

Endearment, respect, and disdain through linguistic gender

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ENDEARMENT, RESPECT, AND DISDAIN THROUGH LINGUISTIC GENDER

Carinho, respeito e desprezo por meio do gênero linguístico

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ABSTRACT: Linguistic genders are usually assigned to nominal referents on the basis of such core semantic properties as sex (or natural gender), animacy, humanness, in addition to shape, form and size. In a number of languages, linguistic genders have affective values. Reversing genders – from feminine to masculine or from masculine to feminine – often reflects speaker's attitudes towards the entity, including endearment, respect, and disdain. The paper focuses on semantic effects of gender reversals, and the ways in which the choice of linguistic gender and gender switches may correlate with the implications of social gender as a cultural construct.

KEYWORDS: linguistic gender; social gender; gender reversal.

RESUMO: Gêneros linguísticos são normalmente atribuídos aos referentes com base em propriedades semânticas básicas como sexo (ou gênero natural), animacidade e traço humano, além de forma e tamanho. Em um conjunto de línguas, os gêneros linguísticos têm valores afetivos. A reversão de gêneros – do feminino para o masculino e do masculino para o feminino – muitas vezes reflete as atitudes do falante em relação a um referente. Estas atitudes podem ser de carinho, respeito e desprezo. O artigo foca nos efeitos semânticos da reversão de gêneros e nos modos pelos quais a escolha de um gênero linguístico e a mudança de gêneros pode se correlacionar com as implicações de gênero social, visto como um construto social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: gênero linguístico; gênero social; gênero reverso.

PREAMBLE: VERSATILE GENDER

Linguistic genders are grammatical classes of nouns based on core semantic properties such as sex (female and male), animacy, humanness, and also shape, form, and size. Not infrequently, the meanings of linguistic gender reflect speaker's attitude towards the entity, its value and importance – endearment, respect, and disdain (see Aikhenvald 2016, 2018, forthcoming, and references there). Attitudinal and evaluative meanings of genders are particularly salient when genders are reversed – the feminine gender form referring to a man, and the masculine form referring a

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woman. This paper focuses on the effects of gender reversals in small gender systems across the world, with two terms (feminine and masculine) or three terms (feminine, masculine, and neuter) (see Aikhenvald 2000: 340-50; 2018: 107-8 on systems of other kinds, based on the investigation of 700 languages).

Gender reversals can be bilateral or unilateral. In *BILATERAL SYSTEMS*, reversals operate both ways — from feminine to masculine and from masculine to feminine. Some examples are in §2. *UNILATERAL* systems display gender reversals only in one direction: either masculine to feminine, or feminine to masculine, or either feminine or masculine to neuter — the topic of §3.

The choice of linguistic gender often correlates with the social implications of being a man or a woman. This is known as social gender — a notion related to contrasting roles of men and woman, and how these appear embodied in cultural practices, ritualized behaviour, and societal stereotypes. In many instances, reversing linguistic gender for human referents reflects attitudes to the conventional roles of each social gender. The final section offers a summary of the patterns of gender reversal and their underpinnings and motivations.

1 BILATERAL GENDER REVERSALS

Bilateral gender reversals can be restricted to human referents. In terms of their semantic effects, reversals can be symmetrical: then reversing genders either way has the same, or similar semantic effect. Or they can be asymmetrical, with semantic effects being different.

1.1 BILATERAL GENDER REVERSALS OF SYMMETRICAL TYPE

An example of bilateral gender reversal of symmetrical type comes from Manambu, a Ndu language from the Sepik region of New Guinea. Referring to a man as if he were a woman, and to a woman as if she were a man has the same effect — that of mockery and disdain.

Manambu has two genders: feminine and masculine (see Aikhenvald 2008, 2017 for further details). Gender is distinguished in the singular number, and realised through agreement on adjectives, demonstratives, a few other modifiers, and on verbs. As a rule, gender choice for adult humans is based on their sex, or natural

gender. Terms for adult men will be assigned to the masculine, and terms for women to the feminine gender. This is shown in (1) and (2).

- | | | | | |
|-----|---|------------------------|----------------|---------|
| (1) | ke-de
this-masc.sg
'this big man' | numa-de
big-masc.sg | du
man | Manambu |
| (2) | ke-ø
this-fem.sg
'this big woman' | numa-ø
big-fem.sg | ta:kw
woman | |

Gender choice for children and non-humans is based on shape, size, and quantity. A small child will be assigned feminine gender (even if it is a boy), and a big child will be treated as masculine. A big dog or a big pig will be masculine, and a small one feminine (no matter what their sex). A large house is masculine, and a small one feminine. A long piece of wood is masculine, and a short and round one feminine. A long road will be referred to with masculine gender, and a short one with feminine. A little money or a little blood will be feminine, and a lot of money or blood masculine (see also Aikhenvald 2018: 33-45). Reversing genders for adult humans has a different effect: this is downright offensive.

