

## STRUCTURAL LINGUISTIC GENDER CATEGORIES AND DISCURSIVE MATERIALIZATION: A DECONSTRUCTIONIST ANALYSIS

Heiko Motschenbacher\*

**Abstract:** This article argues for a stronger re-integration of structural linguistic analysis into contemporary language and gender research by demonstrating its usefulness for poststructuralist discussions of gender. Aiming at a deconstruction of the binarisms “female” vs. “male” and “grammatical gender language” vs. “natural gender language,” it deals with lexical, social, grammatical, and referential gender as the major mechanisms of linguistic gender construction in personal nouns. These mechanisms are scrutinized in order to expose inconsistencies between and within these categories that strongly contest the stability of the above-mentioned binarisms. This is, to a large extent, done by means of structural analyses of data from Basque (for lexical gender), German (for social gender), and Croatian (for grammatical gender). The gender indexicality of the four categories is finally explained in terms of discursive materialization.

### 1. Introduction

Contemporary synchronic linguistics more than ever witnesses a co-existence of structuralist and poststructuralist approaches. Those linguistic sub-disciplines that deal with the language system (*langue*) are firmly based in structuralist thinking as a direct heritage of Saussure (e.g., phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, lexicology). At the same time, many of those linguistic disciplines that go beyond the abstract language system and look at language use in concrete communication contexts (*parole*) have increasingly started to incorporate poststructuralist approaches. This is especially true of sociolinguistics and its contemporary theorization of the relationship between language and identity (see Baxter, 2003; Joseph, 2004; McElhinny, 2003, pp. 24–26). At first glance, a structuralist reliance on stable categories and a poststructuralist skepticism towards these may seem incompatible. This article questions this notion by arguing that a poststructuralist approach can significantly benefit from structuralist, *langue*-oriented analysis. In recent language and gender research, one can detect a gradual marginalization of structuralist linguistic approaches<sup>1</sup> and a move towards more context-sensitive local studies of gender as a linguistic performance in concrete interactions. The latter certainly is a useful development, but *parole*-oriented research loses a significant degree of its explanatory power when it fails to take language structure into account. At this point, it is crucial to re-

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<sup>1</sup> These approaches used to be an integral part of the dominance paradigm in early feminist linguistics of the 1970s and 1980s, which was partly concerned with exposing gender-biased structures in the language system that work to the detriment of women.

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conceptualize the language system not as a mere abstract prerequisite on which language use is based, but more in tune with poststructuralist thinking, as the result of repeated linguistic performances that over time have led to the materialization of certain structural categories.

The following analyses will deal with structural categories of linguistic gender representation in personal nouns as a matter of discursive materialization. If gender is subject to ongoing materialization processes, this implies that gender categories are not stable, natural or clear-cut. In line with a deconstructionist view of gender, it follows that it is the subtle incongruities of these categories that expose their “non-naturalness.” Discursive materialization, as discussed in this article, is mainly based on the Foucauldian notion of discourse as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). This concept departs from more traditional theorizations of discourse within linguistics (i.e., in the sense of “text,” “conversation,” “language use in context”) and sees language as a site in which traces of discourses (i.e., ways of seeing the world) can be detected, some of which are well-entrenched or dominant, whereas others are more subversive (see the contributions in Warnke, 2007). The approach used here is inspired by contrastive linguistics, centering on gendering mechanisms in personal nouns and their role in the discursive construction of gendered identities across languages (see contributions in Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001–2003; Hornscheidt, 2006).

## 2. A deconstructionist view of binarisms

In the present analysis, two binarisms are to be subjected to deconstruction. The first one is the conceptualization of gender as a strictly binary identity—i.e., female and male seen as biologically based, mutually exclusive, and monolithic categories. Deconstruction in this case aims at going “beyond binary thinking” (Bing & Bergvall, 1996), exposing gender as a continuum of overlapping femininities and masculinities that are a result of social construction rather than biological predetermination. This goes hand in hand with an emphasis on intra-gender rather than inter-gender variation; an acknowledgement of identities as hybrid, locally negotiable, unstable and even contradictory; and an increasing skepticism towards essentializing statements of gender differences.

