subfield of language and gender research, one body of work unifies the study of gender's embeddedness in the grammar and lexicon of different languages. It is often referred to as *structural gender linguistics* (the focus of the following section, Section 2.4). Yet in general, it is not an overall focus of the questions that currently underpin the subfield, with most researchers favoring macro-level approaches that forgo the study of the building blocks of language. Many scholars draw a distinction between the *language and*

gender and *queer linguistics* subfields because of their overall foci on feminism and queer and trans rights, respectively. Queer linguistics features many more studies approximating the work of this dissertation, usually bound by the topic of *gender-inclusive language*, which focuses on the prescriptive and nonprescriptive possibilities of expressing nonbinary and other gender identities as related to the constraints of individual linguistic systems. Many of these studies will be interpolated in Chapter 4, which describes the many ways that the topic of gender-inclusive language has been theorized, the forms that have been proposed or adopted by speakers of different languages, and the connection between gendered linguistic structures and discrimination and other adverse outcomes in society.

2.4 Structural Gender Linguistics

Perhaps the most relevant body of research to this dissertation are the volumes and articles that comprise what has been termed *structural gender linguistics*. The term “structural” makes clear that the focus of investigation is the actual structure of the language itself as opposed to the use of its resources in discourse, which is not a study concerned with the building blocks of language, like morphemes, individual words, and patterns of gender agreement within phrases. Instead, structural gender linguistics intends to analyze the grammar and lexicon of different languages for sites where normatively gendered meanings and grammatical distinctions are made. Many early studies of linguistic sexism fall under the rubric of structural gender linguistics because of their contributions to lexicographic, pronominal, and morphological analyses of gender in language, especially those without a system of agreement-based nominal classification, like English (e.g. Bodine, 1975; Baron, 1986; Miller & Swift, 1980). In the present century, this line of research has been proliferated in the four volumes entitled *Gender Across Languages* (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001; 2002; 2003; Hellinger & Motschenbacher, 2015). These volumes offer language-by-language analyses of the feature of gender with an articulated focus on “pronouns and nouns” (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001, p. 2). Over forty languages are included from all parts of the world, including an American Indigenous language (Oneida), two creoles (Belizean Creole, Eastern Maroon Creole) and even one constructed language (Esperanto). Beyond personal nouns and pronouns, the volumes highlight other phenomena which lie beyond the rubric of this dissertation, including idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and male- and female-specific discourse. Instead of identifying and including other linguistic features besides

nouns and pronouns in order to build a featural typology (as is the goal of this dissertation, in contrast), the volumes instead propose the existence of five mechanisms responsible for “the representation of women and men in a language” (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001, p. 7-11):

1. “Grammatical gender,” or the feature of agreement-based nominal classification documented most extensively by Corbett (1991);
2. *Lexical gender*, or items which carry the semantic property [male] or [female] because they reflect the “property of extra-linguistic [i.e. ‘natural’ or ‘biological’] femaleness or maleness and which “may or may not be marked morphologically;”
3. *Referential gender*, the mechanism which “relates linguistic expressions to the non-linguistic reality,” as in cases where the normative gender reference of a particular noun and its nominal class value are misaligned;
4. *False generics*, or the use of a certain set of normatively gendered linguistic forms (often normatively masculine forms) to represent or refer to all people, including in supposedly generic or gender-neutral reference, and when one’s identity is unknown;
5. *Social gender*, which is the mechanism that explains the case in which “the behavior of associated words can neither be explained by grammatical nor by social gender,” as in the association of the word *nurse* with women and the personal pronoun *she*, producing the item *male nurse*.

The five above mechanisms explored in each volume of *Gender Across Languages* differ greatly from the typology elaborated in this dissertation. Because the typology presented in Chapter 3 is featural, only what are termed “grammatical gender” and “lexical gender” above remain, albeit with definitions that more fully capture linguistic and extralinguistic realities and create space for theorizations of gender-expansiveness. The final three features are not linguistic features, and are largely incompatible with this dissertation and also with the other enumerated features. Firstly, “referential gender” and “social gender,” at minimum, are subsumed by this dissertation’s definition of *lexical gender*. The proposed feature of “referential gender” intervenes for masculine-feminine gender languages in cases when the nominal class value of a given personal noun is not aligned with its meaning, as in the provided example of the German neuter *das Mädchen* ‘the girl’. Yet the mechanism

used to derive the normative gender value of the noun as feminine is the same as it is for lexical gender items: lexical semantics, or the imbued meaning of a word constructed by its reiteration with a stable meaning over time. Similarly, the effect of gender stereotypes that the proposed feature of "social gender" speaks to can be tracked to lexical semantics as well as pragmatics, especially when the use of certain terms in context is considered and compared against its normative gender value (or lack thereof). This, too, is subsumed by this dissertation's definition of *lexical semantics*, though it is useful in reminding us that although the normative gender values produced in language are a product of long histories, we also observe a level of instability and sociolinguistic variation that give way to change over time. Finally, "false generics" are not themselves a linguistic feature, but rather the use of normatively masculine or feminine linguistic features to intend to subsume people of all genders in personal reference.

It is worth noting that within the modest field of structural gender linguistics, there is an attempt to incorporate poststructuralist and discursive approaches for the purpose of de-essentializing identities, destabilizing meanings and the correlation between gender identity and linguistic gender values, and understanding meaning in context (e.g. Motschenbacher, 2016). This line of thought is by no means incompatible with the study presented in this dissertation; although the two diverge in their focus on the use of language to construct and reinforce ideologies and the documentation of normatively gendered linguistic forms, respectively, they also converge on a consideration included throughout this dissertation: pragmatics, or the study of appropriate language use in context. For example, pragmatic considerations play a substantial role in the violation of misgendering, i.e. when extralinguistic information is assumed or weaponized in one's use of gendered language. Yet, as is the point of this chapter to demonstrate, the base task of documenting the normatively gendered features of language is not complete, and in many respects, for most of the world's languages, it has not been explored, even after fifty years of language and gender research.

2.5 Conclusion

The study of socially gendered distinctions and meanings in linguistic systems can be located in the field of formal linguistics, though it is a small topic, both historically and in the present day. As described in this chapter, the concept most often referred to as

linguistic gender is not the target of the present study, but rather it refers generally to *nominal classification*, both agreement-based morphosyntactic systems as well as classifier languages. Within agreement-based systems of nominal classification, masculine-feminine languages are an obvious point of focus, especially because their nominal classes are named for the normative gender reference of personal forms, for which most fall neatly into either masculine or feminine grammatical categories. Yet even within these languages, as well as in all other types of agreement-based nominal classification, only semantic and pragmatic analyses of individual lexical items allow us to fully compile all normatively gendered sites within the grammar and lexicon of a given language. Similarly, gender may be located within the topic of classifier languages; while we have uncovered evidence that at least eleven languages have classifiers that select for normative gender, they are relatively small and underresourced languages which on the whole are not extensively documented. Ultimately, the review of extant work on the concept of *linguistic gender* has found that while the study of gender in language gives the body of literature its name, gender is overall a misleading descriptor, especially because it places no particular focus on the concept of human gender and identifies a number of linguistic systems that have nothing to do with the topic. As discussed in the following chapter, a goal of this dissertation is to provide a more humanistic framework that will facilitate the study of normatively gender-specific linguistic features, and to aid in growing that body of literature to the point where it is central within the field of formal linguistics.

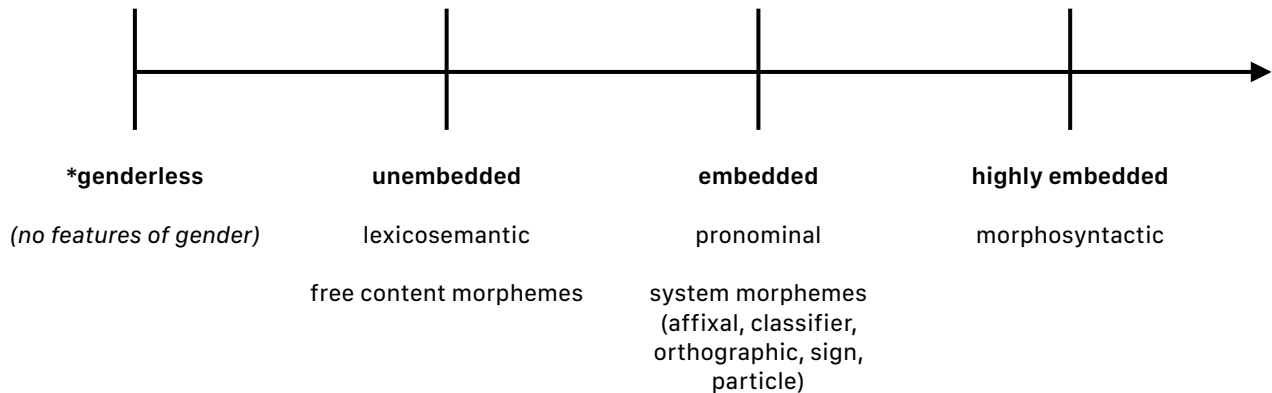
Relatedly, the investigation presented in this dissertation is not even popular within the next most related body of literature, the subfield of formal linguistics entitled *language and gender*. While research on normatively gendered linguistic features and the topic of linguistic sexism are the origins of the subfield (e.g. Bodine, 1975; Baron, 1986), these topics are nowhere near as vital and have been relegated to a subtopic within a subfield, the body of research most often identified as *structural gender linguistics*. It lives on, however in the work of many researchers in the subfield of queer linguistics, which will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 4 to finalize our picture of *gender-inclusive language*.

From this background, we bring forth several useful concepts, including *pronominal*, *morphological* and *morphosyntactic gender* in language, the feature of *classifier gender*, the concept of *linguistic sexism*, and the realization that gender in language is firstly a semantic and pragmatic phenomenon which may also be formalized to varying degrees in the languages of the world. Chapter 3 uses these concepts to provide a humanistically-oriented

theory and definition of *linguistic gender* which will be used to build a representative crosslinguistic typology uncovering the known features of gender in language.

3 A Humanistic Theory of Gender in Language

Figure 3.0 Scale of embeddedness of gender in language



3.0 Introduction

This chapter intends to unify the threads of research presented in Chapter 2 by establishing an alternative definition of *linguistic gender* that targets normatively gendered meanings and embedded grammatical distinctions in the languages of the world. Departing from an understanding of linguistic gender as agreement-based systems of nominal classification, the foundations of a new theory based on the complex human quality described in Chapter 1 are explained with the aid of a feature-based typology of the known forms of gender in language. The most major tenet of this more humanistic theory is that there is probably no such thing as a “genderless” language. To the contrary, while not every language of the world has been documented, we know that every language has the capacity to express gendered meanings, and given the relevance of social gender around the world, it is most likely that all of them, or at least an overwhelming majority of them, do so. The typology presented in this chapter sketches a lexicogrammatical continuum representing different degrees of embeddedness correlated with different linguistic features (see Figure 3.0), beginning with what is posited by this dissertation to be the most basic and frequent crosslinguistic realization of gender in language: *lexical semantics*. While gendered

meanings are frequently embedded in individual words due to their patterns of usage over time, individual lexical entries (whose gender distinctions are not morphological) are not an embedded grammatical feature, but rather component parts of the lexicon. *Lexicosemantic gender*, therefore, correlates with the category entitled 'unembedded'. As we advance along the scale of embeddedness, *pronominal gender* is investigated in particular detail because of its prevalence in typologically distinct languages, many of which exhibit few other features of gender, and its status as a highly frequent and embedded grammatical category. Next, different *morphemic* expressions of gender are analyzed, including affixal gender morphology, classifiers which select for gender, the encoding of gendered meanings in different writing systems, the gender-specific distribution of sentence-final discourse particles, and inflection for normative gender in signed languages. Finally, the most embedded form of gender in language posited by this dissertation, (minimally) masculine and/or feminine *morphosyntactic gender*, will be investigated because of their ability to transfer the mark of gender onto several other grammatical categories, including almost all of them in languages like Modern Romance. Morphosyntactic gender is thus correlated with the category entitled 'highly embedded,' also because requisite languages necessarily contain morphemic expressions of gender, usually in much higher numbers, and often exhibit many other of the aforementioned features of gender in language.

A corollary of the theory that no language lacks the feature of gender is that it may be possible to roughly quantify the embeddedness of gender crosslinguistically. This task, however, faces several challenges, as not all grammars are easily comparable. A grammar's basic configuration is governed by the broad morphological type of the language in question as either *analytic*, meaning that it lacks inflectional processes and grammatical relations are expressed by the syntactic position of separate words, or *synthetic*, meaning that single words can express grammatical relations through processes of affixing or fusing morphemes to a root. These types of languages may feature very different grammatical categories, and in the case of analytic languages, the same words may perform a variety of different grammatical functions. For this reason, this dissertation does not seek to perform complicated mathematics with the goal of calculating how gendered a given language is, especially because this is dependent upon how we use language, but rather it offers a series of generalizations. For instance, a masculine-feminine language like Spanish in which multiple grammatical categories must share the value of gender by being repeatedly marked

with overt or covert gender morphology implies that gender is much more present in Spanish than it is in English, wherein features of gender are contained to fewer grammatical categories. A humanistic reading of this linguistic conjecture would be that self-expression for gender-nonconforming speakers of Spanish is much more challenging than it is in English. In order to aid in the process of drawing generalizations, points along the scale of embeddedness total four in number—'genderless', 'unembedded', 'embedded', and 'highly embedded'—and are not attached to a numeric value. This allows for a study which is as typologically sensitive as possible. To this same end, other measures have been put in place, for instance by drawing a distinction between *content* and *system morphemes*. Whereas content morphemes "convey the core semantic/pragmatic content of language" and may themselves be morphologically uncomplex lexical items (e.g. *boy, girl*), system morphemes are productive, functional forms (e.g. *hostess, waitress*), and evidence a degree of grammatical embeddedness (Myers-Scotton & Jake, 2000, p. 1054).

The crux of the humanistic theory of gender in language presented in this dissertation is the role of *people* and their identities. Whereas the traditional conceptualization of *gender agreement* is described in language-internal terms, whereby agreement is achieved by matching the gender values of different building blocks of language to the gender value of a *noun* (theorized to be the originator of the property of gender), this dissertation considers the *personal referent* to be the originator of the property of gender which is then reflected linguistically, often against a constrained set of prescriptive values indicative of legacies of cisheterosexuality and colonialism. By delimiting the definition of gender in language to the domain of personal reference, the prescriptive mechanism that operates in language may be captured (i.e. agreement is made with some quality of the referent, not simply with a noun), and the expanding tension between nonbinary gender identities and prescriptive, mostly binary forms of language may be theorized (i.e. agreement is made with the set of linguistic forms desired by the referent). Relatedly, it enables us to deal with the reality of misgendering and assert the right of language users to self-determine the representation of their gender identity with linguistic resources, even if non-prescriptive, as they see fit.

The idea that people self-determine the representation of their own gender identity in language, and that they may do so in every language, provides us with a paradox: if perhaps every language has some feature(s) of gender, then perhaps all languages also

exhibit gender agreement in some meaningful way. Given that agreement is the defining criterion for agreement-based systems of nominal classification, this conjecture implies that every language might have such a system. This is not true, but when gender agreement is alternatively defined as the mechanism by which we match normatively gendered linguistic forms to some quality of the referent, we observe that perhaps every language participates in this process. Therefore, this dissertation posits that perhaps every language has at least a pseudo-system of gender agreement (as defined herein) whereby despite the morphological type of the language in question, we can observe sites where linguistic forms change depending on the referent's gender or their own intended self-expression of their gender, including by using gender-neutral forms. Framing gender agreement as an agentive process whose target is the *desire of the referent* allows us to separate the many flattened layers of this mechanism. On the one hand, its historical realization as a mostly invisible, unconscious process based on a snap judgment of the sex and/or gender of our interlocutors may be interrogated, and on the other hand, we can maintain separate the concepts of *gender identity* and *linguistic gender self-representation*, disabusing us of the notion that one necessarily equals the other while still positing some sort of important relationship between the two.

3.1 A Humanistic Theory of Gender in Language

Following from the definition of the complex human quality of *gender* established in Chapter 1, whereby:

"Gender is a complex form of human self-expression, a manner of self-positionality in society, and the social construction of the nexus of concepts including 'biological sex', sex assigned at birth, gender roles, sexuality, and cisheteronormativity that originates in the psyche and is expressed through the body, among other sites, and is reinforced in language. It is not limited to a binary understanding and may change many times over the course of a lifespan." (p. 13)

the concept of *linguistic gender* (termed here *gender in language*), may be defined as the appearance of normatively gender-specific meanings and embedded grammatical distinctions based on the complex human quality of gender. As opposed to an

understanding of *linguistic gender* as agreement-based systems of nominal classification, this alternate definition reassigns the concept to the domain of *personal reference*, or wherever people are directly invoked in language. Linguistically, gender appears as a semantic, pragmatic, and/or formal distinction made to differentiate human referents along the basis of gender. Prescriptive gender values in language are largely based on global legacies of cisheteropatriarchy, and throughout time, both extant and innovative linguistic resources have been used to expand the capacity for gender self-representation in language for people of all genders.

The *humanistic theory of gender in language* includes the following disprovable tenets:

- A. There does not exist a truly "genderless" language, per the above definition. Insofar as any given language has the capacity to express the concept of gender with words, every language contains some meaningful distinction based on gender. This is most often revealed in the set of gender-specific personhood (e.g. *man, woman, boy, girl*) and kinship terms (e.g. *father, mother, brother, sister*) in a given language.
- B. Gender-specific meanings may be embedded in language to varying degrees which correlate with different linguistic features. The most basic and frequent crosslinguistic realization of gender in language is in the semantics and pragmatics of *unembedded*, gender-specific lexical entries. *Embedded* expressions of linguistic gender are primarily morphemic and can be found in discrete grammatical categories (e.g. personal pronouns). The most *highly embedded* form of gender in language known by this dissertation is morphosyntactic, namely masculine-feminine agreement-based systems of nominal classification that transfer the feature of gender onto several other grammatical categories.
- Γ. Human gender identities and linguistic gender values have historically shared a mutually co-constructive relationship, producing the two linguistic gender values most often found crosslinguistically—*masculine* and *feminine*—that are based on the European, binary model of gender. These values may be ranked in terms of markedness: in most languages of the world, the masculine linguistic gender is historically considered *unmarked* and used generically, often subsuming human

referents of other genders. The feminine gender is usually *marked*, as evidenced by the use of masculine generics to invisibilize women and the ongoing process of *linguistic feminization*, which produces feminine forms of words, like occupational terms, that did not exist prescriptively before. In the present day, *gender identity* is maintained separate from *linguistic gender self-expression*, however language operates on a mostly binary set of gender values that are historically produced. Because of this, one should not assume a person's gender identity based on the forms of gender in language they adopt, especially because prescriptive linguistic gender values are much less numerous than human gender identities. When masculine and feminine linguistic forms are deemed inadequate for linguistic gender self-expression, gender-neutral forms, which exist to varying degrees, may be employed, or innovative (invented) forms may be developed. These linguistic gender values are likely to be the *most marked*, especially if these forms and usages are considered "new" and lack institutional legitimacy.

- Δ. For every language that exhibits some feature of gender, the choice of which normatively gender-specific form to employ is based on the referent in question, whether that be the judgment of the speaker about how to represent the referent's gender linguistically based on known or perceived information, or the desire of the referent to adopt and be addressed with a certain set of linguistic forms. This concept of *gender agreement* that focuses on adequate *linguistic gender self-expression* describes *people* as the originator of the property of gender that is then expressed (or not) with linguistic resources. Successful gender agreement matches gender-specific or gender-neutral linguistic forms to the desire of the referent to be addressed with those forms.
- E. The availability of adequate forms of linguistic gender self-expression is a basic human right that must be defended. The people who need these forms of self-expression most will create and employ them, but since language and grammar are social phenomena, their acceptance is dependent upon conferrences of societal and/or institutional legitimacy. While it is true that gender affirmation with language is important for all people, those with non-normative gender identities are disproportionately affected by a perceived lack of adequate forms of linguistic

gender self-expression and must confront the psychologically and materially violent process of *misgendering* (when one's use of gender in language does *not* match the desire of the referent). Language is in a constant state of change and all forms of linguistic gender self-expression, whether prescriptive or non-prescriptive, are valid.

3.2 About the Typology

The corpus of data found in this dissertation includes a representative sample of typologically and geographically distant languages. Linguistic diversity is intended to be captured in other ways, for instance by the inclusion of some of the world's largest and smallest languages, languages in different states of vitality, languages which have changed dramatically over time as a result of colonization and globalization, and signed languages are also considered (e.g. American Sign Language). It is by no means an exhaustive survey, but instead designed to illustrate the known features of gender in language using a highly diversified sample.

Where possible, linguistic data comes from a variety of prescriptive language documents (e.g. grammars, dictionaries, language manuals) published by universities, large publishing houses, and language academies. These governmental and non-governmental bodies (among other institutions) participate in the standardization of language and confer the highest possible degree of institutional legitimacy onto the linguistic forms they document. That this data comes from sources that are considered official or national allows us to investigate language as a category of hegemonic power and make sociological arguments about the relationship between language and interrelated systems of power such as colonialism, sexism, and transphobia. For languages which are less well-documented, the highest quality information has been sought, for instance dissertations producing grammars resulting from fieldwork and/or archival research, or scholarly articles that compile comparative information on understudied language families. All of these sources will be supplemented with different empirical and community-based publications focused on the concept of *gender-inclusive language* in Chapter 4 to explore the many ways that the prescriptive constraints of language have been reimagined to include people of other gender identities and to create more room for gender-neutrality.

This remainder of this chapter, however, reports the features of gender in language

according to their prescriptive, traditional, and normative values in order to provide a starting point that outlines the constraints of standard language that exist currently. Those values come down to three: *masculine*, *feminine*, and *gender-neutral*. As per the theory above, when gendered meanings and distinctions appear in language, it is almost always normative binary gender that is distinguished. Gender-neutral options exist prescriptively to varying degrees, but as revealed in this chapter, the availability of extant gender-neutral forms decreases with higher and higher degrees of gender embeddedness. The descriptors *prescriptive*, *traditional*, and *normative* are helpful in describing masculine and feminine linguistic values as a product of shared global histories and forms of power. The term *prescriptive* refers to the institutional standardization of language; a sample referent is any source that compiles "correct" linguistic forms and usages or prescribes a set of rules about how a given language is to be used. When this dissertation makes a distinction between *prescriptive* and *non-prescriptive* forms, this refers to the fact of certain linguistic forms being legitimated by and included in documents produced by institutions of prescriptive language, and other forms being denied this institutional legitimacy, either because the form is extant but used in an innovative way (e.g. the -e morpheme in Spanish; *amigue* 'friend') or because the form itself is innovative (e.g. the -x morpheme in Spanish; English neopronouns), contributing to their markedness in society. The term *traditional* refers to the historical production of standard language and the outdated model of binary gender that has been reinforced by and embedded in language to varying degrees over the course of several centuries. Finally, the term *normative* allows us to contrast the worlds of *cisheteronormativity* and *queerness/genderqueerness*. Although queerness has always existed throughout history, this dissertation considers standard language to be a largely cisheteronormative object. In domain of personal reference, masculine and feminine linguistic values have historically shared as referents the cisheteronormative male and female, respectively. Contrasting normative and non-normative subjects and usages of language allows us to define cisheteronormativity as the overall crosslinguistic default and any challenge to that system as a form of queer and genderqueer resistance. For this reason, the qualifiers "normatively masculine" and "normatively feminine" are employed throughout this dissertation to repeatedly invoke a broader understanding of gender laid against a backdrop of traditional binary thought.

Figure 3.2 Values of gender in featural typology

(normatively) MASCULINE	(normatively) FEMININE	(gender-) NEUTRAL
-----------------------------------	----------------------------------	-----------------------------

Figures included in this typology thus organize linguistic forms into three categories entitled *masculine*, *feminine*, and *gender-neutral* (not to be confused with *neuter*), except for cases in which figures are intended to describe a given language in terms of its extant nominal class values (see Figure 3.2). In the final chapter of this dissertation, different gender-inclusive forms (which may or may not overlap with extant gender-neutral forms) will be considered and will often demand a reconceptualization of these categories on a language-by-language basis. The labels *masculine*, *feminine*, and *neutral*, which refer to the complex human quality of gender, may be totally irrelevant to the grammatical system of the language in question; for instance, the Greek neuter noun (το) αγόρι '(the) boy' is classified here as *masculine* because of its gender-specific meaning referring to a normative male child. Linguistic forms documented include those which bear gender-specific meanings or distinctions on their own (e.g. nouns, personal pronouns) or which are used in gender-specific personal reference because they are agreement targets (e.g. articles, prepositions). Items in the same row have no distinction in meaning other than the reference of normative gender, unless otherwise noted. Using this logic, the figures presented in this dissertation reorganize prescriptive grammars that describe linguistic forms according to their values within systems of agreement-based nominal classification and transform them into a matrix based on normative gender values. Figure 3.2.1 illustrates this process by comparing the formal gender values of nouns in Modern Greek to their semantics.

Figure 3.2.1 Transformation of grammar based on nominal class values into grammar of normative gender values (Greek)

Nominal Class Value				Normative Gender Value		
MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER		MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTRAL
άδερφος 'brother'	γυναίκα 'woman'	αγόρι 'boy'	→	άδερφος 'brother'	αδερφή 'sister'	αδέρφι 'sibling'
θείος 'uncle'	αδερφή 'sister'	κορίτσι 'girl'		θείος 'uncle'	θεία 'aunt'	—
άντρας 'man'	θεία 'aunt'	παιδί 'child'		άντρας 'man'	γυναίκα 'woman'	(ο) άνθρωπος 'person, human'
άνθρωπος 'person, human'		αδέρφι 'sibling'		(το) αγόρι 'boy'	(το) κορίτσι 'girl'	(το) παιδί 'child'

For languages without such a system, forms used in personal reference are isolated and described according to their normative gender values. Figure 3.2.2 illustrates this process for English.

Figure 3.2.2 Creation of grammar of normative gender values (English)

				MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTRAL
lady		husband		man	woman	person
	man		woman			
boy		girl		boy	girl	child
	spouse					
wife		baby		husband	wife	spouse
	person					
child		gentleman		gentleman	lady	—
				—	—	baby

Throughout the typology, a series of analyses will be performed that compare the embeddedness of gender in different languages with the goal of creating a preliminary picture of the crosslinguistic scale of gender in language.