A small squat and roundish man was once referred to with (3) (behind his back):

- | | | | | |
|-----|---|--------------------|-----------|----------------|
| (3) | kə
this:fem.sg
'this fat smallish and roundish man' (highly derogatory) | numa
big:fem.sg | du
man | <i>Manambu</i> |
|-----|---|--------------------|-----------|----------------|

The man was assigned to feminine linguistic gender based on shape and size, following the principles of gender assignment to non-humans, and especially inanimates. By using shape and size as properties for gender assignment, a man is 'downgraded' to the status of a non-human. On another occasion, a large and loud 'know-all' woman was referred to with masculine gender (also behind her back).

- (4) kə-də numa-də ta:kw
 this-masc.sg big-masc.sg woman
 'this big manly and bossy woman' (highly derogatory)

The woman in (4) was assigned linguistic gender based on her size — like a non-human would be. She was also portrayed as unlawfully appropriating male properties, being bossy and 'too big for her boots', and also sporting the esoteric knowledge which only men are entitled to have.

If a man displays socially unacceptable behaviour, he may be referred to with feminine gender. Manambu marriage practices are virilocal — when a woman marries, she is supposed to move in with her husband. A man who moved to his wife's village and thus violated the normal principles was referred to as (5).

- (5) kə-ø ta:kw la:n-ad
 Manambu
 this-fem.sg woman husband-3masc.sg
 'This (feminine) woman is (masculine) a husband' (about a man who moved to his wife's village breaching normal virilocal practices)

The man in (5) is referred to as 'this (feminine) woman', but the agreement on the predicate is masculine. The mismatch in agreement emphasizes the grotesqueness of the culturally inappropriate situation whereby a man shows patterns of social behaviour associated with a woman. The 'feminine' man has failed to 'live up to' his Social Gender status. The sentence in (5) was accompanied with loud laughter (behind the back of the man in question — as this was considered offensive).

The derogatory effect of gender reversal for adult humans in Manambu correlates with the reversal of social expectations for men (normally referred to with masculine gender) and women (linguistically feminine). Both man-like woman and a woman-like man are monstrous in that they violate the accepted norm.

Bilateral gender reversal may have different, partly symmetrical effects, if genders have an inherent evaluative meaning. An example comes from Lokono (or Dian), an Arawak language from Guyana. The masculine linguistic gender of non-humans has overly positive overtones. The feminine gender has the opposite

overtones. Animals and birds which are thought of as having a 'positive personality' are masculine—they include turtles and hummingbirds. Domestic animals to which speakers have a special attachment, for instance, a dog, are masculine; however, one's neighbour's dog (whom one does not particularly like) is more likely to be feminine. Nice and cute animals are masculine, while bigger animals are feminine (van Baarle and Sabajo 1997). In addition the masculine gender covers:

- (a) all males of the speaker's tribe, except if they are despised;
- (b) males who are not of the speaker's tribe, if they are friends of the speaker or if a relationship of mutual respect exists with the speaker, and also
- (c) animals, objects (such as *adali* 'sun') and spirits (such as *Adajali* 'God') 'considered to be GOOD AND DESIRABLE or when they are protagonists in stories' (Pet 1987: 26-7).

The feminine gender includes:

- (a) all females, and those males who are despised;
- (b) males who are not of the speaker's tribe, and are neither friends nor despised.

In Palikur, another Arawak language, spoken in the Brazilian state of Amapá and the adjacent areas of French Guiana, the connotations of bilateral gender reversals for animates (but not for humans) go the other way around. Feminine gender is associated with positive value, while masculine goes together with negative feelings. The rat is a small animal; however, it is assigned masculine gender because it is looked upon as dirty and bad. But a cute little baby rat would be referred to as feminine. Turtles are usually feminine. However, a turtle which is a nuisance and has to be got rid of would be referred to as masculine; all insects are masculine in spite of their small size, according to an explanation by a native consultant, 'because none of them are any good for food and all they do is bother people, eat crops and cause sickness' (Aikhenvald and Green 2011).

1.2 BILATERAL GENDER REVERSALS OF ASYMMETRICAL TYPE

In a number of languages, bilateral gender reversals have an asymmetrical effect. Referring to a man with feminine gender would be derogatory. In contrast, talking about a woman as if she were a man would imply an indication of her higher status.