The second binarism to be deconstructed is a “more linguistic” one, namely, the (folk)linguistic categorization of how languages deal with gender representation—i.e., languages with “natural gender” versus languages with “grammatical gender” (cf. Baron 1986, 109–111). This dichotomous classification—though prominent as a conceptual tool in foreign-language teaching—is far too simplistic to characterize the complexities of the interrelation between gender and language structure in any language. Grammatical gender refers to noun classes in languages (such as German, French, or Serbian) whose nominal lexicon is structured by the values of feminine, masculine, and, for some, neuter. The first two of these classes are frequently considered a major means of gender representation. A closer look at these languages, however, reveals that grammatical gender is not able to account for all linguistic mechanisms of gender construction. This is equally true for languages without grammatical gender, which are said to possess “natural gender” to express the extralinguistic category of gender. One such example is English, in which the anaphoric usage of the pronouns *she* and *he* when referring to personal nouns such as *woman* and *man* in a text cannot be explained by means of grammatical gender. Again natural gender is also unable to explain all

linguistic gendering mechanisms in languages like this. For the majority of English personal nouns (e.g., *passenger, patient, person, student*), natural gender is not applicable at all, even though they may be pronominalized by *she* or *he* in many contexts. Moreover, with respect to an increasing skepticism towards the biological foundation of gender, the term “natural gender” must also be treated with suspicion.

More sophisticated linguistic treatments of the subject deal with gender representation through universal linguistic categories of gender representation to be found across many languages throughout the world. Accordingly, Hellinger and Bußmann (2001) identify lexical gender, social gender, grammatical gender, and referential gender as mechanisms of linguistic gender representation. These mechanisms will be explained in the next section because they provide linguists with descriptive tools to avoid essentializing statements on gender and its linguistic representation. In a second step, the descriptive categories will be exposed to a critical scrutiny of their “binariness” in order to make them better equipped for the purposes of gender deconstruction (see also Hornscheidt, 1998).

### 3. Linguistic categories of gender representation

#### 3.1 Lexical gender

Personal nouns possess lexical gender when they carry the semantic feature [female] or [male], independently of any context. Most languages have certain sets of personal nouns that are particularly likely to be lexically gendered. This is usually true for kinship terms (e.g., *mother, father; brother, sister*), address terms (e.g., *Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms.*), and personal nouns denoting female and male human beings in general (e.g., *woman, man; boy, girl*). The lexical gender of personal nouns triggers agreement in anaphoric pronouns (*the man – he; the woman – she*). From a lexical point of view, most personal nouns in English are gender-indifferent, i.e., they carry neither the semantic feature [female] nor [male] (e.g., *person, nurse, farmer*). Using lexically gendered personal nouns is a means of direct gender indexing (Ochs, 1992). Lexical gender (as opposed to “natural” gender) locates the basis of the categories “female” and “male” not in biology, but in semantics. From the point of view of gender deconstruction, lexical gender is the least promising category because it firmly builds on a binary gender conceptualization. In other words, lexical gender is about categorizing the gender continuum into two, and only two, mutually exclusive binary macro-categories “female” and “male,” and hence abstracts away from intra-gender differences.

#### 3.2 Social gender

The fact that lexically gender-indifferent personal nouns like *nurse* and *farmer* are anything but completely gender-neutral is a matter of social gender. Whereas *nurse* is more likely to be perceived as female, *farmer* is biased towards the male (even though male nurses and female farmers exist). Phenomena like these are sometimes also called *covert gender* (Hellinger, 2004) because gendering in these cases cannot be deduced from the forms themselves, but surfaces only occasionally, for instance, when anaphoric pronouns refer to the personal nouns concerned in non-specific contexts (e.g., *a nurse – she; a farmer – he*) or when social gender has to be overcome through explicit opposite-gender marking (e.g., *male model, woman doctor*). Social gender is a matter of entrenched social stereotypes that tie

certain role scripts to women and men. These stereotypes can be very well established (as is the case for *nurse* and *farmer*), but they may also come in much weaker degrees of stereotypical association (*teacher* and *doctor*, for example, are less clearly socially gendered; see Kennison & Trofe, 2003). Social gender, therefore, is not about directly indexing female or male, but about making a gendered interpretation more likely (indirect gender indexing; Ochs, 1992). Even languages with no grammatical gender and no gender distinctions in pronouns, such as Turkish (Braun 2001), can therefore be a site of gender bias that, due to its covertness, is even harder to challenge than that in gender languages.