Figure 3.2.3 Typology of the features of gender in language

LEXICAL

housewife. NOUN.

'*haüs-*, *wif*' plural

housewives. 1 : a married woman in charge of a household (MERRIAM-WEBSTER)

PRONOMINAL		AFFIXAL		CLASSIFIER		
ENGLISH	ITALIAN	SPANISH		JACALTEC		
(he/him)	(lui, -o)	latino	amigo	cumam	cumi?	—
(she/her)	(lei, -a)	latina	amiga	—	—	ya?
(they/them)	(loi, -ə)	latino/a	amigo, -a	naj	ix	—
(ze/zir)	(ləi, -ə)	latin@	amig@	naj ni?an	ix ni?an	—
(he/they)	(lui/ləi)	latinx	amigx	ho?	xo?	—
(any pronouns)	(qualunque)	latine	amigue	ho? ni?an	xo? ni?an	—
				—	—	unin

ORTHOGRAPHIC

EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHS



CHINESE

人 亻 女 他 她
[M.] [F.] 'he' 'she'

PARTICLE

STANDARD JAPANESE

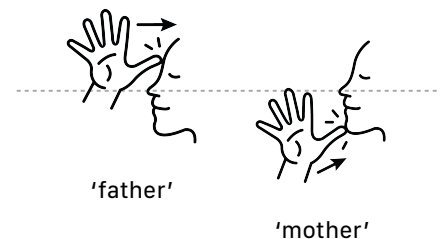
ぞ ぜ さ わ わ ね わ よ
よ ね の な の よ の か し ら

THAI

กระผม ค่ะ คณะ ชะ ชะ วะ วะ
ครับ ชะ จ๊ะ จ๊ะ ยะ ยะ ไ้ย

SIGN

AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE



MORPHOSYNTACTIC

GREEK

Ο Αλέξανδρος είναι παιδιατρικός νοσοκόμος που δουλεύει σε ένα νοσοκομείο στη Βενεζουέλα. Αυτός είναι ένας πολύ αξιосέβαστος συνάδερφος και ένας εξαιρετικός φροντιστής των ασθενών του. Μόλις αποφοίτησε με το πτυχίο ιατρικής του πριν ξεκινήσει αυτή τη δουλειά.

3.3 Lexicosemantic Gender and the Myth of the "Genderless" Language

As described in Section 2.1.1, the term "genderless" is commonly used to describe languages which lack an agreement-based system of nominal classification. Consequently, the use of the term invokes the idea that no features of gender are found in those languages. Four common referents of the term "genderless language" are English, Hungarian, Farsi, and Vietnamese. While indeed none of these languages feature an agreement-based system of nominal classification, at minimum, all of them contain the feature of *lexicosemantic gender*, wherein normatively gender-specific meanings are found in the semantics of different words in a given language, especially nouns. A diagnostic that may be used to detect the feature of lexicosemantic gender is termed here the *simple gender test*. The goal of the test is to locate sets of basic, frequent, gender-paired terms of personal reference in a given language using another language or a set of basic concepts as a point of comparison. Crosslinguistically, gender-specific lexical items are frequently found in the following sets of nouns with personal reference, among others:

- Basic personhood terms (e.g. *man, woman*), which may also encode other distinctions like age (e.g. *boy, girl*), formality and/or social status (e.g. *gentleman, lady*), etc.;
- Kinship terms (e.g. *mother, father*), which describe relationships between people and in some languages may have the effect of encoding gender information about all parties involved in the relation, as well as other distinctions, like generation (e.g. *grandmother, granddaughter*), marital status (e.g. *husband, wife*), relation through marriage (e.g. *brother-in-law, sister-in-law*), paternity/maternality, etc.;
- Occupational terms (e.g. *actor, actress*), which are the focus of linguistic feminization in many languages, including titles for royalty (e.g. *king, queen*) and governmental and military ranks.

To illustrate the simple gender test, Figure 3.3 displays an abbreviated matrix of kinship terms in English. As can be seen in the figure, a small sample based only on the distinctions of gender and generation reveals a few lexical gaps, namely for the pairs *uncle/aunt* and *nephew/niece*, for which there exist no prescriptive gender-neutral forms. Because

of this, a dash indicating the prescriptive nonexistence of a certain form is placed in the cell, and we might expect those sites to become the targets of gender-inclusive innovation. Besides exposing lexical gaps within a single language, the utility of the simple gender test is its ability to use one language to analyze another for basic, gender-specific terms of personal reference. To take the example of the three other "genderless" languages listed above, each deviate from the forms of expression of kinship relations in English in different ways, sometimes in ways that make it impossible to provide adequate translational equivalents.

In Hungarian (see Figure 3.3.1), we see similar lexical gaps as in English, namely for the pairs *nagybácsi* 'uncle' and *nagynéni* 'aunt' as well as *unokaöccs* 'nephew' and *unokahúg* 'niece', for which there exist no prescriptive gender-neutral alternatives. One difference is that in Hungarian, it is possible to express the concept of an older or younger brother or sister using additional kinship terms that are morphologically distinct at the root and not a result of compounding:

Figure 3.3 Abbreviated matrix of English kinship terms

MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTRAL
grandfather	grandmother	grandparent
father	mother	parent
uncle	aunt	—
brother	sister	sibling
son	daughter	child
nephew	niece	—
grandson	granddaughter	grandchild

Figure 3.3.1 Abbreviated matrix of Hungarian kinship terms

MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTRAL
nagypapa 'grandfather'	nagyanya 'grandmother'	nagyszülő 'grandparent'
apa 'father'	anya 'mother'	szülő 'parent'
nagybácsi 'uncle'	nagynéni 'aunt'	—
fiútestvér 'brother'	lánytestvér 'sister'	testvér 'sibling'
báty 'older brother'	nővér 'older sister'	—
öcs 'younger brother'	húg 'younger sister'	—
fiú 'son'	lány 'daughter'	gyerek 'child'
unokaöccs 'nephew'	unokahúg 'niece'	—
fiúunoka 'grandson'	lányunoka 'granddaughter'	unoka 'grandchild'

báty 'older brother', *nővér* 'older sister', *öcs* 'younger brother', and *húg* 'older sister'. These terms are used largely to the exclusion of the items *fiútestvér* 'brother' and *lánytestvér* 'sister'. Overall, while Hungarian features a similar amount of gender-neutral basic kinship terms as English, it seems to contain more kinship terms that are distinguished by normative gendered reference, disqualifying it as a "genderless" language.

Figure 3.3.2 Abbreviated matrix of Farsi (Persian) kinship terms

MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTRAL
پدربزرگ 'grandfather'	مادربزرگ 'grandmother'	— 'grandparent'
پدر 'father'	مادر 'mother'	— 'parent'
عمو 'paternal uncle'	عمه 'paternal aunt'	—
دایی 'maternal uncle'	خاله 'maternal aunt'	—
برادر 'brother'	خواهر 'sister'	همنیا 'sibling'
پسر 'son'	دختر 'daughter'	فرزند 'child'
—	—	برادرزاده 'brother's child'
'nephew'	'niece'	خواهرزاده 'sister's child'
—	—	نوه 'grandchild'
'grandson'	'granddaughter'	

In Farsi (Persian), we find other deviations from the English-language model (see Figure 3.3.2). In some parts of the kinship terminology paradigm, Farsi is more rigidly gendered; for instance, there exist no translational equivalents for the gender-neutral concepts of a *grandparent* or *parent*, only the gender-distinguished pairs *پدربزرگ* 'grandfather' and *مادربزرگ* 'grandmother' as well as *پدر* 'father' and *مادر* 'mother'. The concepts of an *uncle* or *aunt* must be double-gender-marked in Farsi, encoding a distinction of normative gender both for the relative themselves as well as their positioning in the patrilineal or matrilineal line, producing four terms instead of two: *عمو* 'paternal uncle', *عمه* 'paternal aunt', *دایی* 'maternal uncle' and *خاله* 'maternal aunt'. For the concepts *nephew* and *niece*, we find just two terms whose description of

the referent is gender-neutral, but which simultaneously encode a reference of normative gender for the parent of that child: *برادرزاده* 'brother's child' and *خواهرزاده* 'sister's child'. Finally, there are no gender-distinguished forms akin to *grandson* and *granddaughter* in English, only the gender-neutral term *نوه* 'grandchild'.

Kinship terms in Vietnamese are similarly distinct from those of English (see Figure

Figure 3.3.3 Abbreviated matrix of Vietnamese kinship terms

MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTRAL
ông 'grandfather'	bà 'grandmother'	— 'grandparent'
bố, cha, ba 'father'	mẹ, má 'mother'	— 'parent'
— 'father's older brother'	cô, o 'father's older sister'	— 'father's older sibling'
cậu 'mother's older brother'	dì 'mother's older sister'	— 'mother's older sibling'
— 'parent's older brother'	— 'parent's older sister'	bác 'parent's older sibling'
chú 'father's younger brother'	cô 'father's younger sister'	— 'father's younger sibling'
cậu 'mother's younger brother'	dì 'mother's younger sister'	— 'mother's younger sibling'
— 'parent's younger brother'	— 'parent's younger sister'	— 'parent's younger sibling'
— 'brother'	— 'sister'	— 'sibling'
anh 'older brother'	chị 'older sister'	— 'older sibling'
— 'younger brother'	— 'younger sister'	em 'younger sibling'
— 'son'	— 'daughter'	con 'child'
— 'nephew'	— 'niece'	cháu —
— 'grandson'	— 'granddaughter'	cháu 'grandchild'

3.3.3). For instance, there are no translational equivalents for the the general concepts of a *brother*, *sister*, or *sibling*. If the sibling is older, forms are forcibly gender-distinguished (*anh* 'older brother' and *chị* 'older sister') but if the sibling is younger, only one gender-neutral term is prescriptively available: *em* 'younger sibling'. This distinction of relative age carries

through to the concepts of *uncle* and *aunt*, which are triple-marked, twice for gender and once for relative age, producing eighteen possible forms for which eight exist prescriptively. If the parent's sibling is older than the parent in question, a gender-neutral term is prescriptively available: *bác* 'parent's older sibling'. If the parent's sibling is younger, however, prescriptively-available forms of expression are forcibly double-gender marked: *chú* 'father's younger brother', *cô* 'father's younger sister', *cậu* 'mother's younger brother', and *đì* 'mother's younger sister'. While the forms *em*, *con*, and *cháu* are themselves gender-neutral, a mark of gender may still be applied, as in *con trai* 'son' and *con gái* 'daughter'.

In this way, by using just a small number of English words, the simple gender test reveals that like English, each of the above "genderless" languages minimally contain the feature of *lexicosemantic gender*. Crucially, the normative gender-specific value of these lexical items is due only to their socially-constructed meanings as opposed to some sort of formal (morphological and/or phonological) mark of normative masculine or feminine gender. For this reason, most gender-paired lexical items that are distinguished lexicosemantically differ at the root. In languages with morphemic expressions of gender, it is possible to find gender-paired lexical items with different roots whose distinction of normative gender value is reinforced formally, for instance in the Spanish pair *yerno* 'son-in-law' and *nuera* 'daughter-in-law', which feature canonical -o/-a masculine-feminine morphology, although in languages with inflectional gender morphology, it is more usual that gender-paired items share the same root. Morphological gender itself falls outside of the definition of lexicosemantic gender as the most basic feature of gender in language, however, because it is embedded, as evidenced by its systematicity and productivity in different parts of the grammar.

The simple gender test includes a crucial caveat: kinship terms and other basic terms of personal reference may differ greatly from one language to another, and not every society shares the same kinship structure and/or conceptualizations of personhood (Lévi-Strauss, 1971). For this reason, translational equivalencies should be monitored closely, especially as they may not be available from one language to another. This lesson is repeatedly invoked in comparisons between Indigenous and imperial languages. In translation, the use of European languages to attempt to understand aspects of colonized societies involves the installation of a binary logic that reinforces the idea of cisheteropatriarchy and the Western construction of the nuclear family unit. The decolonial feminist philosopher María Lugones

(2020) gives the example of the Aymara word *warmi*, usually glossed as *mujer* in Spanish or 'woman' in English. She writes that the true meaning of *warmi* "is decidedly not woman" as the organization of Aymara communities is based on cosmological and not biological terms (Lugones, 2020, p. 42). Her argument is not just that the words themselves are not equivalent; she contends that the two sets of identities are produced in totally distinct power structures and cannot be understood within the confines of the Western epistemological tradition.

Scholarly research produced in the Western university claims that *male* and *female* are the basic gender categories in Aymara society and that *chachawarmi* (glossed as 'man-woman') is the cultural concept representing the ideal balance between the "two genders," which is said to structure households in Aymara culture (e.g. Mitchell, 2003, p. 275). Many sources uncritically use Western gender categories to gloss basic Aymara personhood terms, as in *yuqalla* *'boy' and *imilla* *'girl'. While both Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors claim that gender (or something meant by the term *gender* in English) is indeed a fundamental organizing principle of Aymara society (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2004), other distinctions not found in the Western gender system also define Aymara personhood categories. When translated using Western terms, many aspects of the meaning of the Aymara words are lost. In Aymara, personhood terms are distinguished according to Andean beliefs about personhood and the cycle of life, which are related to broader cosmologies distinct from those that produced the Western categories. Carrasco Gutiérrez & Gavilán Vega (2014) provide an analysis of basic Aymara personhood terms that relates them to a binary division of "sex," but that distinguishes them further based on other meaningful distinctions, including stage of life (pre-birth, alive, deceased), linear age, and reproductive capacity (see Figure 3.3.4). It is worth noting that Aymara personhood terms do not distinguish what the authors call "sex" in prenatal or early stages of life, nor after death. In combination, these dimensions produce more basic personhood terms than are found in Western languages. Glossing them using basic European personhood terms betrays the true meaning of the Indigenous terms and provides an inadequate framework of knowledge with which to attempt to understand them.

Furthermore, what are understood as the most basic gender categories in Aymara, *chacha* and *warmi*, are defined by the locally-specific practice of *jaqichasiña* (glossed as 'marriage'), which defines personhood in Aymara culture, yet the definition cannot be

Figure 3.3.4 Basic personhood terms in Aymara

MASCULINE	FEMININE	STAGE
sullu		<i>Fetal From gestation until before birth.</i>
asu wawa		<i>First six months (sometimes until less months).</i>
wawa		<i>Between six months and when they lower from the mother's shoulder and begin to walk.</i>
wawa yuqalla	wawa imilla	<i>From when they begin to walk until 3 or 4 years.</i>
jisk'a yuqualla jach'a	jisk'a imilla jach'a	<i>Between 4 and 14 years (the age limits can vary).</i>
majta	maldaya	<i>Preadolescence, between 11 and 14 years (only in some high plain sectors).</i>
wayna	tawaqu	<i>Adolescence, approximately after 14 years until the moment of marrying.</i>
chacha	warmi	<i>Adult. After marrying.</i>
-	takya (or mama)	<i>Adult, now in reproductive stage.</i>
jach'a awki jach'a tata achachi	jach'a tayka jach'a mama apachi	<i>Elders. About 50 years old. Non-reproducing woman.</i>
jiwata amaya		<i>Individual after death.</i>

Source: Adapted and translated from Carrasco Gutiérrez & Gavilán Vega, 2014, p. 172

restricted to just people (Medrano Valdez, 2019, p. 107). The Andean notion of *chachawarmi* describes a balance that includes not only human beings, but also nature and the entire universe (Burman, 2011), so in this way it cannot be defined by basic Western terms, which are restricted in meaning to the distinct beliefs about personhood that produced them. For this reason, describing *chachawarmi* as the Andean notion of gender is insufficient, as the traditional Western understanding of gender is restricted to the realm of the human, and it

also ignores distinctions that define personhood in local context, like *jaqichasiña*. *Chachawarmi* is said to describe a relationality, complementarity, reciprocity, and duality (among other terms) that does not subscribe to the binary logic implied by the Western gender system (Layme Pairumani, 2016; Medrano Valdez, 2019).

With this caveat in mind (and recalling that gender is always a locally-specific sociological category), lexicosemantic gender is assumed to be crosslinguistically universal, as words can be found in presumably every language that encode meanings based on local conceptualizations of human gender. This finding offers us the tenet of the present theory that states that no language is genderless (as would be implied by current definitions of linguistic gender). Instead, in basic sets of terms describing personhood, kinship, and occupations (among other things), lexical gender items with normatively gendered meanings may be found.

3.4 Embedded Features of Gender in Language

Whereas the only unembedded (and presumed to be crosslinguistically universal) feature of gender in language posited by this dissertation is *lexical gender*, embedded features of gender are not found in every language, and their distribution is highly dependent on the type, modality, and other unique characteristics of the language in question. As implied by the title "embedded," these features comprise the grammatical structure of the language in some way, for instance by forming distinctions for normative gender in traditionally "closed" grammatical categories, as in the case of *pronominal gender*, or by being an exponent of *gender inflection*, including cases of *affixation*. Pronominal gender is treated separately here because of its unique status as an embedded and highly frequent feature that may or may not rely on morphemic distinctions (e.g. *er/sie* in German v. *ele/ela* in Portuguese). All other features presented in this section (affixal, classifier, orthographic, particle, and sign) are manifestly morphemic. While affixation is the most common inflectional process found crosslinguistically, and this appears to hold true for the features of gender identified by this dissertation (Brown, 2010, p. 492), this result is mostly local to synthetic (agglutinative and fusional) languages. We must also take into consideration the two extremes of morphological typology which are excluded from this discussion. *Polysynthetic languages* are the most morphologically dense as they permit the

composition of words through long stretches of concatenating morphemes, yet because the loci of these morphemes are usually verbal forms, and because polysynthetic languages usually lack agreement-based systems from which gender morphemes might originate, they are not presumed to be the focus of this study, though examples may exist (Fortescue, 2016). Affixation is not present at all in purely *isolating languages* which rely on syntax to establish grammatical relations, yet a look at isolating languages allows us to expand our conceptualization of embedded features of gender to *classifiers*, which function as a non-agreement-based system of nominal classification relevant to the syntax and may rarely select for normative gender in some languages. Beyond morphological typology, other unique characteristics may allude to more features not commonly recognized; for instance, Japanese and Thai exhibit a more nebulous feature entitled *particle gender*, whereby obligatory sentence-final particles expressing social status may be wholly or partially gender-specific, or may drastically change in meaning depending on the identity of the speaker. The scripts employed by different world languages also play a role. Logosyllabic writing systems which are capable of embedding morphological information lead to the discovery of *orthographic gender*, whereby normatively gender-specific meanings may be encoded in graphemes comprising characters or words in languages like Mandarin Chinese. Finally, turning our focus to languages of other modalities besides speech allow us to conceptually expand our idea of gender inflection, as in the case of *sign gender*, where changes in the spatial position of signs or variations of the same hand shape may be used to encode normative gender distinctions in signed languages.

What distinguishes unembedded and embedded features of gender is the concept of *word formation*. Some words like *boy* and *girl* are themselves morphologically uncomplex *lexemes*, which are essentially the functional or meaning-bearing components of associated forms to which different morphemes are added, as in the case of *boy* → *boys* and *girl* → *girls* (Stump, 2001, p. 13). We have now isolated -s as a suffix indicating plurality, therefore separating this *system morpheme* from meaning-bearing *content morphemes*, since -s does not bear lexical meaning. Inflection is defined as the process by which some kind of linguistic value or morphosyntactic property is expressed (Spencer, 2016, p. 30), as in this case of an affix combining with a base. The forms *girl* and *girls*, for example, are not two different words, but rather two different inflectional forms of the same word, the former inflected for singular grammatical number and the latter for plural grammatical number. In

lieu of creating new words, inflectional processes create inflectional paradigms of related forms for a single word within a single grammatical category (Spencer, 2016, p. 27). The content morphemes *boy* and *girl* share categorization as *free* content morphemes (as opposed to *bound* content morphemes like *rasp-* as in *raspberry*), morphologically uncomplex words, and lexemes. For this reason, this dissertation subsumes free content morphemes (which are recognized as words) under its definition of *lexical gender*. An example of a word formation process that is not inflectional is *compounding*, which is defined as the combination of separate lexemes to create new lexemes (which could also be words) with meanings related or unrelated to their component parts (Spencer, 2016, p. 28). For instance, *cowboy* and *cowgirl* are different words than *cow*, *boy*, and *girl*, and this is evident in the distinct meanings of the compounds. This distinction between words and inflectional forms of the same word is what motivates the categories entitled *unembedded* and *embedded* features of gender in language, the latter of which are described in the following sections.

3.4.1 Affixal Gender

Affixation is just one method of gender inflection, but it is presumed to be the most crosslinguistically prevalent of all, especially suffixation (Brown, 2010, p. 488; van Goethem, 2020, p. 1), and it provides some of the most emblematic examples of morphological gender in language, including the canonical *-o/-a* gender inflection found in Spanish and Portuguese. The general term *affixation* betrays a number of linguistic devices which are used to perform morphological inflection, such as prefixes, suffixes, infixes, and circumfixes, though inflection can also be effectuated using other processes, like reduplication, ablaut, consonant gradations, the modification or stress or tone, or subtraction (Spencer, 2001; Stump, 2001). Yet for only one of these above phenomena do we have abundant evidence of inflection for normative gender. The suffixal morphology found in Indo-European and many other languages is apparently the strongest evidence of affixation marking normatively gendered distinctions, as canonical morphemes are intrinsically linked to masculine-feminine agreement-based systems, which inflect many words used in personal reference (e.g. *filho* 'son' and *filha* 'daughter' in Portuguese). For this reason, suffixation is the focus of this section, as we lack strong evidence for normative

masculine and feminine gender marking in prefixation and the other possible types of inflection listed above. For instance, prefixal morphology is found in Swahili and is a characteristic trait of Bantu languages, but nominal classes in Bantu do not distinguish binary gender, and thus this type of "gender" inflection does not meet the more humanistic definition of *gender* set forth in this dissertation. There is evidence of infixal gender inflection in the form of ablaut in Marind, an endangered Papuan language of Indonesia (e.g. *anem* 'man', *anum* 'woman'; Olsson, 2018, p. 125-127), and a case where gender is distinguished phonologically in the suprasegmental feature of lexical stress in Afar, a language of Djibouti and Ethiopia (e.g. *bàxa* 'son', *baxà* 'daughter'; Corbett, 1991, p. 51-52; Hayward, 2001, p. 626).

As alluded to previously, morphological gender inflection is a logical consequence of agreement-based systems of nominal classification, wherein all agreement targets of a given noun must be inflected for the nominal class value of that noun. This results in the mark of gender repeating itself, often many times in a single clause. Yet gender marking via affixation is found in typologically distinct languages, and thus not having a formal system of nominal classification does not disqualify the possibility of locating gender morphology within those languages. In some cases, traces of gender morphology remain in languages that are descended from, that have lost, or are otherwise influenced by agreement-based systems of nominal classification. This is especially true in instances of European colonialism, wherein Indigenous and imperial languages are in situations of heavy language contact, and we routinely observe cases in which Indigenous languages inherit gender morphology or are otherwise influenced by the binary bias of imperial languages.

Figure 3.4.1 displays four examples of canonical gender inflection in Portuguese, Italian, Greek, and Ukrainian. Among these examples, Portuguese is the least morphologically complex, as nouns are not inflected for case and pluralization is realized by a separate suffix, akin to the process of pluralizing English nouns. Italian, on the other hand, illustrates the difference between fusional and non-fusional morphology. Fusional morphology is defined as the ability for a language to encode multiple grammatical features in single affixes, and is distinct from agglutinative morphology, in which there is a one-to-one correspondence between morphemes and inflectional values, as well as a linear order to their attachment to noun forms (Bybee, 1985, p. 45). Typologically speaking, both Portuguese and Italian are defined as fusional languages (as opposed to agglutinative

Figure 3.4.1 Affixal inflection for normative gender

Portuguese				Italian			
	MASCULINE	FEMININE		MASCULINE	FEMININE		
	dançarino 'dancer'	dançarina 'dancer'		bambino 'boy, child'	bambina 'girl'		
				bambini 'boys, children'	bambine 'girls'		
Greek							
	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER	
NOM.	αδερφός 'brother'	αδερφή 'sister'	αδέρφι 'sibling'	αδερφοί 'brothers'	αδερφές 'sisters'	αδέρφια 'siblings'	
ACC.	αδερφό	αδερφή	αδέρφι	αδερφούς	αδερφές	αδέρφια	
GEN.	αδερφού	αδερφής	αδερφιού	αδερφών	αδερφών	αδερφιών	
VOC.	αδερφέ	αδερφή	αδέρφι	αδερφοί	αδερφές	αδέρφια	
Ukrainian (<i>inflection of</i> професор 'professor')							
	MASCULINE SG.	FEMININE SG.		MASCULINE PL.	FEMININE PL.		
NOM.	професор	професорка		професори	професорки		
GEN.	професора	професорки		професорів	професорок		
DAT.	професору, -ові	професорці		професорам	професоркам		
ACC.	професора	професорку		професорів	професорок		
INST.	професором	професоркою		професорами	професорками		
LOC.	професорі, -ові	професорці		професорах	професорках		
VOC.	професоре	професорко		професори	професорки		

languages) because they have this ability, as can be seen in their inventories of verbal morphology which simultaneously encode person, number, tense, aspect, and mood. Yet though Italian nouns do not inflect for case, as is the case in Portuguese, pluralization is handled differently: gender and number is handled by fusional morphology, where both values are simultaneously encoded in one suffix. As a result, as opposed to an inventory of two canonical gender morphemes, Italian contains four: *-o* for the masculine singular, *-a* for the feminine singular, *-i* for the masculine plural, and *-e* for the feminine plural. As will be discussed in Section 4.2.2, the fact that four of Italian's five vowels double as gender and number morphemes creates a challenge for achieving gender-inclusivity that has been overcome by multiple thoughtful proposals by Italian-speaking members and allies of the queer community.