This is what we find in Amharic, an Ethio-Semitic language from Ethiopia. Using feminine gender forms to address a man has derogatory connotations. An Amharic-speaking man can address another man with a feminine pronoun 'as a term of insult, to belittle' him (Wolk 2009: 131). Hoben (1976: 287) mentions how the second person singular masculine pronoun *ante* can be replaced with the corresponding feminine pronoun *anci*, 'if the speaker wishes to insult a male'. This form was used 'to refer to the rebel groups as a put down', and also to express social distance — 'in the context of an older man using the feminine to address a younger boy' (Pankhurst 1992: 169). The form *anci* can also be used 'in a humorously belittling sense for the smallest in a group of friends or for the clown of a group' (Hoben 1976: 286). Such 'derogatory' connotations also come about when an elderly person can address a male youngster as 'feminine'. One can refer to a male enemy with a feminine pronoun, to show one's superiority.

Addressing women as if they were men in Amharic has the opposite effect — of praise and approbation. The implication being that a woman is acting 'like a man' and is thus 'promoted' to a manly status (Pankhurst 1992: 169), similar to the effect of unilateral gender reversals in Tariana discussed in §3.1.1.

The exact overtones of masculine to feminine linguistic gender reversal in Amharic may depend on the context, and partly on the dialect. Male speakers of Amharic are known to employ second person feminine pronouns to address other men — their equals — as a term of rapprochement, or endearment (Wolk 2009: 131-2, Pankhurst 1992). According to Hoben (1976: 287), in Addis Ababa, but not in the countryside, male friends may address each other as *anci* 'you singular feminine', to express affection. Switching from feminine to masculine gender may also have evaluative effects. The masculine pronoun can also be used between women as a mark of 'attachment and closeness' (Pankhurst 1992: 170).

Gender reversals from masculine to feminine with a derogatory effect are a feature of numerous lexical expressions in English. In many proverbs and sayings,

women are portrayed as fussy, untrustworthy and generally inferior. Someone who has little logic is said to have 'female logic'. One will never believe an 'old wives' tale'. A particularly overwrought colleague was once said to be 'a drama queen'. An inefficient editor who had no idea what he wanted from his authors was dubbed 'an old woman'. In his letter to his friend James Hogg on 24 March 1814, Lord Byron referred depreciatingly to his fellow poets Coleridge and Southey as 'mere old wives' (Lansdown 2015: 163). This appears to reflect a traditionally low position of women in societies which used to be run by men.

If I am summoning a group of my girl-friends, *Come on, ladies* will be just fine. But a man saying *Come on, ladies* to his male friends sounds condescending: he will be seen as urging the men to behave like men, not like substandard 'ladies'. Inherently sexist associations between 'man' and positive properties are embedded in a number of derivational forms with positive overtones, including *manly* defined by The Oxford English Dictionary as 'having good qualities traditionally associated with men, such as courage, frankness, etc' (further examples in Baron 1986). In the English poetic tradition, "masculine"-marked words were grouped according to supposedly "manly" attributes (mostly positive) and "feminine"-marked words according to "womanly" attributes (some positive, many negative): such as strong, active, aggressive, powerful, clever, big fierce, giving ("manly"); versus weak, timid, passive, loving, soft, helpful, beautiful, small, moral, receptive ("womanly")' (Wales 1996: 148). The common English idiom *Man up!* meaning 'get your act together in such a way as a real man would, don't whimper' reflects the same idea (see Aikhenvald 2018: 191, for examples from other European languages). This constellation of semantic features of gender as a social construct reflected in linguistic gender usage can be conceived as a kind of 'sexist symbolism' (see Baron 1986: 94; and Yaguello 1979, for a similar approach to French).

2 UNILATERAL GENDER REVERSALS

Unilateral gender reversals may involve gender change from feminine to masculine (§3.1) or from masculine to feminine (§3.2). In §3.3, we turn to the correlations between gender reversals and diminution. Unilateral reversals in three gender systems are the topic of §3.4. In the overwhelming majority of instances, the

semantic effect of gender reversals covers humans, and occasionally extends to other animate beings.

2.1 UNILATERAL GENDER REVERSALS: FROM FEMININE TO MASCULINE

Referring to a woman with masculine gender forms — 'as if' she were a man — may imply special respect and deference. Some examples are in §3.1.1. Alternatively, a reversal from feminine to masculine gender may express endearment and affection — see §3.1.2. Or it may have negative overtones — see §3.1.3.

2.1.1 EXPRESSING RESPECT

In Tariana, an Arawak language from the Vaupés River Basin in north-west Brazil, a woman has to be referred to with feminine gender, on the verb, or the pronoun *duha* 'she' or a classifier for females (*-ma*). However, the mythical Woman-Creator or a particularly powerful or respected woman can be 'promoted' to the status of an honorary man, by using the non-feminine singular cross-referencing prefix *di-* and the non-feminine singular pronoun *diha* 'he'. This can be seen as a reflection of a traditionally subservient and somewhat ambivalent position of a woman in the traditional Vaupés society. Among the Tariana and their Tucanoan neighbours, women were the erstwhile owners of the magic Yurupary flutes but lost them and cannot even look at them any more. Women may not have the status, but they have hidden powers. To recognize these, a woman gets 'promoted' to honorary 'manhood', through the use of gender.