### 3.3 Grammatical gender

Grammatical gender is a specific system of nominal classification in gender languages (see Table 1). It structures the entire nominal lexicon of these languages, usually attributing only one of the three values masculine, feminine, or neuter<sup>2</sup> to each noun—e.g., German *der Tisch* ('the table.MASC. '), *die Lampe* ('the lamp.FEM. '), *das Bett* ('the bed.NEUT. ').<sup>3</sup> Grammatical gender is responsible for agreement phenomena. Satellite elements within and outside the noun phrase, such as articles, adjectives, anaphoric pronouns, verbs, numerals, or prepositions may show different inflectional forms depending on the grammatical gender of the noun. For the most part, the relation between a certain noun and its grammatical gender is considered to be arbitrary. However, the relationship between grammatical gender and the representation of extralinguistic gender is not completely arbitrary for personal nouns as a subset of the nominal lexicon. For these, one finds a strong tendency of lexically female personal nouns to be grammatically feminine and lexically male personal nouns to be grammatically masculine (e.g., German *die Frau* 'woman.FEM. ', *der Mann* 'man.MASC. '). In the absence of lexical genderization, grammatical gender may be the only relevant factor that causes a gendered perception. This is typically true for masculine personal nouns such as German *Lehrer* ('teacher') or *Arzt* ('physician'), which are semantically ambiguous, oscillating between male-specific and generic meanings. Despite the fact that these are not exclusively lexically male, they are in many contexts more likely to be interpreted as male and can also be contrasted with lexically female nouns derived from grammatically masculine bases (e.g., German *Lehrer und Lehrerinnen* 'teachers.MASC. and teachers.FEM. '). Compared to the marked feminine forms, which are always female-specific, the masculine forms have a wider referential potential and theoretically may be employed to refer to all-male, mixed-sex, unknown-sex, or even all-female groups of people, which in effect makes them examples of generic masculines.<sup>4</sup> In gender languages, grammatical gender is the dominant factor for the choice of anaphoric pronouns (e.g., German *der Lehrer – er* 'the teacher.MASC. – he'; *die Lehrerin – sie* 'the female teacher.FEM. – she'; *das Mädchen – es* 'the girl.NEUT. – it'). Grammatical gender can only sometimes be overridden

<sup>2</sup> Not all gender languages show all three classes. The Romance languages, for instance, use only masculine and feminine grammatical gender. Other languages, such as Danish and Swedish, distinguish only neuter and common gender (*uter*). However, all of these phenomena can be explained in terms of the simplification of an originally three-class Indo-European gender system, which has completely eroded in English.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this article, grammatical gender is glossed using the abbreviations MASC. (masculine), FEM. (feminine), and NEUT. (neuter). Lexical gender, by contrast, is glossed without abbreviation as MALE, FEMALE and NEUTRAL.

<sup>4</sup> Generic feminines or female generics are much rarer and have been attested for the Iroquoian languages Seneca and Oneida and some Australian Aboriginal languages (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001a, p. 9).

by lexical (German *das Mädchen* – *sie* ‘the girl.NEUT. – she’), social (German *ein Model* – *sie* ‘a model.NEUT. – she’), or referential gender (German *diese Person* – *er* ‘this person.FEM. – he’). To distinguish the grammatical meaning of grammatical gender from the semantic or pragmatic meaning of lexical, social and referential gender, the designations “masculine” and “feminine” are used to exclusively describe grammatical gender, whereas the other three mechanisms are described using the adjectives “female” and “male” (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001).