The cases of Greek and Ukrainian display higher degrees of fusion in their gender morphology. In the example of Greek, we can observe that the agreement-based system of nominal classification interacts with both grammatical number and case. These distinct suffixes are generally not neat sequences of individual and adjacent gender, number, and case markers, but rather fusional morphemes that encode multiple inflectional values at once. To isolate just one class, the feminine morphemes *-η*, *-ες*, *-ης*, and *ών* encode different combinations of grammatical number and case. While it is arguable that the minimal marker of genitive case within the feminine singular is *-ς*, this observation is not generalizable to other parts of the paradigm, where it is clear that this is an inventory of fusional morphemes, many of which occupy multiple cells. The same interaction of nominal class, number, and case can be found in Ukrainian, though with many more inflectional forms in a single nominal paradigm. While some neuter Ukrainian nouns refer to humans, as in *дитинчá* and *малý* 'baby, infant', this distribution appears more exceptional in Ukrainian than it is in Greek, and most nouns that may be inflected either for masculine or feminine normative gender do not have counterparts in the neuter (Pugh & Press, 1999, p. 47). For this reason, Figure 3.4.1 displays only masculine and feminine classes for the noun *профéсор* 'professor', but Ukrainian has many more cases than Greek, totaling seven: nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental, locative, and vocative (Pugh & Press, 1999, p. 58). As a result, the inflectional paradigm for a single Ukrainian noun is larger than that of a Greek noun, and much larger than that of a Portuguese or Italian noun. As will be explored in Chapter 4, gender-inclusive strategies must take into account the multiplication of forms

within inflectional paradigms engendered by multiple interacting inflectional categories, yet the unique morphemic inventories of different languages may provide preexisting solutions, as in the case of morphemes which are not canonically masculine or feminine exclusively and are found on common gender nouns, like *-e* in Spanish and Portuguese.

Figure 3.4.1.1 Traces of morphological gender in English

	MASCULINE	FEMININE		MASCULINE	FEMININE
-ESS	heir	heiress	-O/-A	Latino	Latina
-ETTE	bachelor	bachelorette	-A	—	diva
-EUSE	masseur	masseuse	-E	fiancé	fiancée
-IX	aviator	aviatrix	-INA	—	ballerina
-INE	hero	heroine	-US	alumnus	alumna
-ENNE	comedian	comedienn		alumni	alumnae

Beyond languages with an agreement-based system of nominal classification, gender morphology may still be found. In addition to the unembedded feature of lexical gender, English also contains the embedded feature of morphological gender, which is mostly due to influence from other languages, French perhaps being the most predominant among them (Baron, 1986). Figure 3.4.1.1 displays a number of feminizing suffixes that produce gender-inflected forms in the language. For instance, the words *diva* and *ballerina* are borrowed from Italian. We even find some paired morphology borrowed from other languages, as in the case of *Latino* and *Latina*, which preserve canonical Spanish masculine and feminine gender morphology, and the Latin noun *alumnus*, from which we inherit three associated inflectional forms, all of which retain fusional Latin morphology encoding both gender and number. There is even at least one example of a more complex etymology: *Filipino* and *Filipina*, a Spanish imposition on the Phillipines, which Spain colonized over more than three centuries. English therefore inherited this Spanish-originated marker of Phillipine identity via Tagalog/Filipino.

Relatedly, colonialism has historically played a major role in the transferring of binary gender distinctions to Indigenous languages, as well as the globalization of binary gender ideology in general. Focusing on the spread of Spanish in Latin America, which has had a ruinous effect on the diversity and vitality on Indigenous languages throughout the Americas (Escobar, 2012, p. 67), European colonization has influenced the structure of Native languages since the onset of the conquest, as exemplified by the evangelizing missions that manipulated Indigenous languages by introducing foreign writing systems for them (Mignolo, 1995). Overall, Indigenous languages of the Americas lack masculine-feminine systems of agreement-based nominal classification, though they encode locally-specific distinctions of gender in meaningful ways, including lexically. It is more rare that they contain morphological features of gender, though multiple examples do exist, as in some cases of classifier gender discussed in Section 3.4.3 and the case of Yucatec Maya, which contains masculine (*h-*) and feminine (*x-*) "gender prefixes" that commonly precede names and different categories of nouns (Lois, 1998). A clear example of the transfer of gendered features can be found in Nahuatl, in which the Spanish diminutive suffixes *-ito* and *-ita* are used frequently; though Nahuatl natively has diminutive forms (*-tsi*, *-tzin*) that do not distinguish gender, Spanish diminutives are used with names and nouns of Spanish origin in the language, and are distinguished for normative gender just as they are in Spanish (Chamoreau, 2012). An extreme example can be found in Tagalog. Due to the legacy of Spanish colonialism in the Philippines, Tagalog has inherited hundreds of gendered pairs of Spanish origin that include some of the most basic terms in the language (e.g. *ihó* 'son' and *ihá* 'daughter'), including the terms of national identification *filipino* and *filipina*, and has also inherited a system of masculine-feminine morphosyntactic agreement that has been integrated into the native lexicon and grammatical structure of the language (Blazado & Papadopoulos, 2025; Oficina de Educación Iberoamericana, 1972; Schachter & Otones, 1972, p. 197).

Suffixal masculine-feminine gender marking can thus be present in different languages regardless of their morphological type, save for the case of purely isolating languages, many of which employ classifier systems instead. Notwithstanding, affixal gender is a highly frequent embedded feature of gender crosslinguistically and a logical consequence of agreement-based systems of nominal classification, which can even influence languages without such a system. As previously stated, this dissertation makes no

attempt to be exhaustive, especially because the morphological complexity of the world's languages cannot possibly be captured here, though it is meant to be representative and to enumerate several known types of gender in language. In all, affixal gender is an emblematic feature of gender in language and a productive inflectional process that may be successfully utilized to feminize and neutralize gender-specific forms for the purpose of adequate self-identification. This topic is a focus of the following chapter.

3.4.2 Pronominal Gender

Personal pronouns are frequently gendered in many languages of the world, regardless of their genealogy. The gendered distinctions which distinguish them are either morphological, or else they are viewed as component members of a 'closed' category, further evidencing their embeddedness in the grammar. One such crosslinguistic feature is *pronominal gender*, or the appearance of normatively gendered distinctions in the paradigm of personal pronouns in a given language. Personal pronouns are an embedded and highly frequent grammatical category and often contain a substantive set of related forms, such as different case forms, reflexive forms, possessive forms, etc. They are also an interesting counterpoint to the observed tendency that embedded features of gender are at minimum inflectional. In languages with morphological expressions of gender, it is possible to find examples where distinctions of normative gender in personal pronominal paradigms are based on morphological gender inflection, for instance in the Greek personal pronouns *αυτός* 'he' and *αυτή* 'she', which feature canonical, suffixal masculine-feminine gender morphology. In other languages, personal pronouns may share compositional similarities, for instance the English pronouns *he* and *she*, although taking a look at the lexicon and grammar more broadly, we cannot make the claim that *s-* or *he* are productive; *s-* cannot be said to be a feminine gender morpheme because we lack evidence of its systematicity in distinguishing masculine-feminine paired items, and similarly, there is minimal evidence to suggest the productivity of the root *he* (e.g. *he-wolf*, *she-wolf*), even within the lexicon.

As in the case of English, some distinctions of normative gender found within personal pronominal paradigms are potentially non-reoccurring and may not even be manifestly morphemic. Because they can lack the productive system morphology that encodes normative gender values, pronominal gender is maintained separate from the types

of morphological gender found in this dissertation, though it is possible for both features to appear at once, as in the example of Greek above. Relatedly, it is difficult to order these two categories of features. In English, although morphemic expressions of gender can be found throughout the lexicon (e.g. *actress*, *comediienne*, *majorette*), they are much less frequent in everyday use than gender-distinguished personal pronouns, which are obligatory. In Spanish, subject pronouns are not obligatory because grammatical person and number are marked in verbal conjugation, yet the gender morphology that permeates the language is much more frequent than gender-distinguished pronominal forms, even if they were obligatory, precisely because the morphological system of gender is also morphosyntactic. In general, we can say that a language featuring both pronominal and morphological gender has a higher degree of embeddedness than a language with just one of the two features, but separately, the two features are hard to rank in crosslinguistic terms.

The feature of *pronominal gender* has been enumerated in the literature since at least the time of Corbett's *Gender* (1991), in which it serves as a complication to several tenants of the theory of agreement-based systems of nominal classification, in particular because this theory does not consider the role of the personal referent in linguistic outcomes of "gender" agreement. In reality, personal pronouns are the best evidence for the fact that *people* themselves originate the property of gender that is reflected linguistically somehow, and that the basic mechanism of gender in language is primarily semantic and pragmatic rather than it is morphosyntactic, though these two concepts intersect in the reimagined concept of *gender agreement* provided in this dissertation.

Above all others, pronominal gender is perhaps the most emblematic feature of gender in language, especially in the context of gender-inclusive language reforms (the focus of Chapter 4). Some of the earliest known anti-sexist language reforms in English focused on the generic use of the masculine personal pronoun *he* to refer to people of all genders (Bodine, 1975). As an alternative, the use of the extant gender-neutral personal pronoun *they* for both singular and plural referents has been revitalized and even supported institutionally to a high degree within the English-language context. In addition to its prescriptive gender-neutral status, it has also been embraced as a gender-inclusive pronoun that many nonbinary speakers have adopted because they believe it has the capacity to represent their gender-identity specifically in addition to neutrally. The pronoun *they* [SG.] as well as *pronoun culture*, which refers to the practice of leaving space for people to declare

their pronouns in community settings, are now emblematic features of the gender-inclusive English-language movement.

Locating extant gender-neutral pronouns in languages with gendered distinctions in their personal pronominal paradigms varies per the constraints of the language in question. For instance, several Spanish personal pronouns are distinguished by gender (e.g. *él* 'he', *ella* 'she'), yet partially because the language is strictly masculine-feminine, there are no prescriptive gender-neutral alternatives. Masculine-feminine-neuter languages like German and Greek serve as an interesting point of comparison. In many languages, neuter genders are largely reserved for inanimate objects. This observation is more valid for German than it is for Greek; while German contains very few terms of personal reference that are grammatically neuter (e.g. *das Mädchen* 'the girl'), more basic words for people are neuter in Greek, for instance *το αγόρι* 'the boy', *το κορίτσι* 'the girl', and *το άτομο* 'the person'. In both languages, neuter pronouns are not used prescriptively to refer to people, though perhaps because the Greek neuter gender is less strictly inanimate, some nonbinary speakers have adopted its resources, including the pronoun *αυτό* (as compared with the pronouns *αυτός* 'he' and *αυτή* 'she'). Here it becomes clear that *neuter* does not equal *gender-neutral*. This is also clear in the case of English with reference to the concept of animacy; the pronoun *it* (as well as the German pronoun *es*) is not prescriptively used in personal reference because it is strictly reserved for inanimates. By contrast, in English, the gender-neutral pronoun *they* has historically occupied both singular and plural as well as animate and inanimate positions.

Figure 3.4.2 displays the canonical, third-person singular personal pronouns found in the top twenty most-spoken languages of the world, according to Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2025). Crosslinguistically, personal pronouns reveal a tendency to exhibit the feature of gender most frequently in the third person, yet it must be stated that languages with pronominal gender can exhibit distinctions in particular grammatical persons, numbers, and cases, etc., including in combination. From this sample, we may observe two general tendencies. Firstly, it appears more likely than not for a given language to have the feature of pronominal gender in some part of their pronominal paradigms. Of the twenty languages included in the figure, only five lack the feature of pronominal gender, meaning that gender distinctions are found nowhere in the personal pronominal paradigm. Those languages

Figure 3.4.2 Third-person singular personal pronouns in the top twenty most spoken languages of the world

RANK	LANGUAGE	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTRAL
1	English	he	she	they
2	Mandarin Chinese*	他	她	—
3	Hindi	—	—	वह / यह
4	Spanish	él	ella	—
5	Modern Standard Arabic	هو	هي	—
6	French	il	elle	—
7	Bengali	—	—	এ / ও / স্ন
8	Portuguese	ele	ela	—
9	Russian	он	она	—
10	Urdu	—	—	یہ / وہ
11	Indonesian	—	—	dia, ia
12	German	er	sie	—
13	Japanese	彼	彼女	あの入
14	Nigerian Pidgin†	—	shì	ì, ìm
15	Egyptian Arabic	هو	هي	—
16	Marathi	तो	ती	—
17	Telugu	వీడు / వాడు	ఇది / అది	తను
18	Turkish	—	—	o
19	Hausa	shī	ita	—
20	Tamil	அவன் / இவன்	அவள் / இவள்	—

Note: Forms conjoined by a comma are alternates, whereas forms conjoined by a slash encode a proximal/distal distinction.

* The masculine-feminine distinction between the forms 他 'he' and 她 'she' is found only in writing; both are pronounced identically as *tā*.

† Faraclas (1996) notes that the mesolectal feminine form *shì* is attested in varieties of Nigerian Pidgin in close proximity with the local acrolect of Nigerian Standard English.

include Hindi, Bengali, Urdu, Indonesian, and Turkish; of them, two contain the feature of agreement-based morphosyntactic gender (Hindi, Urdu). Secondly, based on this sample, it appears equally likely to find or to not find extant gender-neutral personal pronouns throughout crosslinguistic paradigms. Of the twenty languages displayed in Figure 3.4.2, nine have extant, gender-neutral, third-person singular pronouns. In addition to the five languages listed above, these include English, Japanese, Nigerian Pidgin, and Telugu. It must be kept in mind that the twenty languages displayed here are not extrapolable to all the languages of the world in general, but they are useful in highlighting one principle: pronominal gender may be found despite the morphological type of the language in question, including languages with or without the feature of agreement-based nominal classification.

Figure 3.4.2.1 Third-person pronouns in Modern Greek

	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER
NOM.	αυτός	αυτή	αυτό	αυτοί	αυτές	αυτά
ACC.	αυτόν	αυτή(ν)	αυτό	αυτούς	αυτές	αυτά
GEN.	αυτού	αυτής	αυτού	αυτών	αυτών	αυτών

The different grammatical shapes of the languages presented in the prior figure compel us to consider the interactive role of different grammatical features in personal pronominal paradigms, such as person, number, and case. Figure 3.4.2.1 displays part of the pronominal inventory of Modern Greek, wherein pronouns are neatly divided along normatively gendered lines and also interact with case (nominative, accusative, and genitive) in addition to number (singular and plural). The difference between English and Greek is stark; whereas only one cell in the English paradigm is distinguished for normative gender (*he* and *she*), there are at least 12 pronominal forms in Greek that evidence gender-marking due to the additional constraint of case in the language. Grammatically neuter pronouns are attested in use by some nonbinary speakers of Greek, and when these additional forms are considered, the number expands to 18, as compared to the two found in English. However, while English and Greek contain normatively gendered distinctions in the

third person alone, other languages feature gendered distinctions in the second person (e.g. Hebrew, Arabic), as well as the first person (e.g. Japanese, Spanish), possibly in combination with other grammatical persons. This multiplication of gendered forms within a paradigm based on the constraints of a given language is an overarching theme of Chapter 4, as is the emblematic feature of pronominal gender more generally.

3.4.3 Classifier Gender

As observed in Section 2.2, classifier languages (the other referent of the term *nominal classification*) can exhibit a rare and understudied feature titled here *classifier gender*, whereby individual classifiers in a given language select for normatively gender-specific nouns. A classifier is a free or bound morpheme that marks a noun once or multiple times within a phrase, highlighting one of its salient qualities (Aikhenvald, 2000; Corbett, 1991; Croft, 1994; Craig, 2000; Dixon, 1982; 1986; Kilarski, 2013; Kilarski & Tang, 2021). Because of their status as system morphemes (which on the whole originate from the lexicon), classifiers are considered here an embedded feature of gender in language, as they are used in systematic ways throughout the grammar. However, unlike agreement-based systems, agreement cannot be said to be made apart from the condition that a semantically-appropriate noun is selected; instead, the classifier precedes or follows nouns and does not have agreement targets within the morphosyntax. This is what distinguishes the degree of embeddedness of the two systems, but in classifier languages, the same classifier can also repeat itself for the purpose of reference tracking within a single phrase, a sentence, or across long stretches of speech.

Whereas in agreement-based systems the nominal class value of a noun is revealed on its dependent elements which are targets of morphosyntactic agreement (e.g. *il primo sindaco* 'the first mayor' in Italian), nominal classes are revealed in classifier languages by observing the distribution of nouns with different classifiers, which are most often adjacent to them (e.g. *uch unin* [CL:YOUNG.FEMALE child] 'girl' in Chuj [Mayan]; Hopkins, 2012; Royer, 2019). In the cases of classifier gender known by this dissertation, these classifiers are characterized as strictly "male" or "female" in the literature and select only for personal nouns with normative masculine or feminine reference. In this way, they resemble the behavior of most personal nouns in masculine-feminine agreement-based systems, but

classifier gender is much more restrictive because it is based purely on semantics, unlike agreement-based systems which may also consider formal properties of the noun and whose nominal classes are usually far less numerous.

Classifier gender appears to be extremely rare crosslinguistically. This dissertation is aware of only eleven languages that have the feature: four Mayan languages (Jacaltec, Acatec, Chuj, and Q'anjob'al), six Arawakan languages (Baniwa, Tariana, Warekena, Bahuana, Achagua, and Yucuna), and Bora, a Witotoan language of Northern Peru (Aikhenvald, 2000; Aikhenvald, 2019; Craig, 1986a; Craig, 1986b; Cronhamn, 2025; Day, 1967; Day, 1973; Hopkins, 2012; Thiesen & Weber, 2012; Seifart, 2018). Of these, perhaps Jacaltec and Baniwa are the most well-documented, and these languages are presented in this section. In almost no case are extensive wordlists available for any of these languages, especially because most are endangered and decreasing in vitality (Catalogue of Endangered Languages, 2025), however scholarly research on each reveals the set of classifiers found therein and occasionally offers a modicum of examples that illustrate the feature of classifier gender in action.

Section 2.2.1 introduced Jacaltec, a language of Northern Guatemala with around 33,000 speakers (Eberhard et al., 2025). Jacaltec features a set of 24 noun classifiers, 12 of which are used in personal reference (see Figure 3.4.3). These human classifiers mark distinctions of divinity (status as a deity), kinship, respect, age, and "sex" (Day, 1967). Only two of these 12 classifiers are gender-neutral: *yaʔ*, the classifier used to introduce a respected person, and *unin*, the classifier used to introduce an infant. Craig (1986b) notes the crosslinguistic rarity of observing a language whose inventory of classifiers is so rich in the domain of social interaction (p. 250). The use of these noun classifiers is "semantically transparent"; in noun phrases, they precede the noun they classify and are even used anaphorically in what would amount to pronominal reference in other languages (Aikhenvald, 2000; Craig, 1986a; Craig, 1986b; Day, 1967; Day, 1973). An example of this can be seen in Figure 3.4.3 in the example *xil náj noʔ lab'a* 'He saw the snake', wherein the classifier *naj* CL.MALE.NON-KIN is used to refer anaphorically to the antecedent, in this case to a male named John. Many Jacaltec classifiers are themselves full or reduced noun forms, as in the case of *unin* 'infant' and its same-form classifier *unin* CL.INFANT, or the noun *winaj* 'man' and its related classifier *naj* CL.MALE.NON-KIN (Craig, 1986b, p. 253). Relatedly, there is a system of lexical gender in the language in which kinship terms can have normatively-

Figure 3.4.3 Classifier gender in Jacaltec

MASCULINE		FEMININE		NEUTRAL	
cumam	<i>male deity</i>	cumi?	<i>female deity</i>	-	
-		-		ya?	<i>respected human</i>
naj	<i>male non-kin</i>	ix	<i>female non-kin</i>	-	
naj ni?an	<i>young male non-kin</i>	ix ni?an	<i>young female non-kin</i>	-	
ho?	<i>male kin</i>	xo?	<i>female kin</i>	-	
ho? ni?an	<i>young male kin</i>	xo? ni?an	<i>young female kin</i>	-	
-		-		unin	<i>infant</i>

<i>xil</i>	náj	<i>xuwan</i>	<i>no?</i>	<i>lab'a</i>	<i>cawán</i>	<i>heb'</i>	<i>íx</i>
saw	CL.MALE.NK	John	CL.ANIMAL	snake	two	PL	CL.FEMALE.NK
'John saw the snake'				'the two of them [F.]'			

<i>xil</i>	náj	<i>no?</i>	<i>lab'a</i>	<i>xí</i>	náj	<i>tet</i>	<i>íx</i>
saw	CL.MALE.NK	CL.ANIMAL	snake	saw	CL.MALE.NK	to	CL.FEMALE.NK
'He (John) saw the snake.'				'he said to her'			

Sources: Craig, 1986a; Craig, 1986b

gendered distinctions that mark the referent, and many of these terms are even normatively gender-specific in use depending on the gender of the speaker (Day, 1973, p. 125-127). We are not offered, however, extensive evidence of the use of different classifiers with these or other personal nouns in the literature. Apart from Jacaltec, classifier gender is minimally attested in the related Mayan languages Acatec, Chuj, and Q'anjob'al (Hopkins, 2012).

Perhaps an even more interesting example is Baniwa (also referred to as Baniwa-Koripako), a group of mutually intelligible dialects spoken along the Içana River in the

borderlands of Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela (Cronhamn, 2025, p. 4). It is an endangered Arawakan language with an estimated speaker population of a few thousand to up to about 19,000 (Aikhenvald, 2007; Cronhamn, 2025; Catalogue of Endangered Languages, 2025). It provides a particularly unique example as it contains the feature of classifier gender in addition to an agreement-based system of nominal classification. Another aspect of its rarity is that this latter system is *feminine-non-feminine*, distinct from more common *masculine-feminine(-neuter)* systems (Aikhenvald, 2007; Cronhamn, 2025). The *feminine* class in Baniwa houses nouns normatively referring to women, while the *non-feminine* class contains nouns normatively referring to men, as well as all other nouns, meaning that the quality of femininity comprises the only semantic assignment rule, and all remaining nouns are the semantic residue in the language (Cronhamn, 2025, p. 83-84; 117; Corbett, 1991, p. 13). Simultaneously, the language features a system of 53 classifiers which can appear suffixally on the numerals *apa-* 'one', *dzama-* 'two' and *madali-* 'three' and have many more morphosyntactic loci (Cronhamn, 2025, p. 97-99; 114). Four of these 53 classifiers are used in personal reference (see Figure 3.4.3.1):

Figure 3.4.3.1 Baniwa classifiers used in personal reference

CLASSIFIER	LABEL	EXAMPLES
-áana	CLF.GROUP	Groups (e.g. of people, animals, objects)
-hípa	CLF.MALE	Male humans
-íita	CLF.HUMAN	Humans, some fish, insects, knives, paddles
-da	CLF.CHILD	Preadolescent children
-ma ²	CLF.FEMALE	Female humans

Source: Cronhamn, 2025, p. 100

Of the five classifiers above, two are used only with nouns normatively referring to men and women: *-hípa* CLF.MALE and *-ma²* CLF.FEMALE, respectively. In the case of *-ma²*, it is distinguished morphophonologically from a phonologically identical classifier used for pairs of objects: unlike *-ma¹* CLF.PAIR, *-ma²* causes vowel lengthening on the initial syllable of the

numeral *apa* 'one' (Cronhamn, 2025, p. 99; 113). While these classifiers are identified and delimited based on their ability to attach to the numerals 1-3, they have more morphosyntactic loci than canonical numeral classifiers, including attributive adjectives, free and bound nouns (including deverbal nouns), demonstratives, and interrogatives (Cronhamn, 2025, p. 115). Given this fact, it is clear that Baniwa classifiers also qualify as numeral classifiers, though their multiple morphosyntactic loci plus the high degree of interaction between classifiers and agreement-based nominal classes makes Baniwa a more complicated case (Aikhenvald, 2000, p. 234-235; Aikhenvald, 2007).

Pursuant to this theme, each classifier in Baniwa has what are termed both a *simplex* and a *complex* form; complex forms are featured on adjectives and interrogatives and contain an additional nominalizing (derivational) suffix, which in the case of the feminine (*-ma²-ro*) and masculine (*-hípa-li*) complex classifiers are the canonical suffixes of the feminine (*-ro*) and non-feminine (*-li*) nominal classes, respectively (Cronhamn, 2025). Except for this example, gendered classifiers and nominal class markers do not cooccur, as numerals are a morphosyntactic locus of classifiers but are not targets of morphosyntactic agreement in the language. A related phenomenon, however, occurs with demonstratives, whose bare forms are specific to the two nominal classes in their singular forms, and the feminine classifier may attach when the demonstratives are used contrastively, as in *rhóa-ma²* DEM1.FSG-CLF.FEMALE 'this (one)' [contrastive, about a woman] (Cronhamn, 2025, p. 106). Figure 3.4.3.2 displays the simplex and complex forms of gendered classifiers in Baniwa, their combination with the numerals 1-3, examples of their use with different nouns, and examples of other nouns that they classify.

In contrast with most masculine-feminine systems of agreement-based nominal classification, the semantics of classifier gender in Baniwa (and in most languages with the feature) are more straightforward and less likely to contain irrelevancies (i.e. cases in which nouns in the class do not actually have normatively masculine or feminine, or even personal, referents). Cronhamn (2025) notes that the male classifier *-hípa* is used exclusively with reference to men and the female classifier *-ma²* is similarly restricted to use with women to the exclusion of animals and all other nouns in the language (p. 168; 173). It is worth noting, however, that the more generic human classifier *-íita* may be used in many cases to avoid gender marking, for example with the gender-neutral noun *nawíki* 'person' (p. 170). Besides providing an example of straightforward, gender-based lexical selection, Baniwa presents a

Figure 3.4.3.2 Classifier gender in Baniwa

S. FORM	C. FORM	LABEL	'ONE'	'TWO'	'THREE'
<i>-hípa</i>	<i>-hípa-li</i>	CLF.MALE	aphépa	dzamhépa	madalhípa
<i>-ma²</i>	<i>-ma²-ro</i>	CLF.FEMALE	<u>a</u> apáma	dzamáma	madalíma
<i>kadalhípa</i>		<i>atsíanli?</i>		<i>aa</i> páma	<i>íin</i> aro
kadali- hípa		atsíanli		apa- ma²	íinaro
how.many- CLF.MALE		man		one- CLF.FEMALE	woman
'How many men?'				'one woman'	
<i>kadalíma</i>		<i>íin</i> aro?		<i>dz</i> amáma	<i>íin</i> aro
kadali- ma²		íinaro		dzama- ma²	íinaro
how.many- CLF.FEMALE		woman		two- CLF.FEMALE	woman
'How many women?'				'two women'	

CLASSIFIER	NOUNS USED WITH CLASSIFIER			
-hípa CLF.MALE	atsíanli 'man'	-eenípe 'son'	walhípa 'young man'	pedália 'elder'
-ma ² CLF.FEMALE	íinaro 'woman'	iokokáma 'seamstress'	ideenhikáma 'female worker'	pedália 'elder'

Source: Cronhamn, 2025, p. 100; 118; 122; 168; 173

number of unique features of gender, including both classifier gender and an agreement-based system of nominal classification based on gender, as well as a rare morphophonological effect involving the feminine classifier *-ma²*. The classifier *-ma* is also found in the neighboring Arawakan language of Tariana (Aikhenvald, 1994, p. 453; Aikhenvald, 2019, p. 115). Moreover, there is minimal evidence of classifier gender in the related Arawakan languages of Warekena, Bahuana, Achagua, and Yucuna (Aikhenvald, 2019, p. 115).