The mother of my Tariana consultants knew the Tariana language very well and used to help her sons remember the traditional terms which had escaped them. She was often referred to with non-feminine cross-referencing marker *di-*. In (6), it was used in talking about her having good feelings about me coming back to the village.

- (6) *duha maṣa-pe|i puwhi di-wa-nipe-ne-mha alia*
 she good-COLL be.glad 3sgnf-enter-NOM-INS-PRES.NONVIS
 EXIST

‘She is very happy indeed’ (lit. ‘(She) is with good feeling of (his=hers) being glad’)

This gender reversal is reminiscent of the overtones of common English expression *Man up!* meaning 'get your act together in such a way as a real man would, don't whimper'. 'Being a man' in the Tariana lore epitomises strength, courage, and prowess, while women are to blame for many things which are wrong with this world (more on this in Aikhenvald 2013). The gender reversal reflects attitudes to social genders.

We can recall, from §2.2, that using a masculine pronoun to address a woman in Amharic has highly positive overtones, of praise and approbation. Similarly, in Figuig, a North Berber language from Morocco, *taməttut* 'woman' can be made masculine (by removing feminine derivational gender marking). The resulting masculine form, *aməttu*, means 'a courageous or a corpulent woman'. This implies approbation (in contrast to the examples from other Berber languages where the overtones of a 'masculine woman' are distinctly pejorative) (Benamara 2013: 411; Maarten Kossmann, p.c.). The effects of gender reversal correlate with the value of social genders within the male-oriented societies.

Along similar lines, in Jarawara, an Arawá language from Southern Amazonia (Brazil), a woman can be referred to with masculine gender if the woman is particularly important or close to the speaker. A narrator referred to his wife as 'he', as a mark of affinity and of respect towards her (Dixon 2004: 287). To what extent this reversal reflects the status of social genders in Jarawara society requires further study.

2.1.2 EXPRESSING ENDEARMENT AND AFFECTION

In all the instances attested so far, gender reversal is restricted to humans. A woman can be affectionately addressed with a form marked for masculine gender in colloquial Russian. Yokoyama (1999: 423) reports that masculine forms used by both sexes to refer to women carry affectionate connotations. The author, a woman, has often been addressed as *moj horoshij* 'my good one-masculine-singular' or *moj malenjkij* 'my little one-masculine singular' by older native speakers of the language (all of them women). Diminutives of female names can take masculine endings in both Russian and Polish (Kasia Wojtylak, p.c.), with specially endearing overtones. A girl named *Masha* can be lovingly called *Mashik* (Masha+diminutive.masculine.singular), and a girl named *Lena* can be called *Lenok*

(Lena+diminutive.masculine.singular) (see also Doleschal and Schmid 2001: 265, and references there, and Rodina and Westergaard 2012: 1092-3 on how young children experience difficulties in acquiring the correct feminine agreement form for such diminutives).

In Modern Hebrew, a man can address close female friends, relatives, associates and partners with masculine pronouns, and verbal and adjectival forms, as a sign of affection and intimacy. Close female friends and relatives can do the same to each other, with a similar effect. Tobin (2001: 187-191) describes linguistic gender reversal in a family of native Hebrew speakers, with two non-identical twin daughters eight and a half years of age: one twin is 'bigger' and the other one is 'smaller'. The smaller twin was the one who most frequently uses the masculine linguistic gender forms to refer to herself; others also use the masculine linguistic gender to talk to her. Their older brother used to address the younger of the twin sisters as a mark of affection. This is illustrated in (7). The brother prepared the dinner for the girl, and is watching her eat, and then says, in a very gentle and soft tone (Tobin 2001: 190).

- (7) ta'im lexa? *Modern Hebrew*
delicious.masc.sg to.you.masc.sg
'Do you like it?' (lit. it is delicious to you.masculine.singular)

On another occasion, the father was telling the smaller twin what she was like as a baby using feminine forms. He switched to the masculine form when he tells her that she had to stay in the hospital alone to become stronger before they could take her home:

- (8) ki **hayita** **tsarix** *Modern Hebrew*
 because you.were.masc.sg necessary.masc.sg
 lehithazek ktsat
 to.become.strong little
 'Because you had to become a little stronger'

Switch to the masculine Linguistic Gender marks solidarity, intimacy and protection. Feminine linguistic gender is not used this way.

The masculine linguistic gender is the functionally unmarked choice in Hebrew (see Aikhenvald 2018: 25-27). Female speakers of Hebrew tend to use masculine forms to refer to themselves and to other people, including women in general extending this unmarked usage. As a speaker put it, 'talking in the masculine frames the conversation as more general and less personal' (Sa'ar 2007: 424-5). This gender reversal has no special overtones of affection.