Languages with nominal classification			Languages without nominal classification
Classifier languages	Noun class languages		
	Gender languages (maximally three classes: e.g., MASC./FEM./NEUT.)	Other noun class languages (many classes)	
e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese	e.g., German, French, Old English	e.g., Swahili, Bantu languages	e.g., Turkish, Finnish, Modern English

Table 1. Typology of nominal classification according to Hellinger & Bußmann (2001)

### 3.4 Referential gender

Referential gender is a matter of whom a particular personal noun or pronoun actually refers to in a given context. This category is necessary because even though personal nouns may be lexically, socially, or grammatically gendered in a certain way, they may not necessarily be used accordingly. The general trend that grammatical, lexical, and social gender correspond to referential gender in personal nouns is regularly flouted. False generics, for example, show such a mismatch when they are used to refer to women. A sentence like German *Sie war nicht Herr ihrer Sinne* (‘She was not master of her senses’) may serve to illustrate this. German *Herr* (‘master’) is lexically male and grammatically masculine. In this sentence, however, it is obvious that it is used to refer to a female person indicated through the use of the pronoun *sie* (‘she’). Another example that may show a mismatch between lexical and referential gender is the English personal noun *guy*, which is lexically male, but is in some contexts used as an address term referring to a mixed-gender or even all-female group (as in *you guys*) (see Clancy, 1999). Usages like these have been criticized by feminist linguists as instances of false generics (e.g., English male generics<sup>5</sup>: *man*, *-man* compounds, and *he*), i.e., lexically male or grammatically masculine forms used to refer to women. When lexically gender-indifferent personal nouns are used to talk about a specific female or male person in a language without any grammatical masculine-feminine distinction, the choice of anaphoric

<sup>5</sup> As Modern English does not have grammatical gender, it does not make sense to speak of “generic masculines” here.

pronouns is based on referential gender and not on any property of the noun itself (e.g., *this person – he/she*).

It is apparent that languages make use of the four described gendering mechanisms to varying degrees. Whereas grammatical gender is not relevant for all languages, lexical, social, and referential gender are very likely to be linguistic universals. Furthermore, one and the same form may be subject to more than one of these mechanisms, sometimes even in conflict—a representation that contradicts a strictly binary model of gender. Conflicts like these surface, for instance, in pronominalization, where pronoun choice may be determined by any of the four mechanisms (leaving aside speaker attitude, which may also lead to different choices). In a sentence like German *Er erkannte das Mädchen, als er es sah* ('He recognized the girl when he saw her'), the pronoun choice *es* ('it') is determined by the neuter grammatical gender of *Mädchen* ('girl'). But one may also say *Er erkannte das Mädchen, als er sie sah* and choose the pronoun *sie* ('she') in accordance with the female lexical gender of *Mädchen* (see also Braun, 2008). In the above-mentioned example *Sie war nicht Herr ihrer Sinne* ('She was not master of her senses'), the pronoun *sie* is chosen as a consequence of female referential gender, which contrasts with the male lexical gender of *Herr* ('master'). Finally, social gender accounts for the choice of the pronoun *her* in sentences like *A nurse should always take care of her patients*, where *nurse* does not refer to a specific individual, but to a member of a group of people. This may lead to a conflict with referential gender in specific contexts where a male nurse is referred to (e.g., *This nurse always takes care of his patients*). The following section will attempt to supplement the conceptualization of these four mechanisms of linguistic gender construction, which is necessary to ensure a higher degree of deconstructionist potential. This will be done by discussing aspects that tend to be treated as "exceptions" in grammars and the research literature because they render the mechanisms less clear-cut and more amenable to non-hegemonic gender representations.

#### 4. Scrutinizing mechanisms of linguistic gender construction

##### 4.1 Lexical gender

As has been stated above, lexical gender is very much in tune with hegemonic discourses of gender as binary (e.g., *woman, man; aunt, uncle*). For English, this category is to some extent weakened in dialectal usage, which sometimes shows no gender distinction when pronominalizing lexically gendered personal nouns with an invariable form *a* or *un* (Baron, 1986, p. 111), or usage of *he/him/his/her* with reference to inanimate objects (Wagner, 2004). Deconstructionist potential mainly resides in lexically gender-indifferent personal nouns because they do not directly construct referents as gendered (e.g., *person, people, spouse, cousin*). Another aspect to be considered here is the possibility that linguistic forms can be lexically both female and male. If forms like these exist, they will also support a conceptualization of gender as binary, but compared to personal nouns that are only lexically male or female they open up a conceptualization that is less tied to one and only one of the sexes. A case in point is Basque, which is considered to be an isolate not related to any other modern world language. Typologically speaking, Basque qualifies as a language without nominal classification and is therefore similar to English in this respect. Basque possesses a moderately productive