In addition to the ten languages mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, there is evidence for the presence of classifier gender in Bora (Thiesen & Weber, 2012; Seifart, 2018),

an endangered Witotoan language spoken in the Loreto region of Peru along the Colombia-Peru border (Eberhard et al., 2025). Yet in crosslinguistic terms, the feature of classifier gender is highly infrequent, even and especially when compared to estimates of the total number of classifier languages in the world (Allasonnière-Tang et al., 2021; Gil, 2013; Her et al., 2022). It is an underresearched phenomenon for which not a lot of attestations are available, although rare and valuable examples of works that pay careful attention to the feature exist (e.g. Day, 1973; Craig, 1986b; Cronhamn, 2025). Though infrequent crosslinguistically, within the languages in which it appears, it may be assumed to be a highly repetitive feature of gender.

3.4.4 Orthographic Gender

Perhaps an even more rare feature of gender in language is titled here *orthographic gender*. At first blush, it may be difficult to think of a language in which it is even possible to encode normatively gendered meanings in the orthography. This is due to the fact that most of the world's writing systems are unable to encode semantic information in individual characters, as in the case of *alphabets*, in which each character represents a consonant or vowel sound, and *syllabaries*, in which each character represents a syllable, most usually of CV structure (Daniels, 1996, p. 4; Daniels, 2017). One type of writing system, however, is indeed able to encode semantic information, namely *logosyllabic* systems, in which characters denote words or content morphemes as well as syllables (Daniels, 1996, p. 4). Perhaps the optimal example of a modern logosyllabic script is Chinese, in which each character equates to one syllabic morpheme, though not always necessarily a full word, as in the case of compounded characters (Boltz, 1996, p. 191). Related are some prominent writing systems of the ancient world, including cuneiform and Egyptian and Mayan hieroglyphics. Hieroglyphic writing systems, broadly speaking, are of pictographic origin and contain a combination of *phonograms*, which encode phonetic information, and *semograms*, which encode semantic information (Macri, 1996, p. 175; Ritner, 1996, p. 73). This is similarly the case in cuneiform, the world's oldest known writing system dating back to at least around 3200 BCE, which was used to represent Sumerian, an isolate language of southern Mesopotamia (Cooper, 1996, p. 36). While Sumerian cuneiform is often phonologically reconstructed with reference to Akkadian, a younger Semitic language that

similarly adopted cuneiform as its writing system and later replaced Sumerian, it is understood that some cuneiform characters were purely symbolic (Cooper, 1996, p. 37-38). In each of the above cases, we find examples of gender marking in the orthography, as each system allows for the encoding of semantic information in addition to phonetic information.

Figure 3.4.4 Orthographic gender in scripts of the ancient world

Cuneiform		Egyptian Hieroglyphs		Mayan Hieroglyphs	
MASCULINE	FEMININE	MASCULINE	FEMININE	MASCULINE	FEMININE
'person, man'	'woman'	'person, man'	'woman'	'person, man'	'woman'
'mankind'	'daughter'	'soldier'	'to nurse'	'father'	'mother'

Sources: Gardiner, 1957; Montgomery, 2002; Parpola, 1997

Cuneiform, the writing system of the world's earliest known civilization of Sumer, was produced by impressing a reed stylus on wet clay (Cooper, 1996, p. 38). This technique was used to produce the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which chronicles the life of Gilgamesh, an ancient Mesopotamian mythological figure and presumed to be an early Sumerian city-state king (Parpola, 1997). This text, in which cuneiform script documents the Sumerian language, exhibits consistent usage of gendered characters, as in the case of 'person, man' and 'woman' (see Figure 3.4.4). This phenomenon is represented pictographically in two other writing systems of the ancient world: Egyptian and Mayan hieroglyphs. As seen in the figure, Egyptian hieroglyphs, whose invention can be traced back to the First Dynasty of Egypt (c. 3100 BCE), featured a number of gendered personal depictions, typified into two sets by Alan Gardiner (1957) as "man" and "woman and her occupations," and in Mayan writing, which originates from at least 250 CE, we see different conceptualizations of personhood; for characters denoting women, many are depictions of human heads (Macri, 1996;

Montgomery, 2002). It is important to note that in each of these three cases, these writing systems were not simply logographic; though they are considered mixed systems combining both phonograms and semograms, each system conveyed phonological information that was available to interpreters of each script, and that has been reconstructed partially or fully in the present day (Cooper, 1996, p. 37; Macri, 1996, p. 175; Ritner, 1996, p. 73).

That binary gender is encoded in the scripts of some of the world's oldest known civilizations provides us with a striking conclusion: since at least the time of the Sumer people of Mesopotamia, gender has been (and remains to be) a fundamental organizing principle of society and one important enough to become embedded and distinguished in language. This means that since the first known written records of language, we have found different forms of gender distinction. While the use of these scripts does not survive in the present day, another ancient script containing gender distinctions is still used and is the basis of the writing systems of other languages spoken in the present day: Chinese. What is identified as the purely Chinese system of writing dates back to at least 1200 BCE during the Shang dynasty, when inscriptions were found on ox scapulas and turtle plastrons (Boltz, 1996, p. 191). While similarly of pictographic origin, Chinese writing is more strictly logosyllabic than cuneiform and Egyptian and Mayan hieroglyphs; each character denotes a syllabic morpheme, often amounting to words in isolation or when compounded with another character (Mair, 1996, p. 201). These morphosyllables can be comprised of two component parts: a semantic radical that contributes meaning, and a phonetic component that contributes information used in pronunciation (Mair, 1996, p. 201). The name *radical* is usually reserved in the literature for these semantic components. In the Shang writing system, we find two unit characters (comprised of one component alone) which betray a gender distinction. These unit characters are the ancient precursors for two semantic radicals used in the modern Chinese writing system: 人 'person' (with its allograph 亻 when at the left side of a character) and 女 'woman, female' (Boltz, 1996, p. 192). This latter radical is frequently termed the *female radical*. An analysis of modern Mandarin Chinese dictionaries reveals that around 250 characters that utilize the female radical are still in use; of them, one figure states that around 20% are semantically derogatory towards women (Ettner, 2002, p. 34). In Mandarin Chinese, many normatively feminine kinship terms featuring the female radical do not have derogatory meanings, but in other semantic

categories, use of the female radical produces pejorative meanings such as 'slave', 'concubine', 'prostitute', etc. (see Figure 3.4.4.1). This pattern of semantic pejoration is a frequently cited interaction produced by the female radical (Chin & Burridge, 1993; Ettner, 2002; Hara, 2024; Li, 2019; Tang, 1988).

Figure 3.4.4.1 Chinese words with the 'female radical' 女

KINSHIP TERMS			TERMS WITH DEROGATORY MEANINGS		
妈	妞	妹	奴	妾	娼
'mother'	'daughter'	'younger sister'	'slave'	'concubine'	'prostitute'
姐	妻	婆	妖	姘	奸
'older sister'	'wife'	'mother-in-law'	'demon'	'mistress'	'to rape'

Sources: Ettner, 2002; Li, 2019

The female radical is involved in another peculiarity found in the personal pronominal system of Mandarin Chinese. In the present day, normatively masculine and feminine third-person pronouns are distinguished, though this distinction is purely orthographic and not phonological: 他 'he' and 她 'she'. The feminine pronoun 她 was perhaps attested as early as 1870 but gained traction in the context of the New Culture and May Fourth movements in mainland China (Hara, 2024, p. 3-4). This feminist innovation created a gender distinction that did not exist previously within the paradigm; the pronoun 他 'he', which contains the allograph of the 'person' radical 人, was previously gender-neutral, and its reanalysis as a masculine personal pronoun demonstrates the conflation of the concepts of *person* and *man* evidenced in many of the world's languages and scripts.

The Chinese writing system has influenced the scripts of other languages through borrowing or adaptation, including both Korean and Japanese. The modern Japanese writing system is a mix of three scripts: *kanji*, a logographic script that is mostly Chinese in origin, as well as *hiragana* and *katakana*, two syllabaries (Shibamoto Smith, 1996). The Chinese female radical 女 can also be found in the inventory of Japanese kanji, where it can similarly produce the same effect of semantic derogation (see Figure 3.4.4.2).

Figure 3.4.4.2 Japanese words with the 'female radical' 女

TERMS WITH NO CONNOTATION			TERMS WITH DEROGATORY MEANINGS		
婚 'marriage'	娘 'daughter'	妹 'younger sister'	嫌 'to dislike'	妨 'to obstruct'	嫉 'jealous'
姉 'older sister'	嫁 'wife'	娠 'pregnancy'	売女 'prostitute'		

Source: Yoshida & Nakamura, 1999

Overall, in modern languages, orthographic gender appears to be restricted to languages which use Chinese script (e.g. Cantonese), as well as the inventory of Japanese kanji. While it was prevalent in several logosyllabic scripts of ancient times, alphabets and syllabaries are more commonly-used writing systems in the present day, and in these languages, the feature of orthographic gender cannot possibly be realized. Yet the feature is important in establishing the practice of gender marking in written language, as well as in language in general, as continuous throughout time.

3.4.5 Particle Gender

Particles are a more nebulous feature of different languages that may be loosely defined as content or function words with grammatical roles (Cook, 1999). The English words *on*, *up*, and *off* are considered particles when used in phrasal verbs like *come on*, *come up*, and *jump off*, yet they are also function words in the language, as exemplified by their status as prepositions when used individually. Scholarly consensus informs us that certain functional particles deserve status as part of the grammar (see Zwicky, 1985), and therefore they are included in this chapter as a fifth embedded feature of gender in language. In particular, what are termed *discourse* or *pragmatic* particles that mark the speaker's "epistemic and/or affective stance" are the focus of this section (Cook, 1999, p. 181). Many languages like Japanese, Thai, and Chinese feature an inventory of sentence-final particles that have no referential meaning but may have the effect of instantiating speech acts and in some cases may be associated with different gender identities, though perhaps not through

direct indexation (Morita, 2018). For instance, in Japanese, a certain subset of sentence-final particles are regularly cited as an emblematic feature of 女性語 *joseigo* 'women's language' and 男性語 *dansiego* 'men's language' (Hiramoto, 2010; Inoue, 2025; Okamoto, 2018). However, rather than directly indexing normative gender identity, the basis of this distinction is the idealized image of Japanese womanhood and manhood; while masculine particles are associated with assertiveness or forcefulness, feminine particles are associated with softness and politeness. These affective and epistemic stances that are conveyed in conversational dynamics are the correlate to sounding normatively masculine or feminine as the particles themselves cannot be said to have any lexical meaning. Instead, they are a function of pragmatics within the discourse. Multiple typologies exist that divide Japanese sentence-final particles into masculine, feminine, and gender-neutral categories and include detailed notes about in which syntactic constructions gendered associations may be produced, in addition to other notes about the role of intonation, etc. (e.g. McGloin, 1990; Mizutani & Mizutani, 1987; Okamoto & Sato, 1992; Shibamoto, 1985). But while their normative gender values are reified in use by speakers, sometimes to a high degree, very few of them relative to the entire inventory have stable gendered associations. It is also well-documented that the use of particles is correlated with many other social factors besides gender, including age and class (Morita, 2018; Wang, 2023), that dialect plays a role and can offer other gendered forms (Inoue, 2025), and that queer gender and sexuality must be considered, as particles are resources for identity construction (Okamoto, 2018).

Figure 3.4.5 displays some of the particles and variants associated with normative masculinity and femininity in Standard Japanese. The use of the particles ぞ *zo* and ぜ *ze* illustrates the connection between epistemic and affective stances and gendered stereotypes: in the literature, an utterance introducing information into the conversational domain that ends with ぞ *zo* and ぜ *ze* is said to project epistemic authority and assertiveness and is thus registered as highly masculine (Okamoto, 2018). The particle わ *wa* (with rising intonation), on the other hand (as well as its variants わね *wa ne* and わよ *wa yo*), is commonly said to project softness and emotionality and is considered a principal characteristic of Japanese women's speech (Cook, 1999, p. 182; Okamoto, 1995). While particles like ね *ne* and よ *yo* are generally considered gender-neutral, plain forms of verbs followed by よ *yo* (e.g. 行くよ *iku yo* 'I am going') form part of stereotypical masculine speech (Kawasaki & McDougall, 2003, p. 44). In this way, while it is difficult to offer stable

Figure 3.4.5 Particle gender in Japanese

MASCULINE			FEMININE		
ぞ	ぜ	さ	わ	わね	わよ
zo	ze	sa	wa	wa ne	wa yo
な	よ		のね	のよ	かしら
na	yo		no ne	no yo	ka shira
行くよ / ぜ。			行くわ。		
<i>iku yo / ze</i>			<i>iku wa</i>		
'I am going.'			'I am going.'		
やるぞ!			明日なのね?		
<i>yaru zo</i>			<i>ashita na no ne</i>		
'I'm gonna do it!' (<i>threatening</i>)			'It's tomorrow, isn't it?'		

Sources: Kawasaki & McDougall (2003), Okamoto (1995), Okamoto & Sato (1992)

meanings offered by these particles, it is clear that they are building blocks of identity used by different speakers to self-position themselves in society. While their use is more stable among some populations of middle-aged or older, educated women who attempt to achieve higher degrees of hierarchical status, younger speakers challenge these norms in different ways (Hiramoto, 2010; Kiriko Robinson, 2025). For instance, in contemporary society, young women are now much more likely to use forms associated with normative masculinity, although young men outside of the queer community are not more likely to use forms associated with normative femininity (Kiriko Robinson, 2025). Relatedly, the reversal or manipulation of normatively masculine and feminine forms among lesbian and trans communities has been studied as a manner of queer identity construction (Okamoto, 2018, p. 687). Overall, the confounds of age, social status, and politeness enable us to frame the bricolage of gender identity as the purpose of particle use rather than positing them as direct indexes of stable gender identities in Japanese.

Another example that demonstrates the nebulous usage of pragmatic particles in gender identity construction is the Thai language. Thai contains an extensive inventory of

particles belonging to three general types: question, mood, and formal particles (Attaviriyapap, 2015; Cooke, 1989; Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom, 2005; Smyth, 2014). It is the latter category in which normatively gendered distinctions and associations may be found. These sentence-final particles are used as building blocks of a formal (or informal) speech context, as affirmative or negative responses to questions, and may also be used after a person's name to attract their attention (Smyth, 2014, p. 113). The most commonly attested formal particles repeatedly described as "gender-specific" in the literature are listed in Figure 3.4.5.1. This inventory is well-defined along a scale of formality ranging from most deferential to informal. They have associated forms in which gender and formality can be indexed phonologically through tone and vowel lengthening, which for instance "can signal the speaker's closeness or desired closeness to the person [they are] addressing" (Smyth, 2014, p. 113). In many cases, falling tone (^) is reported as female-specific, and in at least the case of the particle ฮะ *há?*, association as normatively masculine is produced by the

Figure 3.4.5.1 Particle gender in Thai

	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTRAL
HIGHEST FORMALITY	กรรม khráp-phǒm		
HIGH FORMALITY	ครับ khráp	ค่ะ / คะ khâ? / khá?	
MIDDLE FORMALITY	ฮะ há?	ฮัะ há	ฮัะ há
MID-LOW FORMALITY		จ๊ะ / จัะ câ / cá	
INFORMAL/INSULTING		ย๊ะ / ยะ jâ? / já?	วะ / วะ / โวย wâ? / wá? / wó:j

Sources: Attaviriyapap, 2015; Cooke, 1989; Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom, 2005; Siengyen, 2025; Smyth, 2014

presence of a final glottal stop, as evidenced by the use of the high tone (´) particle ฮั้ há by both men and women (Cooke, 1989, p. 83; Siengyen, 2025; Smyth, 2014, p. 114). Tone also specifies which particles are used in statements and which are used in questions; in general, interrogative particles are marked by high tone (´) while particles used in declarative utterances are generally marked by falling tone (Cooke, 1989, p. 7-28).

Items in the informal category are generally considered casual among friends, though aggressive and insulting toward strangers (Attaviriyapap, 2015, p. 394). Cooke (1989) refers to the particles ฮั้ / ฮั้ (ja) and วั้ / วั้ (wa) as "unrestrained," a style performed in their usage with both known and unknown interlocutors (p. 83-84). Informality may also be conveyed through the presence or absence of a sentence-final particle; in casual speech, omission is common and different particles may be mixed in conversation to express affection, playfulness, or teasing, for instance (Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom, 2005, p. 182).

While the degrees of formality are relatively well-delineated in the Thai formal particle inventory, their use in the construction of normative gender identity is more enigmatic. We may draw the conclusion that formality and gender are highly correlated in Thai, firstly because most of the particles used in contexts that are formal to any degree have dynamic gendered associations in use. Additionally, there exist forms for every level of formality that are repeatedly described as markedly female-specific (which is not the case with normatively masculine items), and it also seems that the highest level of deference, the particle กระหม่อม *kháp-phǒm*, is reserved for normative males (Attaviriyapap, 2015, p. 393). Focusing on gender alone, we witness a high degree of sociolinguistic variation among speakers of different normative gender identities. For instance, the generally female-specific particles จั้ / จั้ (ca) which are described as "intimate and affectionate" are used by males in certain contexts, but not in all-male settings (Cooke, 1989, p. 83; Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom, 2005, p. 181). Similarly, the informal particle โห้ *wó:j* is described as more present in male speech, but can be used by females (Smyth, 2014, p. 115). The gender of the addressee can also influence the choice of normatively gendered particles, especially when speaking to children, to whom older speakers may refer using particles that align with their interlocutors' gender identity (Attaviriyapap, 2015, p. 394). Queer gender and sexuality is again an important factor in Thai particle use; Attaviriyapap (2015) notes that the falling-tone variant ฮั้ há? with glottal stop is "reserved for feminine males" (p. 393).

As captured in the paragraphs above, particle gender is a highly complicated feature

of gender in language, especially because of its interactions with locally-specific pragmatic, contextual considerations such as politeness and formality. While it is clear that pragmatic/discourse particles form part of the grammar of some languages, and that they produce associations with normative gender, they are not usually rigidly separated into categories depending on the gender of the speaker. Rather, the context and intention of the message can affect their usage, as well as the known or perceived gender of the interlocutor, among other considerations. There is also evidence for gender-specific differences in the use of sentence-final particles in Cantonese (Winterstein et al., 2024, p. 167), possibly among other languages, and as in the above cases, it appears that the role of normative gender stereotypes, epistemic authority, and softness (minimally) interplay in the expression of gender identity through particle use.

3.4.6 Sign Gender

In addition to the spoken languages analyzed in the prior sections above, it is imperative to incorporate natural languages of other modalities into the present argument about the realization of gender crosslinguistically. This section brings into focus different signed languages used by members of the global Deaf community. Though the signed languages with the most users in the present day are relatively young—by most estimations, American Sign Language (ASL) is around 300 years old—they are just as linguistically rich and complex as spoken languages (Aronoff, Meir & Sandler, 2005; Pfau & Steinbach, 2023). The pioneering work on the linguistics of signed languages was authored in 1960 by William Stokoe, a longtime professor at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., the nation's first university for deaf education (Gallaudet University, 2025). The work that Stokoe performed at Gallaudet led to a series of landmark publications that have expanded our definition of language itself and validated the systematicity found in signed languages as the same characteristic morphological complexity found in spoken languages (Stokoe, 2005/1960, p. 1). It is important to note that while signed languages may be said to have some of the same features of gender as spoken languages (e.g. *lexical* and *morphological gender*), they are treated separately in this dissertation because they contain a level of linguistic analysis that spoken languages do not: *cherology* (coined by Stokoe from the Ancient Greek χεῖρ 'hand'), the signed language equivalent of *phonology*, or the study of the structure of the sign

(Stokoe, 2005/1960, p. 16). The spatiotemporal dimension of signs has no true correlate to speech besides gesture, and it is how the feature termed here *sign gender* is defined.

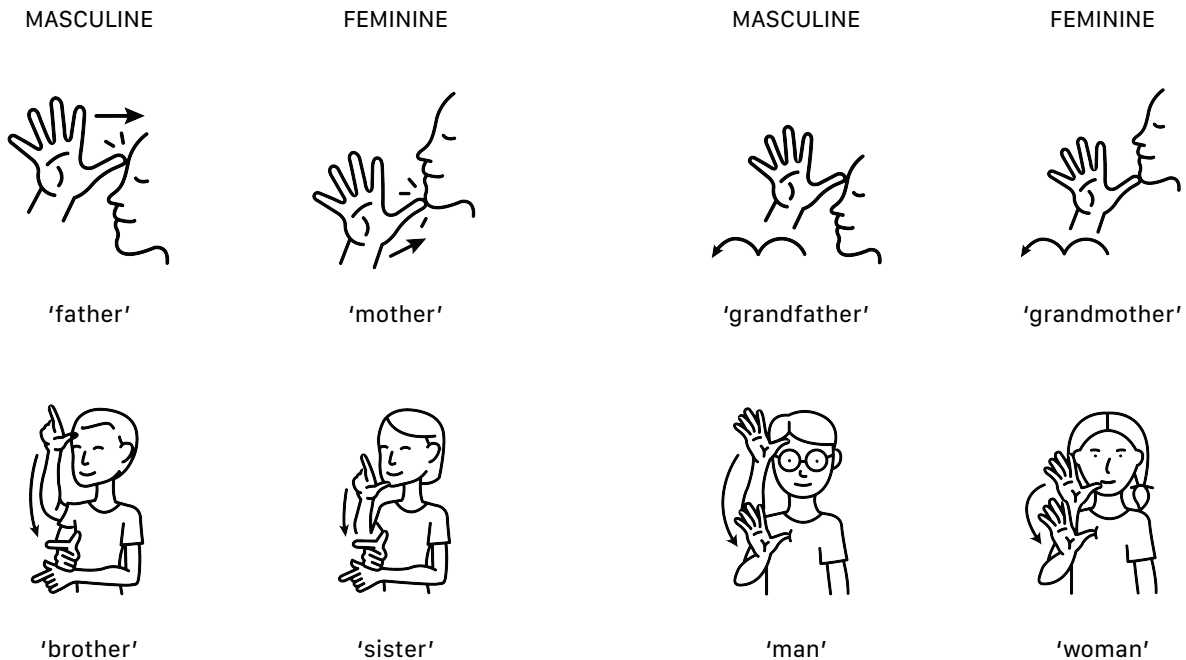
Stokoe's foundational text "Sign Language Structure: An Outline of the Visual Communication Systems of the American Deaf" (2005/1960) proposed different levels of linguistic analysis for signed languages, including *morphemic*, *cheremic*, *morphocheremic*, and *syntactic* levels. As in spoken languages, the morpheme (sign) is the smallest unit of meaning in signed languages. Yet signed languages feature an even more microscopic unit of morphemic analysis, the *chereme*. The three dimensions of a sign are its *configuration*, *position* or *location*, and *motion*, which correlate with the three cheremes that comprise a single sign (a single morpheme): the *tablua chereme*, which correlates with position, the *designator chereme*, which correlates with the configuration of the hand or hands, and the *signation chereme*, which correlates with motion, including when the motion involved is a change in the configuration of the hand(s) (Stokoe, 2005/1960, p. 20-21). Stokoe offers an extensive inventory of cheremes; for instance, tabula (position) cheremes include six points above the shoulders: the whole face or head, the upper part of the face or brow, mid-face, the lower part of the face, the cheek or the side of the face, and the neck; designator (configuration) cheremes are different hand shapes that correlate with the manual alphabet, and signation (movement) cheremes include vertical and lateral movements, wiggling of the fingers, rotation of the forearm, and convergent and divergent movements of both hands (Stokoe, 2005/1960, p. 21-25). In different combinations, these contrastive components comprise the minimal unit of meaning: the morpheme, or the *sign*.

To be more precise, the *simultaneous* (as opposed to *sequential*) morpheme, or sign, is the smallest unit of meaning in signed languages. Whereas affixal morphology (e.g. *negation*) is usually achieved sequentially, the great majority of inflectional processes are simultaneous and do not lie outside the three cheremic dimensions of a single sign (Aronoff, Meir, Padden & Sandler, 2005, p. 22-23; Pfau & Steinbach, 2023, p. 3). What is sometimes termed the *sign (mono)syllable* frequently follows an LML (location-movement-location) sequence involving starting and ending points as well as a motion connecting them (Aronoff, Meir & Sandler, 2005, p. 309-310). Many cases of sign gender known by this dissertation fall into this identification, including the inflection for normative gender in American Sign Language (see Figure 3.4.6).

In ASL, one observed pattern is that many signs referring to normative men are

articulated above the level of the nose, and the same signs may be inflected via the *tabula* (position) *chereme* and articulated below the level of the nose to refer to normative women.

Figure 3.4.6 Normative gender inflection in American Sign Language



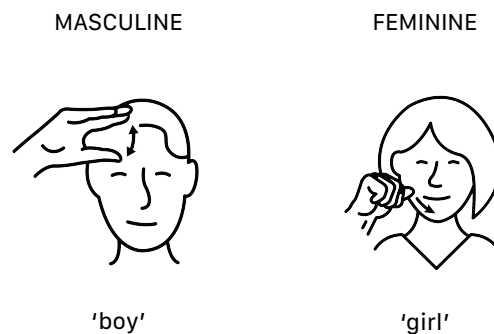
Source: C. Valli (Ed., 2005), *The Gallaudet Dictionary of American Sign Language*

Images adapted from Amanda Goehlert

The signs visualized in Figure 3.4.6 feature this effect: whereas the signs *father* and *brother* are articulated at the level of the forehead or brow, their gender-paired counterparts, *mother* and *sister*, are the same signs that simply originate at a different point, the chin. As discussed in Chapter 4, many signers have neutralized these signs by articulating them precisely at the level of the nose (Vicars, n.d.). While there exists great sociolinguistic variation within the inventory of signs, and some signs may be realized in compounded or contracted manners, Stokoe (2005/1960) notes that "the contrast between brow and lower cheek, tabs [*tabulas*] for so many signs which have 'man' and 'woman' as part of their semantic content, is enough to make two distinct signs for 'cousin' in the language" (p. 29). In this way, when the meaningful distinction between two sign forms is the position of the

hand(s) above or below the level of the nose (and logically, the designator or signation cheremes, or both, remain static), this is recognized in this dissertation as a case of gender inflection in signed languages, akin to the *-o/-a* morphological gender inflection found in Spanish and Portuguese. For this reason, while Stokoe states that the two forms of the sign *cousin* are two different signs, this dissertation theorizes them as one item existing within a normatively gendered pair in order to distinguish them from the signed language equivalent of lexical gender, where the signs are distinct and perhaps do not share any cheremic properties. This is the case of the signs *boy* and *girl* visualized in Figure 3.4.6.1, wherein all three dimensions of the sign (position or location, configuration, and motion) are distinct.