2.1.3 PEJORATIVE OVERTONES OF GENDER REVERSAL

Unilateral gender reversal, from feminine to masculine, in Cantabrian Spanish has pejorative and demeaning overtones: gender reversal may imply disrespect. This is restricted just to animates (including humans: Holmquist 1991). Usually, linguistic gender assignment to higher animates and to humans generally follows their sex, or natural gender, e.g. *hijo* 'son', *hija* 'daughter', *lobu* 'male wolf', *loba* 'female wolf', *oveju* 'ram', and *oveja* 'ewe'. Inanimates and lower animates which are of smaller size, narrow shape, or vertical orientation are assigned to masculine Linguistic Gender, e.g. *anguila* 'eel (average size)', *anguilu* 'very small eel-like fish', *montona* 'very large stack of hay', *montón* 'stack (of hay)'. The masculine gender has overtones of meagre proportions, thinness and small size.

As a consequence, changing linguistic gender from feminine to masculine implies offense. The term *oveju* 'male sheep' was once used to refer to a particularly meagre and substandard exemplar of the species: a cattle raiser was reminiscing about a particularly bad meal he'd once had, consisting of a sheep's head, a few green vegetables, and a few potatoes, and remarked that the sight of the head of that *oveju* (male sheep) 'peering at him from the pot was something he would never forget'. In Spanish, the feminine form *oveja* is normally used in a generic sense; and here a 'shock or humour' resulted from the selection of the male form based not on the sex of the unfortunate animal, but as a 'deprecatative expression of the revulsion' felt by the speaker and expressed with masculine gender (Holmquist 1991: 60). Along similar lines, *hiju míu*, literally, 'my son', was used to refer to a young girl about twelve years of age, a female not yet developed, in a deprecatory reference.

Gender reversal, from feminine to masculine, is a means of dehumanising a human, treating them as if they were an object. The negative overtones of masculine gender stem from its association with small and substandard size.

In a number of Berber languages from the Middle Atlas area of Morocco, referring to a woman with a masculine linguistic gender form implies offense. In Aït Mguild and Aït Wirra dialects, the form marked for feminine derivational Linguistic Gender, *tamṭṭuṭṭ*, means 'woman'. The masculine form, *ameṭṭu* denotes a woman with man-like manners and has derogatory overtones of French *femme hommasse* 'overly masculine woman' (see Taïfi 1991: 53-4, Oussikoum 2013: 820-1, Azdoud 2011: 491, Benamara 2013: 411).

Reversal from feminine to masculine gender in Palestinian Arabic has negative overtones of a different nature. A woman would refer to herself with a masculine form if she was talking about being tired, sad, unhappy or nervous, as in *ʔana maṣru:h min illi sa:r* (I hurt.masc.sg from that.which happened) 'I am hurt by what happened'. A normal feminine form — expected to be used by a female speaker — is *maṣru:ha* (hurt.fem.sg). Reversing Linguistic Genders in self-reference is a mark of something unpleasant. No changes the other way round have been observed: men always refer to themselves with masculine Linguistic Gender (Rosenhouse and Dbayyat 2006: 174-5).

2.2 FROM MASCULINE TO FEMININE GENDER

Talking about a man, or addressing him, as if he were a woman is a typical feature of jocular behaviour called *tsimpantsi* in a number of Kampa (Arawak) languages from Peru (Mihas 2019, Shepard 1997). The *man > woman* gender reversals have a humorous effect reflecting the absurdity and ludicrousness associated with the 'effeminate' men's conduct. Joking behaviour with gender reversal can be displayed by women talking to men, and by men talking to men.

Gender reversals may include using female terms to refer to a man. In (9), from the Alto Perené (Kampa) language, Clelia, an older woman and a long-term friend of Gregorio's wife, jokes with him, calling him a good-for-nothing old woman who is supposed to be afraid of the spirit of a dead man. She uses the female term *isha-pta-ro* and third person non-masculine cross-referencing on the verb. This provokes roars of laughter, since Gregório is man and should be talked about using third person masculine prefixes. The feminine forms are in bold>.

- (9)a **o**-tsarov-a-vai-shi-t-a **isha-pita-ro** *Alto Perené*
 3NM.S-fear-EP-DUR-APL.INT-EP-REAL old.woman-CL:old.devalued-NMZ.NM
 ja ja
 'The old, good-for-nothing woman is afraid for no reason ((laughing))'.
- (9)b **o**-tsarov-a-vai-tz-i **isha-pita-ro**
 3NM.S-fear-EP-DUR-APL.INT-EP-REAL old.woman-CL:old.devalued-NMZ.NM
 'The old, good-for-nothing woman is afraid'.