pattern of plural compound formation (Jacobsen, 1982). When the components are personal nouns, these compounds often consist of a lexically female and a lexically male form in combination. On first glance, these forms might appear to be a borderline case between lexical and grammatical meaning. The fact that these forms are exclusively plural may point to a grammatical phenomenon (i.e., an inflectional process to express number). One reason for an interpretation in accordance with lexical gender is that the components of these formations are clearly lexically gendered. A second reason is that the lexically gendered components do not seem to convey the grammatical plural meaning in themselves because these compounds additionally possess an inflectional suffix *-k* that conveys this plural meaning. For example, the Basque words for ‘aunt’ and ‘uncle’ (*izeba* and *osaba*) are lexically female and male respectively and can be combined to form the plural *osaba-izebak*, literally ‘uncle-aunts’. Formations like these are semantically ambiguous because it is unclear whether only one female-male couple is referred to or several of them (Jacobsen, 1982, p. 384; for more examples, see Table 2).

The examples in Table 2 show that in the plural compounds, the female component typically follows the male component.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, these formations are clearly different from those of the type illustrated by Old English *wif-man* (< Modern English *woman*; literally ‘wife-person’<sup>7</sup>) because the former represent copulative compounds (“dvandva” or “co-compounds”; Bendel, 2006, p. 190; Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2003, p. 351) which are equally headed by both components, whereas in the latter the second element is the only head. *Wif-man* shows a subordinate relationship between the two constituents, i.e., the second component is the base word that is specified by the first component. Copulative compounds, however, exhibit a coordinative structure, in which both components have semantically equal weight (e.g., *author-editor*: ‘the person is both the author and the editor’). Basque copulative compounds contest the notion that personal nouns can have only one lexical gender value.<sup>8</sup> Even though they do not allow for the co-occurrence of the female and the male value in one person due to their plural meaning, they at least do not rule out such an interpretation for groups of people. It should be noted that such copulative compounds usually are “additive co-compounds” (Wälchli, 2005, p. 137), i.e., they denote an ‘and’-relation between the two components (see, for example, *author-editor* above or *sweet-sour*: ‘something is both sweet and sour’). For the Basque compounds in Table 2, this would result in an abstract paraphrase like ‘these people are both women and men’ (rather than ‘either women or men’).<sup>9</sup> As Basque knows neither grammatical gender nor gendered anaphoric pronouns, exclusive female or male lexical gender is not enforced on these forms through satellite elements in agreement.

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<sup>6</sup> This might have phonological reasons, with shorter components tending to precede longer components. A semantic interpretation might see this as an index of male dominance: other Basque plural compounds show a sequence of old + young (e.g., *ama-alabak* ‘mother(s) and daughter(s)’, *aita-semeak* ‘father(s) and son(s)’; Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2003, p. 352) or of powerful + powerless (e.g., *ugazaba-otsenak* ‘master(s) and servant(s)’; Jacobsen, 1982).

<sup>7</sup> The Old English lexeme *man* was originally not gender-specific.

<sup>8</sup> Similar co-compounds consisting of lexically female and male components can be found in many languages besides Basque, such as in Georgian, Lezgian and Mordvin-Erzya (cf. Wälchli, 2005, p. 137).

<sup>9</sup> Another aspect pointing in this direction is the fact that for non-human Basque copulative compounds, forms are attested which explicitly include the conjunction *eta* (‘and’), such as in *sutake* (< *su eta ke* ‘smoke and fire’; Martin Haase, personal communication). Wälchli (2005, p. 242) also mentions a human example, namely *aitatamak* (< *aita eta ama-ak* ‘father and mother-s’).