Figure 3.4.6.1 The lexical gender equivalent in American Sign Language

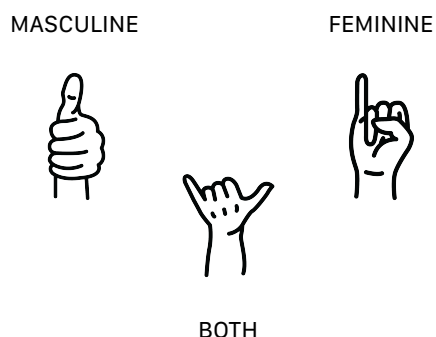


Source: Valli (2005)

Images adapted from Amanda Goehlert

The realization of gender marking varies in other signed languages. While Jamaican Sign Language features the same above- and below-the-nose normative gender inflection as ASL (Cumberbatch, 2015, p. 520), other languages have a manner of gender marking that is akin to the use of classifiers in classifier languages. In Japanese Sign Language (JSL), as well as Korean and Taiwanese Sign Language, two hand shapes are normative masculine and feminine gender markers: the thumb or the pinky finger (respectively) raised from a fist configuration (see Figure 3.4.6.2). These signs distinguish many kinship terms by following them, as the case of the sign *father*, which is the sign for *parent* followed by the normative masculine hand shape, and the two may even be used in combination as in the sign for

Figure 3.4.6.2 Normative gender hand shapes in Japanese Sign Language



Source: Fischer & Gong (2010)

Images adapted from Amanda Goehlert

parents, which is the sign for *parent* followed by a combination of the two gender markers, or a fist with both the thumb and pinky finger extended (Fischer & Gong, 2010, p. 513). These markers are also used for subject and object marking in verbal agreement, as well as in pronominal and honorific reference (Fischer & Gong, 2010, p. 511-513). The use of individual fingers to mark normatively masculine and feminine signs appears in other signed languages: the same hand shapes found in JSL can be found in Chinese Sign Language (Yang & Fischer, 2002) and British Sign Language (Sutton-Spence & Woll, 1999), where use of the normatively feminine hand shape produces negative connotations, including the signs for *hearing* and *deaf*. In Eritrean Sign Language, there is a slight alteration: normative masculine and feminine gender marking is realized with the index and pinky fingers, respectively (Moges, 2015, p. 249).

Apart from the languages described above, there is also evidence for different forms of gender marking in Hausa Sign Language (Schmaling, 2015, p. 376) and Greek Sign Language (Sapountzaki, 2015, p. 322). Although the feature of sign gender is virtually unstudied, it is an incredibly valuable and unique feature of gender crosslinguistically as it proves the ability of languages of different modalities to encode normative gender values. As exemplified by the data presented in this section, the unique spatiotemporal/physiological dimension of signs is versatile enough to create and resolve gender distinctions that require other strategies in spoken languages. Because there is evidence to

support the realization of gender as an inflectional morphological process in signed languages, sign gender is identified in this dissertation as the final embedded (though not highly embedded) feature of gender in language.

3.5 Masculine-Feminine Morphosyntactic Gender, the Most Highly Embedded Feature

It may come as no surprise that masculine-feminine agreement-based systems of nominal classification are the most highly embedded feature of gender in language posited by this dissertation. The reason for this is simple: when the mark of gender is reinforced formally in most of a given language's nouns that refer to people, this mark of masculinity or femininity is required to be extended to all elements that must agree with that noun for as long as it is the immediate referent of the conversation. The title "masculine-feminine" is intended to include all languages that minimally have masculine and/or feminine agreement-based nominal classes (as evidenced by the operability of their semantic assignment rules), possibly in addition to other nominal classes. By this delimitation, the masculine-feminine-neuter systems of Greek and German qualify, as does the feminine-non-feminine system of Baniwa. Languages like Swedish, whose masculine-feminine-neuter system has collapsed into a common-neuter system, and Swahili, which contains no masculine or feminine nominal classes, are disqualified.

By a rough estimate based on a representative sample, masculine-feminine agreement-based systems of nominal classification are found in just under a quarter of the world's languages (Corbett, 2013b). While we can establish a general principle about them—that they generally multiply the mark of gender—there is quite a bit of variation to be found within them. This is mainly due to the fact that rules of morphosyntactic agreement in each qualifying language are idiosyncratic. Whereas the Romance languages do not mark gender on verbal forms (save for verbal participles), gender agreement with verbs is present in Hindi, Arabic, and Hebrew. Yet throughout the verbal systems of these latter three languages, gender is not marked on every verbal form when distinctions of person, number, tense, aspect, and mood are considered. In Hebrew, verbal gender can be marked in the first, second, and third persons (Glinert, 2005). In Arabic, there are three grammatical numbers (singular, dual, and plural), and verbal gender distinctions may be found in each (Abu-Chacra, 2018). In Hindi, verbal gender is marked on past tense auxiliaries but not present

tense auxiliaries, and in the presumptive mood, but not the subjunctive mood (Agnihotri, 2023). As these facts reveal, not only is it difficult to measure the degree of gender marking required within grammatical categories, it is just as difficult to compare languages which may differ in which of their categories contain gendered distinctions, and two languages in comparison may have completely different grammatical structures. For instance, Hindi does not have definite articles at all, nor does it distinguish gender in personal pronouns (Agnihotri, 2023). In Greek, names must be preceded by a definite article, whereas this is not the case in all of Romance. Modern Irish's deteriorating system of masculine-feminine gender is present in nouns and personal pronouns, but only evidences itself throughout the rest of the grammar through word-initial morphophonological mutations when nouns of certain genders combine with definite and possessive articles (Colleluori, 2025).

The reconceptualized definition and theory of gender in language presented in this dissertation also requires us to reconsider the mechanism of *gender agreement*. A language like English that has no agreement-based system of nominal classification can still be said to require gender agreement, especially from a humanistic perspective; a referent's desired set of linguistically gendered forms exists in different grammatical categories (nouns, pronouns, honorifics, etc.), and these elements must be tracked throughout texts and conversations in order to avoid misgendering that referent (Papadopoulos et al., 2025). This insight, as well as the data presented in the prior sections, leaves us with the conclusion that gender and gender agreement are probably present in all languages when an alternate definition of linguistic gender is considered. Yet it is also true that not all languages contain a *formal* system of gender agreement engendered by agreement-based systems of nominal classification. Beyond nouns and pronouns, which are seemingly gendered in most of the world's languages, agreement-based systems deliver the mark of gender to categories not normally gender-distinguished in languages lacking such a system, as in the examples of verbal forms and articles provided above.

In all, while quantifying the amount of normative gender marking that is possible in a given language is a seemingly impossible task, we may shift focus to how people *use* languages and the gendered lexical and grammatical structures they might contain. While there are ways to avoid gender marking in some languages, this section presents languages in which it is far more difficult or even impossible to do so. Figure 3.5 presents the same sentence describing a person named Alexander in five different languages: Palestinian

Figure 3.5 Sentence in English, Palestinian Arabic, Spanish, Greek, and Hebrew with gendered forms in bold

ENGLISH

Alexander is a pediatric nurse that works in a Venezuelan hospital. **He** is a very respected colleague in **his** workplace and an excellent caretaker of **his** patients. **He** just graduated with **his** medical degree before beginning this job.

PALESTINIAN ARABIC

الإسكندر هو ممرض أطفال اللي بشتغل في مستشفى بفنزويلا. هو محترم كثير فشغله ومع زملائه، وهو بحافظ على أمراضه بصورة ممتازة. قبل ما بلش شغله كان صار مخلص دراسته فالطب وتخرج.

SPANISH

Alejandro es un enfermero pediátrico que trabaja en un hospital venezolano. **Él** es un colega muy **respetado** en su lugar de trabajo y un excelente **cuidador** de sus pacientes. Acaba de graduarse con su licenciatura en medicina antes de comenzar este trabajo.

GREEK

Ο Αλέξανδρος είναι **παιδιατρικός νοσοκόμος** που δουλεύει σε ένα νοσοκομείο στη Βενεζουέλα. **Αυτός** είναι **ένας** πολύ **αξιοσέβαστος** συνάδερφος και **ένας εξαιρετικός φροντιστής** των ασθενών **του**. Μόλις αποφοίτησε με το πτυχίο ιατρικής **του** πριν ξεκινήσει αυτή τη δουλειά.

HEBREW

אלכסנדר הוא אח שעובד בבית חולים בוונצואלה במחלקת ילדים. הוא עובד מוערך מאוד במקום עבודתו ומטפל מצוין למטופליו. הוא סיים את התואר ברפואה ממש לפני שהתחיל את העבודה הנוכחית.

Arabic, Spanish, Greek, and Hebrew, and serving as a point of comparison, English. Each site where Alexander is marked for normative gender is bolded in each of the three texts. As seen in the figure, the first difference between these languages is the manner in which they handle proper names. In all five languages, the name Alexander is distinguished morphologically, as revealed by their feminine counterparts: *Alexandra*, الإسكندرية, *Alejandra*, *Αλεξάνδρα*, and אלכסנדרה. Yet in Greek, the definite article that must precede the name is also present, thereby adding an additional mark of gender. In Spanish and Greek, the descriptors "pediatric nurse," "respected," and "caretaker" are gendered, although it is possible that these sites would be more gendered if other descriptors were chosen, as the title "colleague" is coincidentally gender-neutral in both, just as the form *excelente* 'excellent' is gender-neutral in Spanish. While personal pronouns can never be dropped in English, they may be in Spanish and Greek, which explains their absence in the final sentence of the text. Possessives are not gendered in Spanish, but they are in Greek. Palestinian Arabic and Hebrew contain an agreement target that none of the other three languages have: verbal forms. In the Palestinian Arabic sentence, five verb forms bear masculine gender: *بشتغل* 'he works', *بلش* 'he begins', *بحافظ* 'he maintains', *كان صار مخلص* 'he had finished', and *تخرج* 'he graduated'. In the Hebrew sentence, four verb forms bear masculine gender: *שעובד* '[that] works [M.]', *עובד* 'he works', *סיים* 'he finished', and *שהתחיל* 'that started [M.]'. The result of this exercise is that the Palestinian Arabic text contains the most markers of normative gender of the five languages, but as mentioned before, this result is partially dependent upon how the gendered structures of languages are used. In each language, there is a degree of avoidance that may be achieved—for instance by using descriptors which are epicene or of common gender, but each also contains sites where a mark of gender is required, as in the first mention of a name in Greek or the obligatory use of personal pronouns with verbs in English.

Because masculine-feminine agreement-based systems of nominal classification extend the mark of gender to many other grammatical categories at once, and because these systems imply the presence of affixal gender in addition to lexical gender and potentially other features of gender, they are reserved for the far end of the scale of embeddedness of gender in language (see Figure 3.0). Chapter 4 focuses on the concept of gender-inclusive language, which is the complement to the structures of normative gender identified in this chapter. Gender-inclusive language includes strategies of avoidance, the

promotion of the use of extant gender-neutral resources, and the creation of gender-inclusive forms of expression in cases where none are available prescriptively. By placing focus on how people, especially queer and genderqueer people, *use* language, we may more fully understand the ways in which we are confronted with normative gender in language and the ways in which we may overcome it in order to achieve adequate forms of linguistic gender self-expression.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter began by offering a more humanistic definition of gender in language that placed focus on *people* and the expression of their gender identities in language. The humanistic theory of gender in language stipulates that no language is truly genderless insofar as every language has the ability to describe locally-specific concepts of gender in words. This tenet was illustrated by means of a featural typology that introduced eight features of gender in language that challenged the all-or-nothing association of the term *linguistic gender* with agreement-based systems of nominal classification. These eight features were grouped into three categories describing different degrees of embeddedness in the grammar and lexicon. The first feature, *lexical gender*, describes words with normatively-gendered meanings and no formal markers of gender, and is the only feature belonging to the category entitled *unembedded*. Then, several *embedded* features of gender in language were described, including many that have evaded extant typologies: *pronominal*, *affixal*, *classifier*, *orthographic*, *particle*, and *sign gender*. In each of these cases, we observe the mark of gender entering the structure of the language in different ways. Finally, the *highly embedded* feature of (*minimally*) *masculine-feminine morphosyntactic gender* was described and used as a manner in which to summon the question of how we *use* gendered language structures, which is a focus of Chapter 4. In conclusion, the research presented in this chapter leaves us with two main themes to bring forth into the next: 1) that all languages may feature gender-specific forms of personal reference to varying degrees (and that these forms are mostly binary) and 2) that the presence of gender in language as it has been shaped by millennia of human history creates problems for nonbinary, trans, and other queer people in the present day. With these findings enumerated, we now leave the world of normative gender behind.

4 Gender-Inclusive Language

As observed throughout the featural typology presented in Chapter 3, where gender is distinguished in language, it is almost always categorically binary and reflective of the simplified understanding of “biological sex” that prevailed prior to the delineation of the concept of gender in the late twentieth century. Crosslinguistically, normatively masculine and feminine terms of personal reference are perhaps more readily available than gender-neutral alternatives, and in instances where those alternatives do not exist prescriptively, we might predict those lexical gaps to be the target of gender-inclusive innovation. *Gender-inclusive language* can be defined as the cohort of terms of personal reference in a given language which may be used by nonbinary, trans, gender nonconforming, and other types of people to self-identify and to be identified by others. Under this rubric falls *gender-neutral language*, a term used in this dissertation to separate extant prescriptive forms that do not carry a mark of gender or have a normatively gendered meaning from innovative (invented) forms which add to the inventory of a given language and expand its ability to refer to people neutrally or with specifically nonbinary reference. In its totality, access to gender-inclusive language for gender nonconforming people, as well as for other members of society who should be aware of its existence and how to employ it, is one of the most central issues in the world of queer and trans advocacy. The main reason for this is the psychologically violent phenomenon of *misgendering*, or the use of incorrect linguistic gender markers to refer to someone, which may trigger intense feelings of gender dysphoria. This dissertation theorizes that for languages in which normative gender is highly embedded (i.e. languages with a minimally masculine-feminine system of nominal classification), the possible sites of misgendering are multiplied, and thus these languages become of higher concern to queer and trans communities. Because this dissertation understands no language to be truly genderless, misgendering is therefore possible in every language, and the particular constraints of each language will provide more or less opportunities for it to be avoided. In this way, how the features of gender in a given language are *used* is the complement to which features that language has and how embedded in the grammar they are, complicating the ability to quantify exactly just how gendered a given language is. This chapter offers a report of the gender-inclusive proposals that have been

popularized in different languages of the world. Then, a series of patterns observed within them are synthesized into a set of preliminary principles about the development of gender-inclusive language. Finally, the dissertation concludes by contextualizing the fight for access to gender-inclusive language in terms of broader societal structures, such as the rise of fascism in the United States described in the introduction to this text.

4.0 Introduction

The goal of gender-inclusive language is to include nonbinary, trans, intersex, gender nonconforming, and other types of people who wish to represent themselves outside of the binary in personal reference against a backdrop of predominantly masculine and feminine forms. For mixed-gender groups, this includes the avoidance of masculine generic forms, for instance in masculine-feminine languages in which the masculine is the default gender (e.g. *¡Hola a todos!* 'Hello, everyone!' and *¡Bienvenidos!* 'Welcome!' in Spanish), and in languages of all types which have popular forms of personal reference that are manifestly binary (e.g. *damas y caballeros* 'ladies and gentlemen' in Spanish). This is also the case for individuals, and in both cases, it is all too frequent that individual languages do not have a large capacity to refer to people gender-neutrally. For instance, in Spanish, a modicum of strategies of inclusivity may be employed within the prescriptive constraints of the language, such as *pro-drop*, or the exclusion of subject pronouns before verbs in languages with enough morphological complexity to mark person and number distinctions without them, or the use of epicene forms such as *la persona* 'person' in Spanish, which have just one nominal class value but may be used to refer to all people regardless of gender identity. Beyond these strategies, a language like Spanish offers almost no other resources for the expression of gender-neutrality. In most cases of adjectival attribution, for instance, a mark of gender must forcibly be applied per the constraints of the system (e.g. *simpático/simpática* 'nice'), and even common gender nouns whose forms do not change from one linguistic gender to another must forcibly mark their dependent elements (e.g. *los estudiantes* 'the students'). This contrast between the size of the inventory of normatively gendered forms and the size of the inventory of extant gender-neutral forms in a given language is all too familiar, and in cases where they are not equal, it is logical that gender nonconforming speakers of those languages will create innovative ways to adequately represent their unique identities. Thus, it is crucial to understand which prescriptively extant forms in a given language rise above

the threshold of gender inclusivity and which do not.

Normatively gender-specific forms in English are contained to the grammatical categories of personal pronouns, reflexive pronouns, possessive articles and pronouns, nouns of different types (lexical gender nouns, compounds, and morphological gender nouns), and honorifics. Logically, any forms within these categories that are not normatively gender-specific may be used in reference to anyone, and thus these prescriptively extant gender-neutral forms are gender-inclusive resources. In English, all grammatical persons and numbers besides the third-person singular do not distinguish gender (with the exception of the second-person plural pronominal form *you guys*, which is frequently used in a supposedly gender-neutral manner, but which may be proven as linguistically masculine when *guys* is compared to its feminine counterpart, *gals*). In the third-person singular, personal pronouns, their unique case forms, and possessive articles and pronouns form a cohort of five related forms for each normative gender (see Figure 4.0). Yet English is crosslinguistically rare in its retention of the gender-neutral personal pronoun *they*, which is used along with its related forms to refer to an individual in a gender-inclusive manner.

Figure 4.0 Related case and article forms of English personal pronouns

	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTRAL
SUBJECT PRONOUN	he	she	they
OBJECT PRONOUN	him	her	them
POSSESSIVE PRONOUN	his	hers	theirs
REFLEXIVE PRONOUN	himself	herself	themselves
POSSESSIVE ARTICLE	his	her	their

Lexical gender nouns may or may not have extant gender-neutral alternatives (e.g. *sibling* instead of *brother* or *sister*), and morphologically gendered nouns are all normatively gendered, though some masculine forms are occasionally used by people of all gender identities (e.g. *actor*), and some have gender-neutral counterparts that may be used (e.g. *flight attendant* instead of *steward* or *stewardess*). For compound nouns with the roots *man* and *woman* (e.g. *salesman/saleswoman*, *mailman/mailwoman*) some alternatives with the root *person* exist (e.g. *salesperson*), or other gender-neutral terms may be available (e.g.

mail carrier, firefighter). Nouns for which no prescriptively extant gender-neutral alternatives exist are likely to be the targets of gender-inclusive innovation, for instance the innovative term *nibling*, which has been proposed and adopted as an alternative to the gendered terms *nephew* and *niece* (Merriam-Webster, 2025a). This is similarly the case with the honorifics *Mr.* and *Mrs./Miss/Ms.*, for which the gender inclusive innovation *Mx.* (pronounced *mix*) has been popularized (Merriam-Webster, 2025b).

For a language like Spanish in which almost every form of personal reference is forcibly masculine or feminine linguistically, it is necessary to first use a semantic analysis to determine which of these nominal class values are intended to align with the gender identity of the referent and which are not. It is possible to use morphological parameters to aid in this semantic analysis. For instance, for most nouns with personal reference that have both masculine and feminine forms (e.g. *campeón/campeona* 'champion'), the use of one form over the other is a direct attribution of normative masculine or feminine gender to a particular referent. Common gender nouns (e.g. *estudiante* 'student', *artista* 'artist') whose forms do not change from one gender to another may also be used in gender-inclusive reference, though their dependent elements must be watched (e.g. *los/las cantantes* 'the singers'). Epicene nouns, on the other hand, are nouns which have only one form with one particular nominal class value that may be used to refer to people of all genders, such as *la persona* 'person' or *el (ser) humano* 'human (being)'. The totality of truly gender-neutral extant forms in Spanish is simply not adequate or sustainable enough to be used to refer to a single nonbinary person throughout long stretches of speech, and for this reason, gender-inclusive systems have been developed, namely through the adoption of an inclusive gender morpheme which may collapse morphological distinctions and an inclusive personal pronoun. Two popular systems throughout the Spanish-speaking world are the *-x* morpheme (e.g. *ellx, latinx, amigx*) and the *-e* morpheme (e.g. *elle, latine, amigue*). While one of these morphemes is innovative (*-x*), meaning that it does not come from within the prescriptive morphemic inventory of the language, the other (*-e*) is an extant resource found within the morphemic inventory that is found in many common gender nouns. As compared to extant gender-neutral forms in a given language, innovative forms, as well as extant resources whose capacities are expanded, are much more marked and scrutinized against a network of metrics, such as their "correctness" and the aesthetics of their form and phonology.

The societal markedness and judgment that often results from the use of gender-inclusive language or debates about it is not dissimilar from the discrimination faced by

gender nonconforming people in society. While it is imperative that people who do not identify as normative men or women have access to neutral and/or inclusive forms of speech, their manners of referring to themselves, including the adoption of a certain set of pronouns, is very often a double whammy in the presence of transphobic interlocutors, who understand the use of gender-inclusive language to be a revelation of some queer gender identity, and/or interlocutors who are linguistic purists. In the same way that some conservatives reject empirical fact in claiming that sexual dimorphism is an established truth, linguistic purists reject the natural physics of language, all of which change over time, especially to develop the capacity to express things that they could not express previously. In the case of gender-inclusive language, this particular form of linguistic evolution is necessitated by the invisibilization and suffering of people who do not have adequate forms of personal reference in the languages they speak. Ultimately, just as there is no single correct way to be a gender nonconforming person, there is no single right way to develop gender-inclusive language, and all forms used for the purpose of adequate linguistic gender self-expression, as well as all lived gender identities, are valid.

4.1 Misgendering and Linguistic Gender Affirmation

One double-sided goal of gender-inclusive language, especially for nonbinary speakers of different languages, is to provide adequate forms of linguistic gender self-identification as well as to reduce the possibility of gender nonconforming subjects being misgendered. As introduced in the preamble to this chapter, *misgendering* can be defined as the use of particular linguistic gender markers (e.g. pronouns, lexically and morphologically gendered forms) to refer to someone that do not align with their gender identity and/or their desire to be referred to using those particular forms. In lieu of a person declaring the set of gendered linguistic forms they'd like to be addressed with, the task of surmising how to refer to that person is left to their interlocutor. Because linguistic and social gender categories are so often conflated, this process of *linguistic gender attribution* most often manifests itself as the process of *gender attribution* more simply. It is also for this reason that declaring a certain set of gendered linguistic forms is viewed as tantamount to declaring a certain gender identity, when in actuality this is not the case. Pino & Edmonds (2024) view the process of gender attribution to be correlated with one's "visual and aural appearance" in nonsexual social interactions (p. 1250), referencing Kessler & McKenna's

(1978) overlay study in which almost any combination of visual determinants could be explained as masculine or feminine where information about "biological sex" was concealed. For gender conforming people whose "biological sex," gender identity, and preference for a certain set of gendered linguistic forms are all in alignment, this *moment of snap judgment* in which perhaps all three values are determined at once is usually invisible and unproblematic. Yet especially for gender nonconforming people and others whose linguistic gender preferences defy other's expectations of them, this moment of snap judgment can result in an intentional or unintentional invalidation of their identity. Trans-affirming psychiatrists offer a range of effects that can be produced when gender nonconforming people are misgendered, including feelings of misrecognition, invalidation, invisibility, unintelligibility, and dysphoria possibly leading to anxiety, post-traumatic stress, depression, and even suicidality (Jacobsen et al., 2024; Langer, 2011).

In 2011, psychotherapist S.J. Langer called for a "linguistic clinical intervention" and a reflection on the impact of gendered language on gender-diverse populations in clinical settings (Langer, 2011, p. 306). Noting that language is the basic instrument of psychotherapy, Langer cites the importance of mutual recognition between therapists and their clients, a task for which gendered language is an obvious obstacle (ibid; Benjamin, 1988). The consequences of misrecognition or feeling unintelligible can be so psychologically traumatic that some gender nonconforming people may strive to avoid detection and retreat from visibility, exacerbating feelings of ostracization and putting them more at risk for negative mental health outcomes (Langer, 2011, p. 303). Gender-inclusive language, for this reason, is a tool that must be at psychotherapists' disposal in order to validate patients, offering them a safe space to access and employ terms of linguistic gender self-identification that they find adequate and gender-affirming. Relatedly, in a Canadian study conducted with 1,091 participants who identified as "nonbinary, genderqueer, agender, or a similar identity," 59% reported being misgendered daily (Jacobsen et al., 2024, p. 819). Rates of misgendering were heightened for visibly disabled participants, younger participants, AFAB participants, and racialized AMAB participants (ibid, p. 824). While very few quantitative findings on the correlation between misgendering and depression, anxiety, and stress exist, this and other studies have found various patterns empirically supporting the idea that constant misgendering is detrimental to nonbinary people, and this violence may be more prevalent for nonbinary people than for binary trans people. The intervention that the person being misgendered must make often puts them in a

perilous situation; if they correct their interlocutors, this is most often taken to be a revelation of a certain gender identity, exposing them to potential violence. By the same token, not making the intervention in order to *not* make this revelation subjects them to further misgendering, which is much more of a problem in languages with highly embedded features of gender that multiply the sites of possible misgendering for nonbinary people.