In his detailed analysis of the socioeconomic life of a Kampa Matsigenka village, Johnson (2003:92) points out that “men are associated with strength and courage. [...] Women are described as “fearful” (*tsaronti*).” As a consequence, when Gregório displays the ‘feminine’ attributes’ of weakness and of fear of the deceased José, ‘his allegedly unmanly behavior motivates Clelia’s selection of the specific participant role coding strategy. She jokingly ‘feminizes’ Gregorio by deploying the third person marker *o-* ‘3NM.S/A’ to achieve the gender reversal effects’, as we saw in (9a,b). According to Shepard (1997: 53 and p.c.), using a feminine (or non-masculine) form to address a man is also ‘part of typical male joking behaviour in which men feminise one another with sexual, and especially homosexual, comments and jokes’. In Mihas’ (2019: 143) words, ‘downgrading a man to a woman is sure to create a comical effect’.

The derogatory jocular overtones of masculine to feminine gender reversals among speakers of Kampa languages are believed to reflect the interlocutors' sociocultural values. As Mihas (2019: 142-3) put it, 'the expected behavioral characteristics of Kampa males comprise physical and spiritual strength, of positive value, whereas the presupposed feminine conduct includes the features of timidity and weakness, of negative value. The negative attributes associated with the female natural gender is a significant factor weighing on the subordinate social position of women in the indigenous society'.

The unilateral gender reversal, from masculine to feminine, correlates with the status of social gender groups in Kampa languages. There are no instances of the opposite reversal: a woman is never referred to as if she were 'promoted' to a manly status.

2.3 DIMINUTIVE FORMS AND FEMININE GENDER

In a number of the world's languages, choice of linguistic gender correlates with physical properties including shape and size. We can recall from §2 that in Manambu non-human referents of smaller size are assigned to the feminine gender; larger ones are assigned to the masculine gender. Correlations between diminution and feminine gender have been attested in the history of English: a small bee was referred to as 'she' as early as John Lily's *Euphues* (1578) (Wales 1996; see also Mathiot 1979). Similar principles have been attested in a few other languages from New Guinea, in numerous Afroasiatic languages (including Cushitic and Omotic), and also East- Nilotic, Khwe (Central Khoisan) (see Aikhenvald 2018: 46).

The formation of diminutives may correlate with feminine gender. In Berber languages, the marker of the feminine linguistic gender is homophonous with diminutive marking (a feature shared with other languages of the Afroasiatic family). The feminine linguistic tends to correlate with small size of an object. Ayt Seghroushen (Moroccan Berber) men belong to the masculine linguistic gender and women to the feminine gender (e.g. *arba* 'male child', *t-arba-tt* 'female child'). For inanimates and lower animates (whose sex is irrelevant and difficult to determine anyway), a masculine form denotes 'something bigger than the feminine', e.g. *t-fus-tt* (feminine) 'little baby hand', *fus* (masculine) 'hand'; *t-amṣaṭt* (feminine) 'thigh', *amsaḍ* (masculine) 'very big thigh'. Changing linguistic gender for humans and sex-differentiable animals implies difference in size (and not in sex) — as shown in the following pairs:

- (10) *t-aməṭtuṭt* (feminine) 'woman' *aməṭtuḍ* (masculine) 'very big woman'
t-yis-tt (feminine) 'little stallion' *yis* (masculine) 'stallion, horse'
t-aymar-t (feminine) 'mare' *aymar* (masculine) 'very big mare'

The feminine linguistic gender in Ayt Seghroushen, a Berber language, has overtones of affection, as we have just seen (see Kossmann 2014). The masculine linguistic gender will signal the opposite — that something is grotesquely big, ugly, or hard to handle. It can be considered an augmentative. The form *t-yaṭt* (feminine) refers to a female goat. The masculine counterpart is *yaḍ* (masculine) which means

'big female goat, difficult to handle'. The feminine noun *titt* 'eye' has a masculine counterpart *aṭṭaw* 'very big eye' with pejorative overtones. The feminine *tamziyda* 'mosque' can be made masculine; the resulting form *amziyda* means 'a ridiculously big mosque'.

Overt change of gender marking in Tashelhit Berber of Ait Imghrane signals change in natural gender for gender-differentiable nouns (especially with human reference), e.g. *aḍbib* 'male doctor', *t-aḍbib-t* 'female doctor', *t-anfirmlī-t* '(female) nurse', *anfirmlī* 'male nurse'. With nouns of other semantic groups, changing masculine to feminine gender implies diminution and endearment, e.g. *akmmu* 'face', *takmmut* 'little face' (Sarvasy 2019). Changing feminine to masculine gender correlates with a bigger size of the entity, e.g. *tadawt* 'back', *adaw* 'very large back', *tafunast* 'cow', *afunas* 'very large cow'. Or this may imply disgust, as in *tak^wurt* 'ball, soccer game' versus *ak^wur ijjan* (ball.masc stinky.PARTICIPLE) 'that dumb soccer game'.