Female form		Male form		Plural copulative compound	
<i>emazte</i>	‘wife’	<i>senar</i>	‘husband’	<i>senar-emazteak</i> <sup>10</sup>	‘husband(s) and wife(s)’
<i>andre</i>	‘lady’	<i>jaun</i>	‘gentleman’	<i>jaun-andreak</i>	‘gentleman/-men and lady/-ies’
<i>erregina</i>	‘queen’	<i>errege</i>	‘king’	<i>errege-erreginak</i>	‘king(s) and queen(s)’
<i>neska</i>	‘girl’	<i>mutil</i>	‘boy’	<i>neska-mutilak</i>	‘girl(s) and boy(s)’
<i>ama</i>	‘mother’	<i>aita</i>	‘father’	<i>aita-amak</i>	‘father(s) and mother(s)’
<i>amona</i>	‘grand-mother’	<i>aitona</i>	‘grand-father’	<i>aiton-amonak</i>	‘grandfather(s) and grandmother(s)’
<i>alaba</i>	‘daughter’	<i>seme</i>	‘son’	<i>seme-alabak</i>	‘son(s) and daughter(s)’
<i>arriba</i>	‘a man’s sister’ <sup>11</sup>	<i>anai</i>	‘a man’s brother’	<i>anai-arrebak</i>	‘a man’s brother(s) and sister(s)’
<i>arriba</i>	‘a man’s sister’	<i>neba</i>	‘a woman’s brother’	<i>neba-arrebak</i>	‘brother(s) and sister(s)’
<i>izeba</i>	‘aunt’	<i>osaba</i>	‘uncle’	<i>osaba-izebak</i>	‘uncle(s) and aunt(s)’
<i>lehengusina</i>	‘female cousin’	<i>lehengusu</i>	‘male cousin’	<i>lehengusu-lehengusinak</i>	‘male and female cousin(s)’
<i>andre</i>	‘woman’	<i>gizon</i>	‘man’	<i>andre-gizonak</i>	‘woman/women and man/men’
<i>emakume</i>	‘woman’	<i>gizon</i>	‘man’	<i>gizon-emakumeak</i>	‘man/men and woman/women’
<i>morroi</i>	‘female servant’	<i>mirabe</i>	‘male servant’	<i>morroi-mirabeak</i>	‘male and female servant(s)’
<i>eraina</i>	‘daughter-in-law’	<i>sui</i>	‘son-in-law’	<i>sui-erainak</i>	‘son(s)-in-law and daughter(s)-in-law’
<i>ama</i>	‘mother’	<i>seme</i>	‘son’	<i>ama-semeak</i>	‘mother(s) and son(s)’

Sources: Hualde & Ortiz de Urbina, 2003, p. 352; Jacobsen, 1982

Table 2. Basque plural compound-formation involving lexically gendered personal nouns

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the plural inflection *-k*, these forms also contain a formal reflex of the definite article (*-a-*). This, however, is visible only in forms whose second component does not end in *-a* (Bendel, 2006, p. 190).

<sup>11</sup> In Basque, there are separate words denoting a woman’s sister (*ahizpa*) and brother (*neba*) and a man’s sister (*arriba*) and brother (*anai*).

## 4.2 Social gender

Superficially speaking, social gender is the only mechanism among the four that suggests a continual rather than strictly binary gender makeup. At closer examination, however, it must be considered a discursive materialization of the most traditional gender stereotypes. If we define it as a covert gender bias stereotypically attached to personal nouns (e.g., *nurse*, *surgeon*), this legitimates the question of why one would have to restrict it to those personal nouns that are indifferent with respect to lexical gender. From a poststructuralist perspective, it would also make sense to apply it to lexically female or male personal nouns, allowing for the linguistic construction of diverse (more masculine or more feminine) femininities and masculinities. Earlier studies using semantic differentials to study connotative meanings in personal nouns clearly point to the fact that female and male occupational terms, for instance, may vary in the degree to which they are perceived as similar to *woman* and *man*, respectively—i.e., some professions may lead to the assignment of stereotypically masculine qualities to a female occupational term and vice versa (see Hellinger, 1990, pp. 101–105). In order to test this more specifically, an explorative survey was conducted at Frankfurt am Main University in June 2006, in which students were asked to rate German personal nouns with respect to whether they represent more feminine or more masculine femininities and masculinities. In total, 63 subjects (34 women and 29 men, most of them in their early twenties) filled in the questionnaire,<sup>12</sup> in which they had to rate personal nouns on a scale from 1 (“strongly male”) to 7 (“strongly female”).<sup>13</sup> This was done with three sets of personal nouns, each consisting of 20 forms: a) lexically female personal nouns, b) lexically male personal nouns and grammatically masculine personal nouns contrasting with female forms in the previous group,<sup>14</sup> and c) lexically gender-neutral personal nouns. Non-native speakers of German were excluded from the study. The results can be read from Tables 3 to 5.