The referent of the concept of misgendering is linguistic content which is formally or semantically marked as normatively masculine or feminine (Conrod, 2020). In order to avoid misgendering, an interlocutor must know which set of linguistic forms the referent would like to be addressed with. Queer rights organizations promote fostering a sort of *pronoun culture* in which it is normalized for interlocutors to offer their set of preferred pronouns while introducing themselves, as in the phrase "My name is Ben and I use *he/they* pronouns" (HRC, 2025). Relatedly, asking for one's pronouns, for instance with the phrases "What are your pronouns?" or "What pronouns do you use?" is becoming more and more normalized in the American context, especially in queer and trans community settings and in university settings. The purpose of pronoun culture is to promote the visibility of the issue of misgendering and to offer others space to declare their preferred pronouns before continuing on with a conversation in order to avoid misgendering. And while gendered linguistic forms are not necessarily indicative of someone's gender identity (e.g. a nonbinary person may choose to use normatively masculine or feminine pronouns), pronoun culture is a central part of *gender self-determination*, which Eric A. Stanley (2014) defines as "becoming liberated as we speak" (p. 91).

Once the desire of the referent is made clear, their interlocutor knows which set of linguistic forms to refer to them with. Similarly to how linguistic content is organized into classes in agreement-based systems of nominal classification, gendered and gender-inclusive language may be thought of as existing in different sets. For instance, in English, the normatively masculine personal pronoun *he* and its related case forms can be imagined to exist in a set with their "agreement targets," which include all other normatively masculine words in the language. This is also the case for the set of normatively feminine items, headed by the pronoun *she* and its related case forms, as well as gender-neutral forms, which are similarly identified by performing a semantic analysis of the lexicon. Any prescriptively extant gender-neutral terms in a language, including the English pronoun *they* and its related case forms, as well as semantically gender-neutral nouns like *sibling* and *partner*, are elevated to the domain of gender-inclusive language, where they may be used to

refer to anyone in a manner that does not mark their gender. Any non-prescriptively extant innovations, such as the multiple classes of English neopronouns (e.g. *ze/hir*), may also form additional sets that within the domain of gender-inclusive language may have associations with specific nonbinary gender identities. In this way, gender-inclusive language includes both gender-neutral language, as well as language intended to mark specific nonbinary identities. These linguistic sets are often represented by their pronoun heads in parenthesis, such as (*he*), (*she/her/hers*), and (*they/them*), which may or may not include one or more related case forms. In a language like Spanish with a masculine-feminine system of nominal classification, a semantic analysis must similarly be conducted in order to identify the sets that are normatively gendered and gender-neutral. Epicene forms like *la persona*, which may be used to refer to all people, even with feminine morphosyntactic agreements, are elevated to the domain of gender-inclusive language, yet masculine-feminine linguistic systems reveal a tendency to not have a large inventory of extant gender-neutral forms, leaving gaps that must be filled. Ártemis López (2019) formalizes this distinction as *direct* and *indirect nonbinary language*. Whereas indirect nonbinary language is devoid of all distinctions that bear upon the gender of the referent and employs epicene and invariant forms, direct nonbinary language is inclusive of innovative gender-inclusive forms like the pronouns *elle* and *ellx* and the morphemes *-e* and *-x* in Spanish (López, 2019). These inclusive forms are the additional sets of gender-inclusive and/or specifically nonbinary pronouns, morphemes, and lexical items that fill holes in the language's paradigms in order to endow it with the capacity for neutrality and specifically nonbinary reference. In Spanish, these sets are represented by their pronoun heads as well as the canonical gender morpheme of masculine, feminine, or inclusive genders, as in (*él, -o*), (*ella, -a*), and (*elle, -e*).

In their totality, prescriptively extant gender-neutral forms and non-prescriptive, innovative gender-inclusive forms comprise the inventory of gender-inclusive language. The explicit purpose of gender-inclusive language is to visibilize and affirm people of nonbinary gender identities, as well as anyone who does not identify with normatively masculine and/or feminine forms, and to create space for gender-neutrality where none exists prescriptively. The recognition and affirmation of gender nonconforming people in language is a human right that must be defended given the detrimental psychological consequences of misgendering and feeling illegible due to a lack of adequate terms of self-identification. Gender-inclusive language itself, too, must be defended as legitimate and valid. All

languages change over time, especially to express realities that they could not express before. For this and other reasons, this dissertation asserts that any forms of language with which nonbinary and other gender nonconforming people identify are already legitimate, though their public view as legitimate is dependent on conferrences of validity from institutions of prescriptive language like language academies and major publishers of language materials, as well as institutions of hegemonic power that uphold standard language, like governments and international organizations.

4.2 Gender-Inclusive Language

The following sections introduce the gender-inclusive forms that have been proposed and/or popularized in different world languages. As with all other parts of this dissertation, this report does not aim to be exhaustive, but rather to provide a representative sample including all of the gender-inclusive forms about which the author is aware as of the year 2025. Rather than being organized featurally, the following sections are organized by language family or individual language as dictated by the particularities of the data set. While this dissertation is not aware of any extant gender-inclusive proposals for the features of classifier gender and particle gender, for the other six features identified in Chapter 3—lexicosemantic, pronominal, affixal, orthographic, sign, and masculine-feminine morphosyntactic gender—each have been neutralized in different ways and sometimes even unified as cohesive systems in certain languages. In order to illustrate this latter phenomenon, two language families are described first (Germanic and Romance) before a number of typologically distinct world languages that have developed gender-inclusive innovations are presented.

4.2.1 Germanic

The Germanic language family is comprised of a number of modern languages descended from Proto-Germanic, which featured a masculine-feminine-neuter system of agreement-based nominal classification. Some of the modern descendants of Proto-Germanic have retained this system, like German, while others have simplified it in different ways, as in the common-neuter system of Swedish, and in English, the system of agreement-based nominal classification has been dissolved altogether. Yet, as echoed throughout this

dissertation, English, while widely understood to be a “genderless” language, prescriptively retains a number of features of gender that are remnants of this system or a result of other influences, like French, resulting in the features of lexicosemantic, pronominal, and affixal gender. In their totality, the proposals that have been made to improve upon these three features comprise the inventory of gender-inclusive English (see Figure 4.2.1). Firstly, gender-inclusive English is emblemized by the extant gender-neutral personal pronoun *they*, which has survived from at least the time of Chaucer and was promoted during the English-language anti-sexist language movement as a neutral alternative to masculine generic forms (Bodine, 1975). In the present day, it has been popularized as a gender-inclusive pronoun that many nonbinary and other types of people self-identify with, and it has also been legitimated both institutionally (e.g. Merriam-Webster, 2025c) and theoretically (e.g. Conrod, 2019) as a valid part of the structure of the global English language. Additionally, many classes of *neopronouns*, or neologistic pronouns, have been attested that were created by different communities either to represent specific gender identities or to add to the cohort of neutral alternatives (Kiriko Robinson et al., 2025). One early example of a neopronominal system are the forms *ze/hir*, which were used throughout the first edition of *My Gender Workbook* by Kate Bornstein (1997), and the second edition published in 2013 introduces an additional set: *sie/hir* (Bornstein, 2013, p. xii). In addition to pronouns, the other two remaining features—lexical and affixal gender—have also been considered. While English is crosslinguistically fortuitous because of its ample inventory of extant gender-neutral lexical items, it also contains a couple of lexical gaps, as in the cases of *nephew* and *niece* as well as *uncle* and *aunt*, pairs with no prescriptive gender-neutral alternatives. For the former pair, the term *nibling* (from *nephew/niece* and *sibling*) has been proposed and promoted in context, for instance by Jennifer Lopez, who spoke of her nibling Brendon Scholl while promoting the 2020 movie about them entitled *Draw With Me* (Lopez, 2020). For the pair *uncle* and *aunt*, the form *pibling* (from *parent* and *sibling*) has similarly been proposed, for instance by Neville Goodman in the British Journal of General Practice in 2005. Fortunately, most compound words in English (e.g. *mailman*, *fireman*, *policeman*) may be neutralized using the extant inventory, as in the gender-inclusive forms *mail carrier*, *firefighter*, and *police officer*. Finally, affixal gender is perhaps the feature that has been least interrogated, though because its presence is mostly due to the influence of other

Figure 4.2.1 Partial grammar of gender-inclusive English

	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTRAL	INCLUSIVE
SUBJECT PRONOUN	he	she	they	ze
OBJECT PRONOUN	him	her	them	hir
POSSESSIVE PRONOUN	his	hers	theirs	hirs
REFLEXIVE PRONOUN	himself	herself	themselves	hirsself
POSSESSIVE ARTICLE	his	her	their	hir

Morphological Gender Nouns			Lexical Gender Nouns		
MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE	MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE
god	goddess	—	man	woman	person
bachelor	bachelorette	—	father	mother	parent
Latino	Latina	Latinx	brother	sister	sibling
Filipino	Filipina	Filipinx	nephew	niece	nibling
—	diva	—	uncle	aunt	pibling

Honorifics			Compound Nouns		
MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE	MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE
Mr.	Mrs., Ms., Miss	Mx.	salesman	saleswoman	salesperson
mister	missus, —, miss	mix	mailman	mailwoman	mail carrier
			fireman	firewoman	firefighter
Sir	Ma'am madam	—	househusband	housewife	—
			—	primadonna	—

Source: Papadopoulos et al., 2025a

languages, gender-inclusive forms found in those languages have occasionally made their way into English, for instance the borrowed term *Latinx* which has been used to describe voting populations in the United States (d'Urso & Roman, 2024).

In other modern Germanic languages, inventories of personal pronouns have been interrogated in many cases, though the particular morphological and morphosyntactic complexities of each have offered challenges to proposing and implementing logical systems of gender-inclusivity. Drawing on analogy from the Finnish personal pronoun *hän*, which is prescriptively gender-neutral, Swedish officially adopted the gender-inclusive pronoun *hen* as a counterpart to normatively masculine (*han* 'he') and feminine (*hon* 'she') pronouns in the glossary of the Swedish Academy in 2015 (Sendén et al., 2015). The pronoun *hen* had originally been proposed by linguists in the 1960s and made a resurgence from the 2000s on, leading to its popularization and ultimate acceptance by the Swedish Academy (ibid). In 2022, the Language Council of Norway also announced their acceptance of the pronoun *hen* as a gender-neutral alternative to the normatively masculine pronoun *han* 'he' and the normatively feminine pronoun *hun* 'she' in Norwegian (Riedel, 2022). In Danish, *hen* is similarly an alternative to the normatively masculine pronoun *han* 'he' and the normatively feminine pronoun *hun* 'she', but Danish speakers also use a lowercase version of the second-person singular pronoun, *de*, as well as the third-person singular common gender pronoun *den* (Hjorth-Nebel Miltersen et al., 2025). In German, a system similar to *écriture inclusive* 'inclusive writing' in French (described in Section 4.2.2) has been introduced and popularized in university contexts and other settings: the "gender star," or the use of an asterisk, underscore, or other symbol to break up masculine and feminine forms of a word, as in *Freund*in* 'friend, partner', which is pronounced with a glottal stop before the feminine morpheme. While it is the topic of much debate, the "gender star" has proliferated in German society to a considerable degree (Müller-Spitzer, 2022).

4.2.2 Romance

The modern Romance languages provide a remarkable example of multiple cohesive systems—all of which were proposed independently—that converge upon a set of linguistic principles operable in most of them, and which in many cases share recurring gender-inclusive forms. With the exception of Romanian, most of the major modern Romance languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, French, and Italian, have coalesced

around systems amounting to new, inclusive nominal classes in each, emblemized by a gender-inclusive personal pronoun and a vocalic gender-inclusive morpheme used to collapse binary morphological distinctions throughout the grammar. These languages, while among the most gendered in the world due to their masculine-feminine morphosyntactic systems of nominal classification, provide optimal examples of the capacity of even an extremely gendered language to develop a logical system of gender-inclusivity.

Perhaps the modern Romance language with the most storied history of anti-sexist and gender-inclusive proposals is Spanish (Papadopoulos, 2022; see Figure 4.2.2). In 1976, the Spanish engineer Álvaro García Meseguer proposed the *-e* morpheme as an anti-sexist proposal to create an additional common gender within the language. There is little evidence to suggest that this proposal was adopted widely around the time that it was made, but in the present day, whether due to his proposal or others that arose independently of it, the *-e* gender is the most commonly attested gender-inclusive system in the language around the Spanish-speaking world. García Meseguer's (1976) original proposal is partially written in this *-e* gender, where it is used identically to present-day attestations (e.g. Duarte et al., 2025). For instance, only sites of direct gendered personal reference are transformed (following from López's [2019] distinction), the articles *le* and *une* are introduced to collapse the pairs *el/lla* and *un/una*, respectively, and orthographic changes preserving the original sound of certain words are evidenced (e.g. "querides amigues," "les polítiques"). Seemingly the only component lacking in García Meseguer's proposal is the personal pronoun *elle*, which was proposed by Sophia Gubb in 2013 and which then appeared in a change.org petition directed at the *Real Academia Español [RAE]* 'Royal Spanish Academy' in 2015. Following this, the unified *-e* gender appeared in grammars that began circulating among different queer communities (e.g. Gómez, 2016). While the *-e* gender and other proposed gender-inclusive innovations have been roundly rejected by the RAE, they have received various levels of support from global Spanish-speaking institutions, though this support remains in flux and is being diminished by the rise of conservatism in certain countries such as Argentina (AP, 2024). In queer community settings, however, use of the pronoun *elle* and the rest of the inclusive *-e* gender has been popularized to a degree that reveals the existence of one "standard" variety or mode of implementation. Beyond the *-e* morpheme, the *-x* morpheme is the other that has gained traction, especially in certain words such as *latinx* and *chicanx*. The origins of *-x* have been placed in the early 2000s among online queer communities, and its use in writing is highly attested. Because it is not a vocalic morpheme,

Figure 4.2.2 Partial grammar of gender-inclusive Spanish

Personal Pronouns			Morphological Gender Nouns		
MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE	MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE
él 'he'	ella 'she'	elle 'they [SG.]'	amigo 'friend'	amiga 'friend'	amigu <u>e</u> 'friend'
nosotros 'we'	nosotras 'we'	nosotres 'we'	chico 'boy'	chica 'girl'	chiqu <u>e</u> 'kid'
vosotros 'you all'	vosotras 'you all'	vosotres 'you all'	bombero 'firefighter'	bombero 'firefighter'	bombero 'firefighter'
ellos 'they [PL.]'	ellas 'they [PL.]'	elles 'they [PL.]'	hijo 'son'	hija 'daughter'	hije 'child'
Lexical Gender Nouns			Articles		
MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE	MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE
padre 'father'	madre 'mother'	— 'parent'	el 'the'	la 'the'	le 'the'
marido 'husband'	esposa 'wife'	— 'spouse'	los 'the'	las 'the'	les 'the'
hombre 'man'	mujer 'woman'	persona 'person'	un 'a/an'	una 'a/an'	une 'a/an'
yerno 'son-in-law'	nuera 'daughter-in-law'	— 'child-in-law'	unos 'some'	unas 'some'	unes 'some'

Source: Duarte et al., 2025

and because there are lively debates about whether the -x is a colonial imposition from English or a decolonial tool from Indigenous languages, among other reasons, the -x is

undoubtedly the most polarizing gender-inclusive Spanish form (see Papadopoulos, 2022). However, just like the *-e*, its use in speech has been attested, where it is mostly realized as the cluster [eks] to fit with the phonological patterns of the language (Papadopoulos, 2024).

In Portuguese, especially Brazilian Portuguese, the *-e* gender is similarly attested in the domain of gender-inclusivity (Clendenning-Jiménez & Kiriko Robinson, 2025). For all grammatical categories besides personal pronouns, the *-e* is implemented in a similarly straightforward manner, where it collapses morphological distinctions of gender throughout the grammar. As is the case with Spanish, it is not able to collapse lexical gender distinctions in which the normative masculine and feminine forms feature different roots, and these pairs at times constitute remaining lexical gaps. For personal pronouns, because the normatively masculine form *e/le* already features the *-e* morpheme, a number of gender-inclusive personal pronouns have been attested, including *elu*, *ilu*, and *ile* (ibid). Gender-inclusive Portuguese has been proposed and popularized by queer community members in the Lusophone community, for instance in grammars of gender and social media videos, as well as in various queer and trans community wiki pages (ibid). This is also the case in Catalan, where gender-inclusive proposals upheld by trans-focused organizations and queer scholars, among others, have converged upon the *-i* morpheme and the pronoun *elli* (Duarte, 2025).

Italian is perhaps the most distinct case to the above examples of Spanish, Portuguese, and Catalan (see Figure 4.2.2.1). Italian gender morphology is fusional and encodes both normative gender and grammatical number, resulting in an inventory of canonical morphemes that utilize four of the five extant vowels in the language. The final remaining vowel in the language's inventory, [u], is anecdotally believed not to be employed as a gender-inclusive resource because in some dialects, such as Sicilian, it is how the masculine singular morpheme *-o* is pronounced. For this reason, gender-inclusive proposals have introduced a new vowel and vocalic morpheme into the inventory of Italian, the schwa: *-ə*. The schwa proposal is generally attributed to Luca Boschetto, creator of the website *Italiano inclusivo*. In 2015, they posted the first proposal for the use of the schwa as a gender-inclusive morpheme. Since then, Boschetto, the sociolinguist and activist Vera Gheno, the editorial house *effequ*, and many others have popularized and expanded on this proposal. There are now enough attestations of the schwa throughout the Italian grammar to describe it as an additional gender (Papadopoulos et al., 2025b). Boschetto's (2015) original

Figure 4.2.2.1 Partial grammar of gender-inclusive Italian

Personal Pronouns			Morphological Gender Nouns		
MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE	MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE
lui 'he'	lei 'she'	l <i>ə</i> i, loi 'they [SG.]'	bambino 'boy'	bambina 'girl'	bambin <i>ə</i> 'child'
			bambini 'boys'	bambine 'girls'	bambin <i>ə</i> /3 'children'
Adjectives					
piccolo 'small'	piccolo 'small'	piccol <i>ə</i> 'small'	amico 'friend'	amica 'friend'	amic <i>ə</i> 'friend'
piccoli 'small'	piccole 'small'	piccol <i>ə</i> /3 'small'	amici 'friends'	amic <i>e</i> 'friends'	amic <i>ə</i> /3 'friends'
italiano 'Italian'	italiana 'Italian'	italian <i>ə</i> 'Italian'	professore 'professor'	professoressa 'professor'	professor <i>ə</i> 'professor'
italiani 'Italian'	italiane 'Italian'	italian <i>ə</i> /3 'Italian'	professori 'professors'	professoress <i>e</i> 'professors'	professor <i>ə</i> /3 'professors'

Source: Papadopoulos et al., 2025b

proposal introduces two canonical morphemes, inclusive singular *-ə* [ə] (lo schwa) and inclusive plural *-3* [ɜ] (lo schwa lungo), and the personal pronoun *l*ə*i* 'they [SG.]'. The original proposal puts forth a set of principles for the schwa's usage. For instance, inclusive forms of noncanonical nouns are based on the masculine singular, and invariant forms undergo no transformation. Other texts, like "Cos'è quella «e» rovesciata?" by Cavallo et. al (2021) and "L'avventura dello schwa" (2022) by Vera Gheno propose use of the schwa (*-ə*) in both the singular and the plural, to the exclusion of the long schwa (*-3*). While within this system the inclusive personal pronoun *l*ə*i* has been proposed to collapse the distinction between normatively masculine (*lui* 'he') and feminine (*lei* 'she') personal pronouns, others have been proposed, including the inclusive pronoun *loi*, which was introduced by students at Colorado College under the supervision of Amanda Minervini in 2022 (Minervini et al., 2022).

For the modern Romance languages that have popularized gender-inclusive systems, a recurring motif has emerged. Related to the fact that most canonical masculine and feminine gender morphemes are vocalic in Romance, it is perhaps not unsurprising that Spanish, Portuguese, Catalan, and Italian have converged upon different inclusive gender morphemes which are vocalic: *-e* in Spanish and Portuguese, *-i* in Catalan, and *-ə* in Italian. Yet as seen in Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian, these vocalic morphemes are situated at some phonetic midpoint between canonical masculine and feminine gender morphemes (Kaplan & Papadopoulos, 2023). Additionally, these same vocalic morphemes are featured on the canonical personal pronouns of the inclusive gender in each language, and in the case of Spanish and Portuguese, the *-e* morpheme forms part of the extant inventory of the language, where it is forcibly masculine or feminine linguistically, though used on common gender nouns, whose forms are invariant (e.g. *estudante* 'student' in Portuguese).

Perhaps the most difficult case within Romance for which no cohesive system has emerged is French. While the inclusive pronoun *iel*, a portmanteau of the canonical masculine (*il*) and feminine (*elle*) personal pronouns, is commonly attested and has been adopted by different nonbinary communities to varying degrees, the extreme morphological complexity of French (especially as compared to the other modern Romance languages) has provided considerable challenges even within individual proposals (see Kaplan, 2022). For canonical masculine-feminine noun pairs in which the masculine morpheme is phonetically null (*-∅*) and the feminine morpheme is *-e*, the system of *écriture inclusive* 'inclusive writing' is commonly used, which introduces a midpoint dot before the canonical feminine morpheme, producing the inclusive morpheme *-·e*, and has varying phonological representations, including a brief pause between the base and the morpheme (ibid). Romanian is distinct from the other modern Romance languages in that it maintains the masculine-feminine-neuter system of Latin, and this dissertation is not aware of any known gender-inclusive proposals for Romanian as of the year 2025.

4.2.3 Other Languages

Outside of the Romance and Germanic language families, a handful of other languages have attested gender-inclusive forms. While only having emerged within the past few years, Greek provides an interesting lesson on the use of extant resources within a given language. Greek, like German and Latin, is a masculine-feminine-neuter language, yet in

comparison, its neuter gender contains more words for people. The words αγόρι 'boy', κορίτσι 'girl', άτομο 'person', and παιδί 'child' are all grammatically neuter and logically take neuter agreements (e.g. αυτό το αγόρι 'this boy'). Perhaps because of this capacity to represent human subjects in the neuter gender in a way that is not derogatory, as opposed to the English pronoun *it* or the German pronoun *es*, the neuter gender has been attested for use in gender-neutral collective reference (e.g. Γεια σε όλους, όλες και όλα! 'Hello to everybody!'), as well as in specifically nonbinary reference. Relatedly, as foreign words, even names, are commonly borrowed into the neuter gender in Greek, the intersection of these two ideas can be seen in Greek-language reporting about the Swiss singer Nemo, who won the 2024 Eurovision Song Contest representing Switzerland. In Greek, names are preceded by articles, and therefore Nemo is introduced as "το Nemo," where το is the neuter definite article, and neuter agreements are occasionally attested (Kodonas, 2024).

In Irish, personal pronouns in the third-person singular nominative (sé 'he' and sí 'she') and accusative (é 'him' and í 'her') have been associated with the forms *siad* and *iad*, which draws on analogy from English in employing the prescriptive third-person plural pronominal forms (Colleluori, 2025). The gendered effects of the morphosyntactic, word-initial phonological mutation caused by definite and possessive articles preceding nouns, however, is not known to have been considered in gender-inclusive proposals.

In Tagalog, because hundreds of Spanish loanwords with Spanish gender morphology were borrowed into the language during the more than three hundred-year period of Spanish colonization of the Philippines, there is minimal evidence for the use of the -x morpheme in Tagalog, as evidenced in the words *filipinx/pilipinx* and *pinxy* (from *pinoy* and *pinay*), all of which are markers of Filipino identity (Blazado & Papadopoulos, 2025).

In Hebrew, the niqqid sign *segol* (ְ IPA: [e̞]) has been used to phonologically distance nonbinary personal pronouns (אֵהְ heh) from masculine (אֵהּ hu 'he') and feminine (אֵיהּ hi 'she') personal pronouns (Nonbinary Hebrew Project, 2025). This system, introduced by Lior Gross and Eyal Rivlin, is proposed for all gender-inclusive personal pronominal forms, nouns like תַּלְמִידֵהּ *talmide* 'student' (as compared with its normatively masculine תַּלְמִיד *talmid* and feminine תַּלְמִידָהּ *talmida* forms), adjectives, possessive suffixes, and verb forms which are marked for gender, for instance as in לֹמְדֵהּ *lomedet* 'I/you/they [SG.] learn', as compared to the forms לֹמֵד *lomed* 'I/you/he learns' and לֹמְדֵת *lomedet* 'I/you/she learns' (ibid). Another proposal introduces a series of twelve new Hebrew characters to resolve problems arising

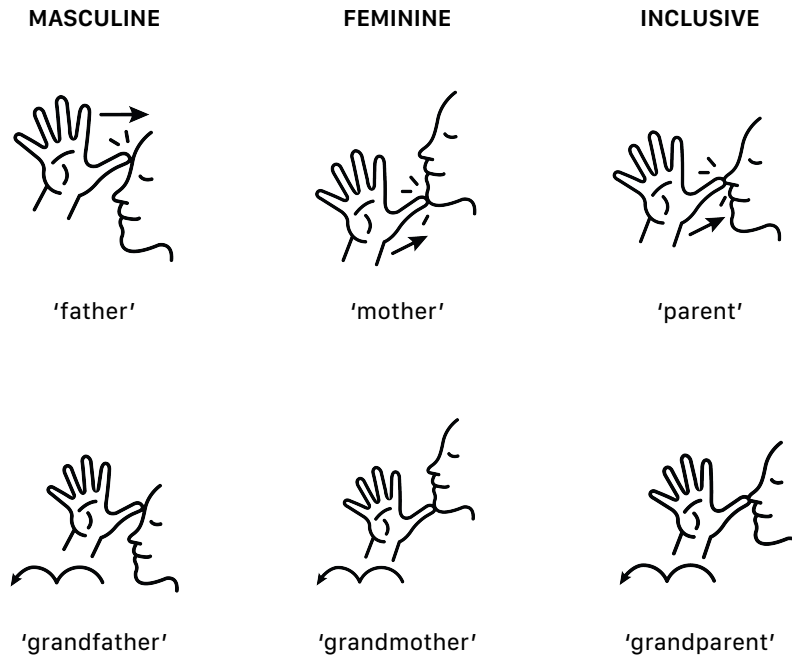
from morphological gender distinctions in the language (Shomer, n.d.), though both systems face opposition from prescriptivist institutions (Gaftor & Mor, 2023).