In their study of modern Norwegian, Fløgstad and Eiesland (2019) describe an innovative use of the feminine form of the adjective *lita* or *litta* 'small' accompanied by the indefinite article *ei* called *ei litta* construction. Its established use with a noun belonging to the feminine gender is in (11).

- | | | | | |
|------|----------------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| (11) | <i>ei</i> | <i>lit-a</i> | <i>jente</i> | <i>Norwegian</i> |
| | a.fem.sg | small-fem.sg | girl | |
| | 'a small girl' | | | |

The same feminine form *ei litta* can occur with nouns of other genders. In (12), it is used with 'house' which belongs to neuter gender; in (13) with it accompanies a masculine noun 'prince'. The form *litta* (rather than *lita*) is commonly used in such non-prototypical contexts.

- | | | | | |
|------|-----------------|---------------|------------|------------------|
| (12) | <i>ei</i> | <i>litt-a</i> | <i>hus</i> | <i>Norwegian</i> |
| | a.fem.sg | small-fem.sg | house | |
| | 'a small house' | | | |

- (13) *ei* *litt-a* *prins* *Norwegian*
 a.fem.sg *small-fem.sg* *prince*
 'a small prince'

The construction *ei litt* in (12) and (13) conveys the meanings of affection, endearment, and sympathy on the part of the speaker (see Fløgstad and Eiesland 2019: 74, for native speakers' assessment of the construction).

2.4 THE THIRD GENDER: DISDAIN AND ENDEARMENT

Manipulating gendered forms in a language with three genders — feminine, masculine, and neuter — may have a variety of effects. For traditional grammarians of English, the choice of gender-sensitive third person singular pronouns is based on Natural Gender: 'she' for women, 'he' for men, and 'it' for inanimates. However, in many varieties of English the situation is not that straightforward. In a modern conversation, an ant was referred to as *he* — emphasizing speaker's empathy with the insect who is referred to as if it was a human (Wales 1996: 143, 146-52; Morris 1999: 188; and Mathiot 1979).

- (14) Speaker A: Ah, there's an ant
 Speaker B: Well, catch it
 Speaker A: Well, put *him* outside/ let *him* go on to —/ Look *he's* on the
 toaster/ Now put *him* outside nicely.../ *he* may be someone else's ant you know

In contrast, referring to a human as 'it' implies disdain — treating the person as something substandard, not worthy of human status. This is aptly captured by the title of David Pelzer's 1995 memoir *The child called 'it'*, a heart-breaking story of childhood abuse by his alcoholic mother who treated her son in an inhumane manner.

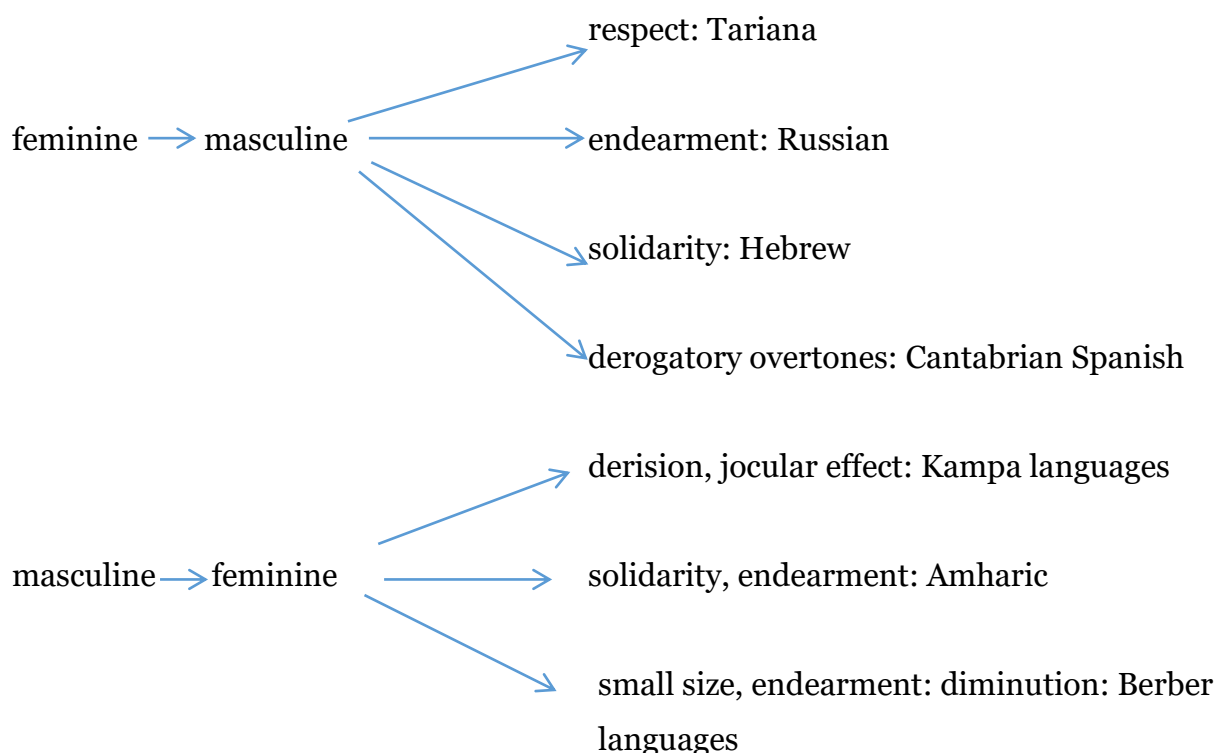
This, however, is not uniformly the case. The neuter linguistic gender in Bulgarian includes mostly inanimates. It may have overtones of joking endearment if applied to humans. In colloquial Bulgarian a neuter gender form can be used to refer to a man or to a woman, marking condescension or endearment. A young teacher (*daskal*, masculine) can be addressed as *daskalcê* (neuter) by an older and a

