An Introduction to Grammatical Gender
Road Map

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

- A morphological specification of a given noun
- Expressed in verbal or nominal (concord)
- Can be linked to polyexponentence
- Not to be confused with “noun classifiers”
What is Grammatical Gender

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

  A boy writes a letter to his father.

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

  A girl gives an invoice to her friend.
What is Grammatical Gender

Feminine Semantic; Feminine Formal

Feminine Semantic; Neuter: Formal

- Die Müllerstochter war ein schönes und frommes Mädchen und lebte die drei Jahre in Gottesfurcht und ohne Sünde. Als nun die Zeit herum war, und der Tag kam, wo sie der Böse holen wollte, da wusch sie sich rein und machte mit Kreide einen Kranz um sich.

-Das Mädchen ohne Hände (The Girl Without Hands)

- The miller's daughter was a beautiful and pious little girl and lived the three years in piety and without sin. When the time drew near, and the day came, when the evil one wanted to take her, she washed herself and made a circle with chalk around herself.
What is Grammatical Gender

Feminine Semantic; Feminine Formal

Feminine Semantic; Neuter: Formal

- Bald darauf bekam sie ein Töchterlein, das war so weiß wie Schnee, so rot wie Blut, und so schwarzhaarig wie Ebenholz, und ward darum das Schneewittchen (Schneeweßchen) genannt. Und wie das Kind geboren war, starb die Königin.

-Schneewittchen (Snow White)

- Soon thereafter she had a little daughter, who was so white as snow, so red as blood, and so black-haired as ebony, and therefore was named the little Snow White. And as the child was born, the queen died.
Shona

- Belongs to the Niger-Kordofanian family
  - Niger-Congo → Bantu
- Shona: Southern Zone (S10)
  - Spoken in Zimbabwe by ~10,749,200 speakers
<table>
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<th>Noun</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Class Prefix</th>
<th>Subject Marker</th>
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What is Grammatical Gender

- Shona (Fortune 1957)

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

*The trees will grow and bear fruit.*

- Class 3
- Class 4
- Class 15
Typology of Grammatical Gender

- Rare cross-linguistically

- According to Nichols (2008) four major language families have grammatical gender
  - Indo-European (Indic, Iranian, Slavic, Germanic)
  - Niger-Kordofanian (Atlantic, Bantu)
  - Afro-Asiatic (Semitic, Chadic, Cushitic)
  - Nahk-Dagastani (Dagastani)

- Other language areas include Australia and the Americas
Typology of Grammatical Gender

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

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

Using WALS, we can try to understand how these three interact pairwise.
Does the Number of Genders Predict Gender Type?
Typology of Grammatical Gender

Distribution of Gender Categories by Number of Genders

- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five+

Roslyn Burns
March 21, 2012
Typology of Grammatical Gender

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

Issues:

- Potential family bias from Niger-Kordofanian

WALS Gender Number and Gender System
Does the Number of Genders Predict Assignment Type?
Typology of Grammatical Gender

Distribution of Gender Assignment by Number of Genders

- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five+
Typology of Grammatical Gender

- Strong correlation between values and the cells they fall in (Fisher p = 7.307e-05)

- Two: 43% of data fall into this category and is a near even split. If you remove Two, then...

- Three-Four: 45% of the data is semantic assignment

- Five+: 32% of the data is mixed assignment.

WALS Gender Number and Assignment Type
Does Gender Type Predict Assignment Type?
Typology of Grammatical Gender

Distribution of Gender Categories by Assignment System

- Sex
- Non-Sex

Semantic

Semantic Formal
Typology of Grammatical Gender

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

Issues:

- Niger-Kordofanian, Nahk-Dagastani, Indo-European, and Afro Asiatic show mixed systems
- Americas and Australia show semantic system
Why Grammatical Gender?

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


References

- Grimm, Jacob and Willhelm Grimm. Das Mädchen Ohne Hände. Die Vollständige Ausgabe der Bruder Grimm Märchen
- Grimm, Jacob and Willhelm Grimm. Schneewittchen. Die Vollständige Ausgabe der Bruder Grimm Märchen