While all of the above examples deal with the features of lexicosemantic, pronominal, affixal, and morphosyntactic gender, Chinese and American Sign Language provide two valuable and unique examples of the improvement of other crosslinguistic features of gender. As described in Section 3.4.4, the Chinese language features a radical in its inventory of characters frequently referred to as the *woman radical*, 女, which at times simply distinguishes normatively masculine and feminine pairs, and which at other times creates a derogatory meaning when replacing the masculine radical, whose allographs are 亻 and 人 (Tang et al., 2025). There are at least three attested proposals which aim to collapse this distinction of orthographic gender, all of which revolve around the personal pronouns 他 'he' and 她 'she' (see Figure 4.2.3). In Mandarin Chinese, both of these pronouns are pronounced identically as *tā*, and thus their distinction is only encoded in writing. For this reason, the pinyin or Romanization *ta* or *TA* is occasionally attested in the news and other media. *X也* is an innovative form created by the intersex community The Missing Gender 0.972 in 2015. Just as it has been employed for the purposes of gender-inclusivity in English, Spanish, and Tagalog, the *-x* appears here as a foreign radical introduced into the extant Chinese inventory, supposedly with the symbolic meaning of crossing out any marker of gender. A third innovation utilizes an extant radical meaning 'none, not any': the pronoun 无也 created by graphic designer Zipeng Zhu in 2021. While this proposal cannot currently be rendered by computers as a single character as in 他 'he' and 她 'she', they are crucial examples of gender-inclusive language in a character-based writing system.

Figure 4.2.3 Third-person singular personal pronouns in Mandarin Chinese

MASCULINE	FEMININE	INCLUSIVE	INCLUSIVE	INCLUSIVE
他	她	TA	X也	无也
tā	tā	tā	tā	tā
'he'	'she'	'they [SG.]'	'they [SG.]'	'they [SG.]'

Source: Tang et al., 2025

Figure 4.2.3.1 Inclusive sign gender in American Sign Language

Source: Vicars, n.d.

Finally, American Sign Language evidences the only known gender-inclusive proposal for the sixth feature of gender identified in this chapter, sign gender. Following from the establishment made in Section 3.4.6 that many kinship terms in American Sign Language are distinguished by the starting position of the signs being above or below the level of the nose, which under Stokoe's (2005/1960) theory of cherology correlates with the *tabula* or *position* chereme, many signs based on this distinction may be articulated precisely at the level of the nose in order to make them gender-neutral (see Figure 4.2.3.1). This instance of the *tabula* chereme producing normatively gendered associations, whereby the normatively masculine form is articulated at the level of the forehead and the normatively feminine form is articulated at the level of the chin, mirrors a pattern found within the systems of gender-inclusivity used in Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian, whereby the correlate of gender-inclusivity in ASL, the level of the nose, is situated at some sort of midpoint between normatively masculine and feminine forms, similar to how the gender-inclusive vocalic morphemes popularized in Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian are all situated at some sort of phonetic midpoint between canonical masculine and feminine morphemes.

4.3 Analysis of Extant Gender-Inclusive Forms

While attestations of gender-inclusive forms have only been documented in a handful of the world's languages, the systems that have been popularized manifest a few patterns that may be described as a series of preliminary generalizations. Firstly, any extant, gender-neutral forms found within a given language are elevated to the domain of gender-inclusive language because of their ability to refer to all people without applying a mark of normative gender. Where gender-neutral forms of a given concept cannot be found and only normatively masculine and feminine forms exist, this lexical gap is expected to become a target of gender-inclusive language. In English, this was illustrated by the pairs *nephew/niece* and *uncle/aunt* for which there are no prescriptively extant gender-neutral forms. Using idiosyncratic processes of linguistic innovation, queer- and trans-focused reform proposals generated innovative forms meant to fill these lexical gaps: *nibling* and *pibling*, respectively, both based on the extant gender-neutral term *sibling*. This type of linguistic innovation promoted by the proliferation of gender-inclusive language can perhaps be predicted by the simple gender test (introduced in Section 3.3), which in fact revealed the two lexical gaps described above. By assessing the extant inventory of normatively gendered forms in a given language as compared to the extant inventory of gender-neutral forms, these lexical gaps can be identified and offered as a point of consideration to nonbinary, trans, gender nonconforming, and other concerned speakers of different languages. Gender-inclusive forms are adopted, proliferated, and popularized by speakers in a way not dissimilar from processes of language variation and change more generally.

Relatedly, another observed pattern is the extrapolation of any embedded forms (e.g. affixal morphemes, pronouns, etc.) that are prescriptively gender-neutral or are found on invariant forms. In English, one referent of this idea was the extant gender-neutral personal pronoun *they*, which was promoted by feminists as an alternative to masculine generic forms and then later promoted by queer and trans activists as a gender-inclusive pronoun used by many nonbinary and other types of speakers to self-identify. In Spanish and Portuguese, this pattern was observed in the expansion of the function of the gender morpheme *-e*, which although it must be forcibly masculine or feminine prescriptively (e.g. *el/la cantante* 'singer'), it is found on many invariant common gender forms which themselves are not distinguished for normative gender. Where this type of extrapolation of the use of an extant resource for the purpose of gender-inclusivity is not possible, creative

forms are innovated, for instance in Italian, as evidenced with the introduction of a new vowel and vocalic morpheme, the schwa: -ə.

In many cases including gender-inclusive Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, American Sign Language, and even some of the gender-inclusive pronominal forms adopted in the modern Germanic languages, another pattern may be observed: normative masculine and feminine forms are frequently neutralized by finding some middle ground between them. The gender-inclusive French pronoun *iel* 'they [SG.]' is an obvious example of this phenomenon, as it is a portmanteau of the normative masculine (*il* 'he') and feminine (*elle* 'she') forms. In Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian, where canonical masculine and feminine morphemes are -o and -a, respectively, the vocalic morpheme that is chosen (in addition to being extant in the cases of Spanish and Portuguese) is situated at some phonetic midpoint between the two canonical forms (Kaplan & Papadopoulos, 2023). For Spanish and Portuguese, this is the -e morpheme, which within the vowel space is basically equidistant from canonical masculine and feminine morphemes in both languages. In Italian, where canonical gender morphemes are -o for the masculine and -a for the feminine, the inclusive morpheme that is being popularized is the vowel in the exact center of the space, the schwa (-ə), which is nonnative to the language's morphemic inventory.

Finally, while it is not entirely provable whether or not the above factors contribute to the acceptance or the legitimation of gender-inclusive forms in society, it is clear that institutions of prescriptive language, such as publishing houses that produce dictionaries and grammars, language academies, and governments, are extremely influential in this regard. Many people believe that language is controlled by these institutions, even though in reality language change over time and among different populations is somewhat a law of nature within the field of sociolinguistics. For this reason, when the institutions of prescriptive language most intertwined with dominant institutions of hegemonic power (such as a language academy that is a function of a government) accept gender-inclusive language and include it in their publications and other communications, its societal view as legitimate is almost ensured. Yet while these institutions play a large role in society's acceptance of innovative forms of language, it must be restated that any and all forms of language with which queer and trans people identify and feel identified by are already legitimate.

4.4 Conclusion: Gender-Inclusive Language as a Form of Resistance

In order to arrive at this final chapter describing the gender-inclusive forms that have been proposed, attested, or popularized in different languages around the world, it was first necessary to build a theory and definition of the concept of *gender in language* that wove together the existing threads of research on the topic, both within the field of formal linguistics and outside of it. The conclusion to this dissertation ends where it began in order to discuss gender-inclusive language as a form of resistance. Chapter 1 began with a discussion about the weaponization of the concepts of gender and language in society more broadly. Inspired by a backdrop of rising authoritarianism in the United States in the year 2025, several executive orders that targeted trans people, the concept of nonbinary gender, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, as well as forms of language and individual languages themselves were described and used as a jumping-off point from which to approach an empirically and theoretically informed description of the concepts of “biological sex” and gender. These understandings were then used to synthesize a definition of *gender in language* that could adequately identify what was meant by the term: the appearance of normatively gender-specific meanings and embedded grammatical distinctions based on the complex human quality of gender. As revealed in Chapter 2, formulating such a definition was necessary because in the field of formal linguistics, no extant theory is motivated by this goal. The term *linguistic* or *grammatical gender* points to the theory of agreement-based nominal classification, and to a lesser degree, to the concept of classifiers, and neither of these concepts have any explicit basis on the concept of (human) gender. After revealing the weaknesses of these theories in identifying and accounting for the various features of gender observed crosslinguistically, including languages with a system of masculine-feminine morphosyntactic gender, a new, more humanistic theory of gender in language was elaborated in Chapter 3. The basic tenets of this theory were that there is no such thing as a genderless language (as all languages have the feature of lexicosemantic gender, minimally), that gender may be embedded to different degrees in the language of the world, that gender values in language and in society are not necessarily the same but share a tight historical correlation, that our goal in using gender in language is to match the desire of the referent, and that access to gender-inclusive language is a basic human right that must be defended. Then, a featural typology introducing eight realizations of gender in language was introduced and related to a scale

ranging from least to most embedded—lexicosemantic, pronominal, affixal, classifier, orthographic, particle, sign, and masculine-feminine morphosyntactic gender. Finally, this chapter explored how typologically distinct languages have improved upon these features of gender in language in order to expand their capacity to refer to nonbinary, trans, gender nonconforming, and other types of people who wish to be referred to neutrally and outside of the binary. It culminates in a message related to the introduction to this dissertation: the takedown of gender diversity and gender-inclusive language desired by authoritarian regimes like the United States in the year 2025 will never happen.

Throughout the history of anti-sexist and gender-inclusive language reform, we have been offered a number of examples of both resistance to and the acceptance of new forms of language meant to visibilize people of marginalized gender identities. In some cases, institutions of prescriptive language have accepted innovative gender-inclusive forms, having recognized their necessity as tools of gender affirmation for nonbinary and other gender nonconforming people. This was largely the case throughout Scandinavia, where inclusive Swedish and Norwegian personal pronouns were accepted by their respective language academies or councils. Yet there are perhaps more examples of the rejection of gender-inclusive language by institutions of prescriptive language. For instance, the *Real Academia Española* [RAE] 'Royal Spanish Academy' has continually refused to accept any innovative form of gender-inclusive Spanish (and, in fact, many feminist anti-sexist proposals) after more than a decade of petitioning by intersex, nonbinary, and other queer and trans Spanish speakers around the world, claiming that they are unnecessary and that masculine and feminine forms are capable of representing all human subjects (RAE, 2020). Here, the guise behind the RAE's rejections is the concept of linguistic economy. Prior to the year 2025, the *Académie Française* [AF] 'French Academy' spewed perhaps the most vitriol toward gender-inclusive language that had been observed prior by any institution of prescriptive language, calling gender-inclusive French forms "aberrations" and "true barbarisms," and by signaling that they place the French language in "mortal danger" (AF, 2014; 2017). Here, their logic is supposedly related to aesthetics, as well as to the concepts of linguistic and cultural purity. But no institution of prescriptive language has done what the Real Academia Española and the Académie Française have tried to disguise: to explicitly preface an assault on language with an attack on all kinds of gender nonconforming people. This move was accomplished on the first day of the 47th presidential administration of the United States by the signing of Executive Order 14168. It reads:

It is the policy of the United States to recognize two sexes, male and female. These sexes are not changeable and are grounded in fundamental and incontrovertible reality. Under my direction, the Executive Branch will enforce all sex-protective laws to promote this reality, and the following definitions shall govern all Executive interpretation of and application of Federal law and administration policy:

- (a) "Sex" shall refer to an individual's immutable biological classification as either male or female. "Sex" is not a synonym for and does not include the concept of "gender identity."
- (b) "Women" or "woman" and "girls" or "girl" shall mean adult and juvenile human females, respectively.
- (c) "Men" or "man" and "boys" or "boy" shall mean adult and juvenile human males, respectively.
- (d) "Female" means a person belonging, at conception, to the sex that produces the large reproductive cell.
- (e) "Male" means a person belonging, at conception, to the sex that produces the small reproductive cell.
- (f) "Gender ideology" replaces the biological category of sex with an ever-shifting concept of self-assessed gender identity, permitting the false claim that males can identify as and thus become women and vice versa, and requiring all institutions of society to regard this false claim as true. Gender ideology includes the idea that there is a vast spectrum of genders that are disconnected from one's sex. Gender ideology is internally inconsistent, in that it diminishes sex as an identifiable or useful category but nevertheless maintains that it is possible for a person to be born in the wrong sexed body.
- (g) "Gender identity" reflects a fully internal and subjective sense of self, disconnected from biological reality and sex and existing on an infinite continuum, that does not provide a meaningful basis for identification and cannot be recognized as a replacement for sex.

In this way, the multiple executive orders related to language that followed this initial pronouncement were explicitly prefaced by a call to eradicate gender diversity in society

and the concept of human or social gender more generally. Yet while institutions of prescriptive language, like the United States government, have the power to enact widespread societal acceptance and the proliferation of various forms of language, they demonstrably do *not* have the power to override various laws of nature, such as the nonbinary empirical realities of “biological sex” and gender, or language change in progress. Despite the highest possible level of institutional assailment, gender-inclusive forms will continue to gain popularity because they are necessary for queer and trans people to live and thrive. Despite the highest possible degree of marginalization and stigmatization, queer and trans people will never stop existing nor finding new forms of resistance to fascism and other kinds of conservative ideological attacks that threaten their existence. And despite the extreme levels of ignorance that currently occupy the United States government, no law or ideology could stop the publication of the empirical knowledge contained in this dissertation, enshrining and defending the concept of gender-inclusive language with dedication to intersex, nonbinary, trans, gender nonconforming, and other types of queer and genderqueer people in countries around the world.

References

- Abbou, J. (2023). Inclusive writing: Tracing the transnational history of a French controversy. *Gender and Language*, 17(2), 1-12.
- Académie Française [AF]. (2014). *La féminisation des noms de métiers, fonctions, grades ou titres—Mise au point de l'Académie française*. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/la-feminisation-des-noms-de-metiers-fonctions-grades-ou-titres-mise-au-point-de-lacademie>
- Académie Française [AF]. (2017). *Déclaration de l'Académie française sur l'écriture dite "inclusive"*. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/declaration-de-lacademie-francaise-sur-lecriture-dite-inclusive>
- Adolarkey Lomotey, B. (2011). On sexism in language and language change—the case of Peninsular Spanish. *Linguistik Online* 70(1), 167-183.
- Aikhenvald, A. Y. (1994). Classifiers in Tariana. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 36(4), 407-465.
- Aikhenvald, A. Y. (2000). *Classifiers: A typology of noun categorization devices*. Oxford University Press.
- Aikhenvald, A. Y. (2007). Classifiers in multiple environments: Baniwa of Içana/Kurripako—A North Arawak perspective. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 73(4), 474-500. <https://doi.org/10.1086/523774>
- Aikhenvald, A. Y. (2016). *How gender shapes the world*. Oxford University Press.
- Aksenov, A. T. (1984). K probleme èkstralingvističeskoj motivacii grammatičeskoj kategorii roda [On the extralinguistic motivation of the grammatical category of gender]. *Voprosy Jazykoznanija*, 1, 14-25.
- Allasonnière-Tang, M., Lundgren, O., Robbers, M., Cronhamn, S., Larsson, F., Her, O., Hammarström, H., & Carling, G. (2021). Expansion by migration and diffusion by contact is a source to the global diversity of linguistic nominal categorization systems. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 8(1), 1-6.

Allen, P. G. (1986). *The sacred hoop: Recovering the feminine in American Indian traditions*. Beacon Press.

Almasi, O., Fallon, M. D., & Wared, N. P. (2014). *Swahili grammar for introductory and intermediate levels*. University Press of America.

American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU]. (2024, Dec. 30). *Florida judge allows state prison officials to withhold medical care for transgender incarcerated people*. <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/florida-judge-allows-state-prison-officials-to-withhold-medical-care-for-transgender-incarcerated-people>

American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU]. (2025). *The first 100 days*. <https://www.aclu.org/the-first-100-days>

American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU]. (2025, April 30). *ACLU asks court to expand temporary relief to all trans, intersex, and nonbinary people seeking passports*. <https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/aclu-asks-court-to-expand-temporary-relief-to-all-trans-intersex-and-nonbinary-people-seeking-passports>

Aristotle. (2020). *Art of rhetoric* (J. H. Freese, Ed.; G. Striker, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published c. 4th century BCE)

Aronoff, M., Meir, I., Padden, C., & Sandler, W. (2005). Morphological universals and the sign language type. In G. Booij & J. van Marle (Eds.), *Yearbook of morphology 2004* (p. 19-39). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-2900-4_2

Aronoff, M., Meir, I., & Sandler, W. (2005). The paradox of sign language morphology. *Language*, 81(2), 301-344. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/lan.2005.0043>

Associated Press [AP]. (2024). Milei prohíbe el uso del lenguaje inclusivo en la administración pública. <https://apnews.com/world-news/general-news-c59668d209a0a500d25c35927b559ff6>

Attaviriyanupap, K. (2015). The linguistic representation of gender in Thai. In M. Hellinger & H. Motschenbacher (Eds.), *Gender Across Languages: Vol. 4* (pp. 369-399). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.36.14att>

Audring, J. (2008). Gender assignment and gender agreement: Evidence from pronominal gender languages. *Morphology*, 18, 93-116. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11525-009-9124-y>

Baron, D. (1986). *Grammar and gender*. Yale University Press.

Benesch, M. (in press). /s/tylizing the /s/elf: The concurrent fluidity of gender and language. In S. Burnett & F. Vigo (Eds.), *Battlefield Linguistics*. de Gruyter.

Bengoechea, M. (2008). Lo femenino en la lengua: sociedad, cambio y resistencia normativa. Estado de la cuestión. *Lenguaje y Textos*, 27, 37-68.

Ben-Ghiat, R. (2024, Feb. 28). What happens to language when authoritarianism takes hold. *Substack*. <https://lucid.substack.com/p/what-happens-to-language-when-authoritarianism>

Blackless, M., Charuvastra, A., Derryck, A., Fausto-Sterling, A., Lauzanne, K., & Lee, E. (2000). How sexually dimorphic are we? Review and synthesis. *American Journal of Human Biology*, 12(2), 151-166. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6300\(200003/04\)12:2<151::AID-AJHB1>3.0.CO;2-F](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6300(200003/04)12:2<151::AID-AJHB1>3.0.CO;2-F)

Blazado, C. & Papadopoulos, B. (2025). Tagalog. *Gender in Language Project*. www.genderinlanguage.com/tagalog

Bodine, A. (1975). Androcentrism in prescriptive grammar: singular 'they', sex-indefinite 'he', and 'he or she'. *Language in Society*, 4(2), 129-146.

Boltz, W. G. (1996). Early Chinese writing. In P. T. Daniels & W. Bright (Eds.), *The world's writing systems* (pp. 191-199). Oxford University Press.

- Bonazzi, M. (2024). Protagoras. In E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2024/entries/protagoras/>
- Bornstein, K. (1997). *My gender workbook*. Routledge.
- Bornstein, K. (2013). *My new gender workbook*. Routledge.
- Boroditsky, L., Schmidt, L., & Phillips, W. (2003). Sex, syntax, and semantics. In Gentner & Goldin-Meadow (Eds.), *Language in Mind: Advances in the Study of Language and Cognition* (pp. 61-79). MIT Press.
- Boschetto, L. (2015). Italiano inclusivo: Una lingua che non discrimina per genere. <https://italianoinclusivo.it/>
- Brown, D. (2010). Morphological typology. In J. J. Song (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Typology* (pp. 487-503). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199281251.013.0023>
- Bucholtz, M. (2003). Theories of discourse as theories of gender: Discourse analysis in language and gender studies. In J. Holmes & M. Meyerhoff (Eds.), *The Handbook of Language and Gender* (pp. 43-69). Blackwell Publishing.
- Burman, A. (2011). Chachawarmi: Silence and rival voices on decolonisation and gender politics in Andean Bolivia. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 43(1), 65–91. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X10001793>
- Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519–531. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble*. Routledge.
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Bybee, J. L. (1985). *Morphology: A study of the relation between meaning and form*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/tsl.9>

Carrasco Gutiérrez, A. M., & Gavilán Vega, V. T. (2014). Género y etnicidad: Ser hombre y ser mujer entre los aymara del altiplano chileno. *Diálogo Andino*, 45, 169–180. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0719-26812014000300014>

Catalogue of Endangered Languages. (2025). *Endangered Languages Project*. <http://www.endangeredlanguages.com>

Cavallo, A., Lugli, L., & Prearo, M. (Eds.). (2021). *Questioni di un certo genere: Identità sessuali, i diritti, le parole da usare: una guida per saperne di più e parlarne meglio*. Iperborea.

Chamoreau, C. (2012). Spanish diminutive markers -ito/-ita in Mesoamerican languages. *Morphologies in Contact*, Akademie-Verlag, 71-91.

Chin, N. B., & Burrige, K. (1993). The female radical: Portrayal of women in the Chinese script. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics. Series S*, 10, 54–85. <https://doi.org/10.1075/aralss.10.04chi>

Clarke, J. A. (2022). Sex assigned at birth. *Columbia Law Review*, 122(7). <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4032865>

Clendenning-Jiménez, S., & Kiriko Robinson, Z. (2025). *Grammar of gender in Portuguese*. Gender in Language Project. www.genderinlanguage.com/portuguese/grammar

Colleluori, K. (2025). Irish. In B. Papadopoulos (Ed.), *Gender in Language Project*. <https://www.genderinlanguage.com/irish>

Conrod, K. (2019). Pronouns raising and emerging [Doctoral dissertation, University of Washington].

Conrod, K. (2020). Pronouns and gender in language. In K. Hall & R. Barrett, *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190212926.013.63>

Cooke, J. R. (1989). *Thai sentence particles and other topics*. Dept. of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University.

- Cooper, J. S. (1996). Sumerian and Akkadian. In P. T. Daniels & W. Bright (Eds.), *The world's writing systems* (pp. 37-56). Oxford University Press.
- Corbett, G. G. (1979). The agreement hierarchy. *Journal of Linguistics*, 15(2), 203-224.
- Corbett, G. G. (1991). *Gender*. Cambridge University Press.
- Corbett, G. G. (2013a). Number of genders. In M. S. Dryer & M. Hapselmath (Eds.), *WALS Online*. <http://wals.info/chapter/30>
- Corbett, G. G. (2013b). *Sex-based and non-sex-based gender systems*. In M. S. Dryer & M. Hapselmath (Eds.), *WALS Online*. <http://wals.info/chapter/31>
- Corbett, G. G., & Fedden, S. (2018). New approaches to the typology of gender. In S. Fedden, J. Audring & G. G. Corbett (Eds.), *Non-canonical gender systems* (pp. 9-35). Oxford University Press.
- Corbeill, A. (2015). *Sexing the world: Grammatical gender and biological sex in Ancient Rome*. Princeton University Press.
- Craig, C. G. (1986a). Jacaltec noun classifiers: A study in grammaticalization. *Lingua*, 70, 241-284.
- Craig, C. G. (1986b). Jacaltec noun classifiers: A study in language and culture. In C. G. Craig (Ed.), *Noun classes and categorization* (pp. 263-294). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Craig, C. G. (1992). Classifiers in a functional perspective. In M. Fortescue, P. Harder, & L. Kristoffersen (Eds.), *Layered structure and reference in a functional perspective* (pp. 277-301). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Craig, C. G. (2000). A morphosyntactic typology of classifiers. In G. Senft (Ed.), *Systems of Nominal Classification* (pp. 50-91). Cambridge University Press.
- Craig, C. G. (2004). Noun classes in African and Amazonian languages: Towards a comparison. *Linguistic Typology*, 8(2), 243-285. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lity.2004.007>

- Croft, W. (1994). Semantic universals in classifier systems. *Word*, 45(2), 145-171.
- Cronhamn, S. (2025). *A grammar of Baniwa classifiers* [Doctoral dissertation, Lund University].
- Cumberbatch, K. (2015). Jamaican sign language. In J. B. Jepsen, G. de Clerck, S. Lutalo-Kiingi & W. B. McGregor (Eds.), *Sign languages of the world* (pp. 511-528). Walter de Gruyter.
- Dahl, Ö. (2000). Animacy and the notion of semantic gender. In B. Unterbeck, M. Rissanen, T. Nevalainen & M. Saari (Eds.), *Gender in Grammar and Cognition, Part 1: Approaches to Gender* (pp. 99-116). De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110802603>
- Daniels, P. T. (1996). The study of writing systems. In P. T. Daniels & W. Bright (Eds.), *The world's writing systems* (pp. 3-17). Oxford University Press.
- Day, C. (1967). *The Jacaltec language* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago].
- Day, C. (1973). *The Jacaltec language*. De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110891904>
- Delcourt, M. (1961). *Hermaphrodite. Myths and rites of the bisexual figure in classical antiquity*. Studio Books.
- Denny, J. P., & Creider, C. A. (1986). The semantics of noun classes in Proto-Bantu. In C. Craig (Ed.), *Noun Classes and Categorization* (pp. 217-239). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Dingemans, M. (2006). *The semantics of Bantu noun classification* [Master's thesis, Leiden University]. https://pure.mpg.de/rest/items/item_1005593/component/file_1005592/content
- Dixon, R. M. W. (1982). *Where have all the adjectives gone?* Walter de Gruyter & Co.

- Dixon, R. M. W. (1986). Noun classes and noun classification in typological perspective. In C. G. Craig (Ed.), *Noun Classes and Categorization* (pp. 105-112). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Duarte, J. (2025). *Catalan*. Gender in Language Project. www.genderinlanguage.com/catalan
- Duarte, J., Duran, J., Fliege, C., & Papadopoulos, B. (2025). *Inclusive partial grammar of Spanish*. Gender in Language Project. www.genderinlanguage.com/spanish/grammar
- d'Urso, A. S., & Roman, M. F. (2024). *The x factor: How group labels shape politics*. https://www.marcelroman.com/pdfs/wps/latinx_project.pdf
- Eberhard, D. M., Simons, G. F., & Fennig, C. D. (Eds.). (2025). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. SIL International. <http://www.ethnologue.com>
- Eckert, P. (1989). *Jocks and burnouts: Social categories and identity in the high school*. Teachers College Press.
- Eckert, P. (2008). Variation and the indexical field. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 12(4), 453-476.
- Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024, April 12). Marcus Terentius Varro. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marcus-Terentius-Varro>
- Escobar, A. M. (2012). Spanish in contact with Amerindian languages. In J. I. Hualde, A. Olarrea, & E. O'Rourke (Eds.), *The Handbook of Hispanic Linguistics* (pp. 65-88). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118228098.ch4>
- Ettner, C. (2002). In Chinese, men and woman are equal—or—women and men are equal? In M. Hellinger & H. Bußmann (Eds.), *Gender Across Languages: The Linguistic Representation of Women and Men* (pp. 29-56). John Benjamins.
- Exec. Order No. 14168, 3 C.F.R. 8165-8168 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/30/2025-02090/defending-women-from-gender-ideology-extremism-and-restoring-biological-truth-to-the-federal>

Exec. Order No. 14173, 3 C.F.R. 8633-8636 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/31/2025-02097/ending-illegal-discrimination-and-restoring-merit-based-opportunity>

Exec. Order No. 14183, 3 C.F.R. 8757-8759 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/03/2025-02178/prioritizing-military-excellence-and-readiness>

Exec. Order No. 14187, 3 C.F.R. 8771-8773 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/03/2025-02194/protecting-children-from-chemical-and-surgical-mutilation>

Exec. Order No. 14190, 3 C.F.R. 8853-8857 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/03/2025-02232/ending-radical-indoctrination-in-k-12-schooling>

Exec. Order No. 14201, 3 C.F.R. 9279-9281 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/11/2025-02513/keeping-men-out-of-womens-sports>

Exec. Order No. 14202, 3 C.F.R. 9365-9368 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/12/2025-02611/eradicating-anti-christian-bias>

Exec. Order No. 14224, 3 C.F.R. 11363-11364 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/03/06/2025-03694/designating-english-as-the-official-language-of-the-united-states>

Exec. Order No. 14242, 3 C.F.R. 13679-13680 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/03/25/2025-05213/improving-education-outcomes-by-empowering-parents-states-and-communities>

Exec. Order No. 14253, 3 C.F.R. 14563-14565 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/03/2025-05838/restoring-truth-and-sanity-to-american-history>

Faraclas, N. (1996). *Nigerian Pidgin*. Routledge.