wealthier man. A woman behaving in a silly way can be addressed as *prosto* (simple+neuter gender) 'dear silly one'. Mladenova (2001: 37-9) refers to these as 'value-laden neuters'. Changing feminine and masculine gender of names for relatives and also personal names in Swiss German (a language with three linguistic genders) have overtones of familiarity and endearment. One can only say *liebes Teddy* (dear:neuter.sg Teddy) 'dear Teddy' (rather than standard *lieber Teddy* (dear:masc.sg Teddy)) to someone who is particularly valued and close to the speaker (Christen 1998). These connotations may be historically related to the neuter gender choice for diminutives in German (see a comprehensive discussion in Baumgartner and Christen 2017, and in Nübling 2017, with reference to other German varieties). This is reminiscent of the value of endearment typical for diminutives (as we saw in § 3.3).

TO CONCLUDE

In each of the instances of bilateral gender reversals, derogatory connotations or overtones of endearment appear to be restricted to semantically specified subclasses of nouns — either humans (as in Manambu and Amharic), or humans and animates (as in Lokono), or just animates (as in Palikur). Bilateral gender reversal with symmetrical semantic effect in Manambu implies inappropriate reversal of social roles for men and for women. In Palikur and Lokono, where genders have intrinsic evaluative meaning, reversing genders implies change in evaluation of the entity.

Figure 1 shows the semantic effects of unilateral gender reversal in the languages discussed here.

Figure 1. Semantic effect of universal gender reversals

Asymmetrical bilateral gender reversal in Amharic follows the same lines as does unilateral gender reversal. The reversal from masculine to feminine gender has negative implications. The reversal in the opposite direction implies approbation. This is what we also see in the examples of gender reversals in English (discussed in §2.2). Gender reversals in three-term systems may also carry evaluative meanings, as we saw in §3.4. Using neuter gender to refer to a human may imply downgrading them to the level of inanimates. Or it may imply special affection and familiarity — much like gender switch from masculine to feminine gender operates in Amharic.

Changing linguistic gender of humans reflects changing social gender relationships. When Linguistic Genders are reversed in jocular contexts in Machiguenga and Manambu, the grotesque effect of it makes people laugh. Reversing genders may result in mortal offense, or in 'promoting' a woman to a higher manly status. Addressing a woman as if she were a man may signal affection or solidarity. Addressing a man as if he were a woman may be a sign of endearment. Or it may imply dragging him down to a 'woman's' level. Linguistic Gender reversal can have an opposite effect in the same language: addressing men as women in Amharic may sound insulting in one context, and endearing in another (depending on the relative age of people and their relationships). Linguistic gender reversals highlight positive

and negative associations with men and women as social constructs, reflecting the stereotypes of social gender entombed in the language.

The meanings of genders and gendered forms reflect social asymmetries in the position of men and women — in Robin Lakoff's (1975: 69) words, 'linguistic imbalances' which 'bring into sharper focus real-world imbalances and inequities'. The ways in which genders can be manipulated and reversed to express evaluative meanings across the languages of the world appear to reflect such imbalances — a feature of traditional social structures.

ABBREVIATIONS

APL.INT applicative intentional

CL classifier

COLL collective

DUR durative

EP epenthetic

EXIST existential

fem feminine

INS instrumental

masc masculine

NM.S non-masculine subject

NMZ.NM nominalizer non-masculine

NOM nominalization

PRES.NONVIS present nonvisual

REAL realis

sg singular

sgnf singular non-feminine

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