Farris, C. S. (1988). Gender and Grammar in Chinese: With Implications for Language Universals. *Modern China*, 14(3), 277–308. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/189320>

Fausto-Sterling, A. (2020). *Sexing the body* (2nd ed.). Basic Books.

Fischer, S., & Gong, Q. (2010). Variation in East Asian sign language structures. In D. Brentari (Ed.), *Sign Languages* (pp. 499–518). Cambridge University Press.

Fortescue, M. (2016). Polysynthesis: A diachronic and typological perspective. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.152>

Gafter, R. J., & Mor, U. (2023). Prescriptive language ideologies in Modern Hebrew. In J. C. Beal, M. Lukač & R. Straaijer, *The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Prescriptivism* (pp. 304-320). Routledge.

Gallaudet University. (2025). *About Gallaudet University*. <https://gallaudet.edu/about/>

Garber, A. M. (2025, April 21). Upholding our values, defending our university. *Harvard University*. <https://www.harvard.edu/president/news/2025/upholding-our-values-defending-our-university/>

García Meseguer, Á. (1976). Sexismo y lenguaje. *Cambio*, 16, 260.

Gardiner, A. H. (1957). *Egyptian grammar: Being an introduction to the study of hieroglyphs* (3rd ed.). Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.

Gheno, V. (2022). *Femminili singolari: Il femminismo è nelle parole* (2nd ed.). Effequ.

Gil, D. (2013). Numeral classifiers. In M. S. Dryer & M. Hapselmath [Eds.], *WALS Online*. <http://wals.info/chapter/55>

- Gómez, R. (2016). Pequeño manifiesto sobre el género neutro en castellano. <https://linguaultrafinitio.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/pequec3b1o-manifiesto-sobre-el-gc3a9nero-neutro-en-castellano.pdf>
- Goodman N. (2005). There isn't a word for it. *The British Journal of General Practice*, 55(520), 897.
- Greenberg, J. H. (1978). How does a language acquire gender markers? In J. H. Greenberg (Ed.), *Universals of human language, vol. 3: Word structure* (pp. 47-82). Stanford University Press.
- Greenberg, J. A. (1999). Defining male and female: Intersexuality and the collision between law and biology. *Arizona Law Review*, 41, 265-328.
- Gygax P. M., Elmiger D., Zufferey S., Garnham A., Sczesny S., von Stockhausen L., Braun F., & Oakhill, J. (2019). A language index of grammatical gender dimensions to study the impact of grammatical gender on the way we perceive women and men. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10.
- Hara, M. R. (2024). Gender in Chinese characters: A study of words containing woman radical in Chinese characters. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(5), 1-5.
- Hayward, R. J. (2001). Qafar (East Cushitic). In A. Spencer & A. M. Zwicky (Eds.), *The Handbook of Morphology* (pp. 123-143). John Wiley and Sons.
- He, A. W. (2017). Discourse analysis. In M. Aronoff & J. Rees-Miller (Eds.), *The Handbook of Linguistics* (pp. 445-462). John Wiley and Sons.
- Hellinger, M., & Bußmann, H. (Eds.). (2001). *Gender across languages: The linguistic representation of women and men. Volume 1*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Hellinger, M., & Bußmann, H. (Eds.). (2002). *Gender across languages: The linguistic representation of women and men. Volume 2*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Hellinger, M., & Bußmann, H. (Eds.). (2003). *Gender across languages: The linguistic representation of women and men. Volume 3*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Hellinger, M., & Motschenbacher, H. (Eds.). (2015). *Gender across languages: The linguistic representation of women and men. Volume 4*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Her, O., Hammarström, H. & Allasonnière-Tang, M. (2022). Defining numeral classifiers and identifying classifier languages of the world. *Linguistics Vanguard*, 8(1), 151-164. <https://doi.org/10.1515/lingvan-2022-0006>
- Her, O. S., Liang, Y. P., Chan, E., Hsu, H. H., Hsu, A. C., & Allasonnière-Tang, M. (2024). Early humans out of Africa had only base-initial numerals. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02506-z>
- Hiramoto, M. (2010). Utterance final position and projection of femininity in Japanese. *Gender and Language*, 4(1), 99-124. <https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.v4i1.99>
- Hjorth-Nebel Miltersen, E., Clendenning-Jiménez, S., & Papadopoulos, B. (2025). Danish. Gender in Language Project. www.genderinlanguage.com/danish
- Holton, D., Mackridge, P., & Philippaki-Warbuton, I. (2012). *Greek: A comprehensive grammar*. Routledge.
- Holmes, P., & Hinchliffe, I. (2013). *Swedish: A comprehensive grammar*. Routledge.
- Hockett, C. F. (1958). *A course in modern linguistics*. Oxford & IBH Publishing Co.
- Hopkins, N. A. (2012). The noun classifiers of Cuchumatán Mayan languages: A case of diffusion from Otomanguean. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 78(3), 411-427. <https://doi.org/10.1086/665919>
- Huitink, L., & Willi, A. (2021). Protagoras and the beginnings of grammar. *The Cambridge Classical Journal*, 67, 66-92. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S175027052100004X>
- Human Rights Campaign [HRC]. (2025). Why we ask each other our pronouns. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/why-we-ask-each-other-our-pronouns>
- Inoue, M. (2002). Gender, language, and modernity: Toward an effective history of Japanese women's language. *American Ethnologist*, 29(2), 392-422.

- InterACT. (2025). Basics: What is intersex? *InterACT: Advocates for Intersex Youth*. <https://interactadvocates.org/faq/>
- Irigaray, L. (1985a). *The sex which is not one*. Cornell University Press.
- Irigaray, L. (1985b). *Speculum of the other woman*. Cornell University Press.
- Irigaray, L. (1993). *An ethics of sexual difference*. Cornell University Press.
- Irvine, J. T. (1995). The family romance of colonial linguistics: Gender and family in nineteenth-century representations of African languages. *Pragmatics*, 5(2), 139-153.
- Iwasaki, S. & Ingkaphirom, P. (2005). *A reference grammar of Thai*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jacobsen, K., Davis, C. E., Burchell, D., Rutherford, L., Lachowsky, N., Bauer, G., & Scheim, A. (2023). Misgendering and the health and wellbeing of nonbinary people in Canada. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 25(4), 816-830. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2023.2278064>
- Jowett, G. S., & O'Donnell, V. (2015). *Propaganda and persuasion* (6th ed.). SAGE.
- Jurczyk, R. (2017). The loss of grammatical gender and case features between Old and Early Middle English: Its impact on simple demonstratives and topic shift. *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia*, 52(2), 203-250. <https://doi.org/10.1515/stap-2017-0008>
- Kaplan, J. M. (2022). Pluri-grammars for pluri-genders: Competing gender systems in the nominal morphology of non-binary French. *Languages*, 7(4), 266-300. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages7040266>
- Kaplan, J. & Papadopoulos, B. (2023, Jul. 4). *Cross-Romance typologies of gender neutrality and gender expansiveness* [Conference session]. 12th International Gender and Language Association Conference, Held virtually.

- Kawasaki, K., & McDougall, K. (2003). Implications of Representations of Casual Conversation: A Case Study in Gender-Associated Sentence Final Particles. 国際交流基金日本語国際センター, 41-55. <https://doi.org/10.20649/00000332>
- Kessler, S. J., & McKenna, W. (1978). *Gender: An ethnomethodological approach*. University of Chicago Press.
- Kilarski, M. (2013). *Nominal classification: A history of its study from the classical period to the present*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sihols.121>
- Kilarski, M., & Allasonnière-Tang, M. (2021). Classifiers in morphology. *Oxford research encyclopedia of linguistics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.546>
- Kiriko Robinson, Z. (2025). [Personal communication].
- Kiriko Robinson, Z., Bedin, C., & Papadopoulos, B. (2025). English neopronouns. *Gender in Language Project*. www.genderinlanguage.com/english/neopronouns
- Kodonas, P. (2014, May 12). Eurovision 2024: Ποιο είναι το Nemo που κατέκτησε τη Ευρώπη. *News 27/7*. <https://www.news247.gr/>
- Kraaikamp, M. (2012). The semantics of the Dutch gender system. *Journal of Germanic Linguistics*, 24(3), 193-232.
- Kramer, R. (2015). *The morphosyntax of gender*. Oxford University Press.
- Kramer, R. (2020). Grammatical gender: A close look at gender assignment across languages. *Annual Review of Linguistics*, 6(1), 45-66.
- Kulick, D. (2000). Gay and lesbian language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29, 243-285.
- Kurinski, E. & Sera, M. D. (2011). Does learning Spanish grammatical gender change English-speaking adults' categorization of inanimate objects? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 14, 203-220.

- Labov, W. (1966). *The social stratification of English in New York City*. Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Labov, W. (2001). *Principles of linguistic change. Volume 2: Social factors*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Lakoff, R. (1973). Language and woman's place. *Language in Society*, 2(1), 45-79.
- Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and woman's place*. Harper & Row.
- Lambda Legal. (2025). Identity document guidance for transgender, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming, and intersex people. <https://lambdalegal.org/tgnc-checklist-under-trump/>
- Langer, S. J. (2011). Gender (dis)agreement: A dialogue on the clinical implications of gendered language. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 15(3), 300-307. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2011.581194>
- Layme Pairumani, F. (2016). La cultura aymara en la Universidad Católica Boliviana. *Ciencia y Cultura*, 37, 205-226.
- Leslau, W. (2000). *Introductory grammar of Amharic*. Harrassowitz Verlag.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1971). *The elementary structures of kinship*. Penguin Random House.
- Li, L. (2019). Dictionaries, corpora and archaic words: The change of Chinese characters with the woman radical. In M. Gürlek, A. N. Çiçekler, & Y. Taşdemir (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 13th International Conference of the Asian Association for Lexicography* (pp. 393-405). Asos.
- Lois, X. (1998). Gender markers as "rigid determiners" of the Itzaj Maya world. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 64(3), 224-282.
- Lopez, J. [@jlo]. (2020, August 22). "Brendon is my nibling and this is their story" [Video]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CENEADXpCao/?hl=en>
- López, Á. (2019) Tú, yo, elle y el lenguaje no binario. *La Linterna del Traductor*, 19, 142-150.

- Lugones, M. (2007). Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern gender system. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 22(1), 186–219.
- Lugones, M. (2008). The coloniality of gender. *Tabula Rasa*, 9, 73–102.
- Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 25(4), 742-759.
- Lugones, M. (2020). Gender and universality in colonial methodology. *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 8(1-2), 25–47. <https://doi.org/10.5325/critphilrace.8.1-2.0025>
- Luraghi, S. (2009). The origin of the feminine gender in PIE. In V. Bubenik, J. Hewson & S. Rose (Eds.), *Grammatical change in Indo-European languages: Papers presented at the workshop on Indo-European linguistics at the 18th international conference on historical linguistics, Montreal* (pp. 3-13). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Luraghi, S. (2011). The origin of the Proto-Indo-European gender system: Typological considerations. *Folia Linguistica*, 45(2), 435-464.
- Macri, M. J. (1996). Maya and other Mesoamerican scripts. In P. T. Daniels & W. Bright (Eds.), *The world's writing systems* (pp. 172-182). Oxford University Press.
- Mair, V. M. (1996). Modern Chinese writing. In P. T. Daniels & W. Bright (Eds.), *The world's writing systems* (pp. 200-204). Oxford University Press.
- Malone, J. L. (1985). On the feminine pronominalization of Irish and English boat nouns. *General Linguistics*, 25(3), 189-198.
- Mandavilli, A., & Rabin, R. C. (2025, February 3). C.D.C. site restores some purged files after 'gender ideology' ban outcry. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/03/health/trump-gender-ideology-research.html>
- Marten, L. (2013). Structure and interpretation in Swahili existential constructions. *Italian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(1), 45-73.

Martins, S. A. (1994). *Análise da morfossintaxe da língua Dâw (Maku-Kamã) e sua classificação tipológica* [Master's thesis, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina].

Mayo Clinic. (2025). *Gender dysphoria*. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/gender-dysphoria/symptoms-causes/syc-20475255>

McConnell-Ginet, S. (2013). Language and gender. In P. Eckert & S. McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender* [2nd. ed.] (pp. 75-99). Cambridge University Press.

Medrano Valdez, Y. (2019). Chacha-warmi. In B. de S. Santos & M. P. Meneses (Eds.), *Knowledges Born in the Struggle* (pp. 96–113). Routledge.

Merlan, F., Roberts, S. P., & Rumsey, A. (1997). New Guinea 'classificatory verbs' and Australian noun classification: A typological comparison. In M. Harvey & N. Reid (Eds.), *Nominal classification in Aboriginal Australia* (pp. 63-104). John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Merriam-Webster. (2025a). Words we're watching: 'Nibling'. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/wordplay/words-were-watching-nibling>

Merriam-Webster. (2025b). "Mx." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/MX#citations>

Merriam-Webster. (2025c). "They." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/they>.

Mignolo, W. (1995). *The darker side of the renaissance: Literacy, territoriality, and colonization*. University of Michigan Press.

Miller, C., & Swift, K. (1980). *The handbook of nonsexist writing*. Harper & Row.

Miller, J. (2022). Thirty years of queer theory. In D. P. Amory, S. G. Massey, J. Miller, & A. P. Brown (Eds.), *Introduction to LGBTQ+ Studies* (pp. 20-49). SUNY Press.

- Minervini, A., Brooks-Kistler, C., Ikpeamaron, C., & Hawley, E. [ndini]. (2022, July 19). Beyond gender binaries in Italian language [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQkNtHEjYF8&ab_channel=ndini
- Mitchell, W. (2003). Aymara. In C. R. Ember & M. Ember (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender* (pp. 274–282). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-29907-6_27
- Moges, R. T. (2015). Eritrean sign language. In J. B. Jepsen, G. de Clerck, S. Lutalo-Kiingi & W. B. McGregor (Eds.), *Sign languages of the world* (pp. 235-252). Walter de Gruyter.
- Money, J., & Ehrhardt, A. A. (1972). *Man and woman, boy and girl: Differentiation and dimorphism of gender identity from conception to maturity*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Montgomery, J. (1951). *Dictionary of Maya hieroglyphs*. Hippocrene Books.
- Morita, E. (2018). Sentence-final particles. In Y. Hasegawa (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Japanese Linguistics* (pp. 587-607). Cambridge University Press.
- Motschenbacher, H. (2016). A discursive approach to structural gender linguistics: theoretical and methodological considerations. *Gender and Language*, 10(2), 149-169.
- Müller-Spitzer, C. (2022). Zumutung, herausforderung, notwendigkeit? Zum Stand der Forschung zu geschlechtergerechter Sprache. *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 5-7(72), 1-12.
- Munson, B. (2007). The acoustic correlates of perceived masculinity, perceived femininity, and perceived sexual orientation. *Language and Speech*, 50(1), 125-142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00238309070500010601>
- Myers-Scotton, C., & Jake, J. (2000). Four types of morpheme: evidence from aphasia, code switching, and second-language acquisition. *Linguistics*, 38(6), 1053-1100. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ling.2000.021>
- Naughton, J., & von Kunes, K. (2021). *Czech: An essential grammar*. Routledge.

- Nonbinary Hebrew Project. (2025). Grammar. <https://nonbinary-hebrew-project.netlify.app/grammar/nouns>
- Oddo, J. (2023). Propaganda and rhetoric. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. <https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-1384>
- Oficina de Educación Iberoamericana. (1972). *Hispanismos en el tagalo*. Madrid: Imnasa.
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. [OHCHR]. (2019). *Background note on human rights violations against intersex people*. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Discrimination/LGBT/BackgroundNoteHumanRightsViolationsagainstIntersexPeople.pdf>
- Okamoto, S. (2018). Language, Gender, and Sexuality. In Y. Hasegawa (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Japanese Linguistics* (pp. 678–697). Cambridge University Press.
- Okamoto, S. (1995). "Tasteless" Japanese: Less feminine speech among young Japanese women. In K. Hall & M. Bucholtz (Eds.), *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self* (pp. 297–325). Routledge.
- Okamoto, S. & Sato, S. (1992). Less feminine speech among young Japanese women. In K. Hall, M. Bucholtz & B. Moonwomon (Eds.), *Locating Power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference* (pp. 478–488). Berkeley Women and Language Group. 478–488.
- Olsson, B. (2018). The coastal Marind language [Doctoral dissertation, Nanyang Technological University]. <https://doi.org/10.32657/10356/73235>
- Oyěwùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Papadopoulos, B. (2022). A brief history of gender-inclusive Spanish/Una breve historia del español no binario. *Deportate, esuli, profughe*, 48(1), 31–48.

- Papadopoulos, B. (2024). Identifying gender in gendered languages: The case of Spanish. In K. A. Knisley & E. L. Russell (Eds.), *Redoing Linguistic Worlds: Unmaking Gender Binaries, Remaking Gender Pluralities* (pp. 196-217). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/KNISEL5096>
- Papadopoulos, B., Bedin, C., Clendenning-Jiménez, S., & Kiriko Robinson, Z. (2025a). *English*. Gender in Language Project. www.genderinlanguage.com/english
- Papadopoulos, B., Cintrón, S., Hartman, C., & Rusignuolo, D. (2025b). *Italian*. Gender in Language Project. www.genderinlanguage.com/italian/
- Parpola, S. (1997). *The standard Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh*. Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, University of Helsinki.
- Penny, R. (2002). *A history of the Spanish language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Pfau, R., & Steinbach, M. (2023). Morphology in sign languages: Theoretical issues and typological contrasts. In P. Ackema, S. Bendjaballah, E. Bonet, & A. Fábregas (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell companion to morphology* (pp. 1-37). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119693604.morphcom048>
- Pino, M., & Edmonds, D. M. (2024). Misgendering, cisgenderism and the reproduction of the gender order in social interaction. *Sociology*, 58(6), 1243-1262. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385241237194>
- Po-Ching, Y., & Rimmington, D. (2021). *Chinese: An essential grammar* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Pugh, S. M., & Press, I. (1999). *Ukrainian: A comprehensive grammar*. Routledge.
- Real Academia Española [RAE]. (2020). *Informe de la Real Academia Española sobre el lenguaje inclusivo y cuestiones conexas*. https://www.rae.es/sites/default/files/Informe_lenguaje_inclusivo.pdf
- Rehg, K. L. (1981). *Ponapean reference grammar*. University of Hawaii Press.

- Riedel, S. (2022, February 3). Norway is adding a gender-neutral pronoun to the dictionary. *Them*. <https://www.them.us/story/norway-gender-neutral-pronoun-hen-dictionary>
- Ritner, R. K. (1996). Egyptian writing. In P. T. Daniels & W. Bright (Eds.), *The world's writing systems* (pp. 73-83). Oxford University Press.
- Rivera Cusicanqui, S. (2004). La noción de derecho o las paradojas de la modernidad postcolonial: indígenas y mujeres en Bolivia. *Temas Sociales*, 19, 27-52.
- Robustelli, C. (2000). Lingua e identità di genere: Problemi attuali nell'italiano. *Studi italiani di linguistica teorica e applicata*, 29, 507-527.
- Royer, J. (2019). Domain restriction and noun classifiers in Chuj (Mayan). In M. Baird & J. Pesetsky (Eds.), *NELS 49: Proceedings of the Forty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the North East Linguistic Society*, 3, 87-97.
- Ruby, E. (2025, April 15). 'Andy, that's not true': North Texas Republican goes viral for 'intersex' confusion. *The Dallas Observer*. <https://www.dallasobserver.com/news/denton-state-rep-admits-to-not-knowing-what-intersex-means-22115827>
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- Sandalo, F., & Michelioudakis, D. (2016). Classifiers and plurality: Evidence from a deictic classifier language. *Baltic International Yearbook of Cognition, Logic and Communication*, 11, 1-40. <https://doi.org/10.4148/1944-3676.1112>
- Sapountzaki, G. (2015). Greek sign language. In J. B. Jepsen, G. de Clerck, S. Lutalo-Kiingi & W. B. McGregor (Eds.), *Sign languages of the world* (pp. 317-334). Walter de Gruyter.
- Schachter, P., & Otones, F. T. (1972). *Tagalog reference grammar*. University of California Press.
- Schmaling, C. H. (2015). Hausa sign language. In J. B. Jepsen, G. de Clerck, S. Lutalo-Kiingi & W. B. McGregor (Eds.), *Sign languages of the world* (pp. 361-390). Walter de Gruyter.
- Seifart, F. (2018). Bora. *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 84(S1), S69–S94.

- Seiler, W. (1985). *Imonda, a Papuan language*. Australian National University.
- Sendén, M. G., Bäck, E. A., & Lindqvist, A. (2015). Introducing a gender-neutral pronoun in a natural gender language: The influence of time on attitudes and behavior. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00893>
- Sevilla Requena, L. (2024). "She'll never be a man": A corpus-based forensic linguistic analysis of misgendering discrimination on X. *Languages*, 9(9), <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages9090291>
- Shibamoto Smith, J. S. (1996). Japanese writing. In P. T. Daniels & W. Bright (Eds.), *The world's writing systems* (pp. 209-217). Oxford University Press.
- Shomer, M. (n.d.). Multi-gender Hebrew. <https://www.multigenderhebrew.com>
- Siengyen, C. (2025). [Personal communication].
- Silverstein, M. (2003). Indexical order and the dialectics of sociolinguistic life. *Language & Communication*, 23(3-4), 193-229.
- Simpson, A. P. (2009). Phonetic differences between male and female speech. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 3(2), 621-640. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-818X.2009.00125.x>
- Smyth, D. (2014). *Thai: An essential grammar* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Spencer, A. (2001). Morphophonological operations. In A. Spencer & A. M. Zwicky (Eds.), *The Handbook of Morphology* (pp. 123-143). John Wiley and Sons.
- Spencer, A. (2016). In A. Hippisley & G. Stump (Eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Morphology* (pp. 27-49). Cambridge University Press.
- Spender, D. (1980). *Man made language*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Stanley, E. A. (2014). Gender self-determination. *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1(1-2), 89-91.

- Steenhuysen, J., & Hesson, T. (2025, January 31). US health agencies scrub HIV, other data to remove 'gender ideology'. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-health-agencies-scrub-hiv-other-data-remove-gender-ideology-2025-02-01/>
- Stokoe, W. C. (2005). Sign language structure: An outline of the visual communication systems of the American deaf. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 10(1), 3-37. <https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/eni001> (Original work published 1960)
- Stolz, T., Bakker, D., & Salas Palomo, R. (Eds.). (2008). *Aspects of language contact: New theoretical, methodological and empirical findings with special focus on Romancisation processes*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Stump, G. T. (2001). Inflection. In A. Spencer & A. M. Zwicky (Eds.), *The Handbook of Morphology* (pp. 13-43). John Wiley and Sons.
- Sutton-Spence, R., & Woll, B. (1999). *The linguistics of British Sign Language: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tang, C., Yi, I. & Bedin, C. (2025). *Mandarin Chinese*. Gender in Language Project. www.genderinlanguage.com/mandarin
- Thiesen, W., & Weber, D. (2012). *A grammar of Bora with special attention to tone*. SIL International.
- Valli, C. (Ed). (2005). *The Gallaudet University dictionary of American sign language* (P. S. Lott, D. Renner & R. Hills, Illus.). Gallaudet University Press.
- van Goethem, K. (2020). Affixation in morphology. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.013.678>
- Varro, M. T. (1938). *On the Latin language, volume ii: Books 8-10 and fragments* (R. G. Kent, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published ca. 1st century BCE)
- Vicars, W. (n.d.). *American Sign Language: The gender morpheme*. ASL University. <https://www.lifepprint.com/asl101/topics/gender-morpheme.htm>

- Wang, Y. (2023). Unconventional Usage of Gender-Based Japanese Sentence-Final Particles: A Study of *wa* and *no* in Youth Conversations. *Languages*, 8(3), 222. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8030222>
- Winterstein, G., Lai, R., & Luk, Z. P. (2024). Softness, assertiveness and their expression via Cantonese sentence-final particles. In E. McCready & H. Nomoto (Eds.), *Discourse Particles in Asian Languages*, Vol. 1 (pp. 143-170). Routledge.
- Wittig, M. (1985). The mark of gender. *Feminist Issues*, 5, 3-12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02685575>
- Yang, J. H., & Fischer, S. (2002). Expressing negation in Chinese Sign Language. *Sign Language & Linguistics*, 5(2), 167–202. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sll.5.2.05yan>
- Yoshida, M., & Nakamura, Y. (1999). *Kodansha's Furigana Japanese dictionary*. Kodansha International.
- Zhu, Z. [@zzdesign]. (2021, June 29). "Say hello to the FIRST NON-BINARY They/Them Pronoun in Mandarin. I created this for the Nonbinary Chinese speaking people..." [Two images]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQt6kFDr05d/>
- Zimman, L. (2017). Gender as stylistic bricolage: Transmasculine voices and the relationship between fundamental frequency and /s/. *Language in Society*, 46(3), 339-370.
- Zwicky, A. M. (1985). Clitics and particles. *Language*, 61(2), 283–305. <https://doi.org/10.2307/414146>