As can be seen in Table 3, a continuum of lexically female personal nouns can be set up ranging from *Soldatin* (‘female soldier’; average 2.57), which is perceived to be most strongly male, up to *Mutter* (‘mother’; average 6.67), which is perceived to be most strongly female. Female and male subjects come up with rather similar ratings. It is remarkable, however, that the two items that are grammatically masculine (*Backfisch* ‘female teenager’ and *Vamp* ‘vamp’) are among the ones that show greater differences be-

<sup>12</sup> Many of the students were participants in an “Introduction to Linguistics” class and can safely be claimed to have only limited linguistic expertise. Other students were approached on campus and can therefore be said to have a mixed academic background.

<sup>13</sup> For the sake of consistency, linguistic social gender is described using the adjectives “female” and “male,” because it represents a semantic rather than grammatical kind of meaning. This contrasts with everyday language use, which would instead show collocations like *feminine men* or *masculine women*. As the latter is also true for German, the instructions in the questionnaire also used the adjectives *maskulin* ‘masculine’ and *feminin* ‘feminine’ to elicit social gender information. The original German wording for questions (1) / (2) / (3) was as follows: “Bitte beurteilen Sie bei den folgenden weiblichen (1) / männlichen (2) / geschlechtsneutralen (3) Personenbezeichnungen auf einer Skala von 1 bis 7, ob diese eher eine (stereotypisch) maskuline oder feminine Form von Weiblichkeit (1) / Form von Männlichkeit (2) / Identität (3) repräsentieren: 1 = stark maskulin; 7 = stark feminin.”

<sup>14</sup> Not all personal nouns tested in this group were lexically male. Some of them were “only” grammatically masculine. But as these were explicitly contrasted with the preceding female set of personal nouns (e.g., *Trommlerin* ‘female drummer’ – *Trommler* ‘drummer.MASC.’), a male-specific interpretation is facilitated. Moreover, it was stated explicitly in the instructions that subjects were to rate “male personal nouns.”

cause men rate them lower in femaleness. Table 4 establishes a similar continuum of lexically male personal nouns ranging from *Mann* ('man'; average 1.25) as most strongly male up to *Tunte* ('fag'; average 5.69) as most strongly female. Table 5 does the same with lexically gender-neutral personal nouns ranging from *Sträfling* ('convict', most strongly male; average 2.08) to *Model* ('model', most strongly female; average 5.74). It is also apparent from this table that grammatically masculine personal nouns tend to cluster towards the male end of the continuum, whereas grammatically feminine personal nouns are more frequent at the female end.

Personal noun [grammatical gender]	Average rating (overall)	Average rating (female/ male subjects)
<i>Soldatin</i> [FEM.] 'female soldier'	2.57	2.68/2.44
<i>Schreinerin</i> [FEM.] 'female carpenter'	2.71	2.82/2.59
<i>Verbrecherin</i> [FEM.] 'female criminal'	3.00	3.00/3.00
<i>Trommlerin</i> [FEM.] 'female drummer'	3.54	3.64/3.40
<i>Bundeskanzlerin</i> [FEM.] 'female chancellor'	3.62	3.88/3.31
<i>Richterin</i> [FEM.] 'female judge'	3.79	3.94/3.61
<i>Professorin</i> [FEM.] 'female professor'	4.24	4.29/4.17
<i>Backfisch</i> [MASC.] 'female teenager'	4.32	4.53/4.04
<i>Sängerin</i> [FEM.] 'female singer'	5.43	5.44/5.41
<i>Vamp</i> [MASC.] 'vamp'	5.48	5.73/5.18
<i>Lesbe</i> [FEM.] 'lesbian'	5.54	5.44/5.66
<i>Friseurin</i> [FEM.] 'female hairdresser'	5.59	5.68/5.48
<i>Flugbegleiterin</i> [FEM.] 'female flight attendant'	5.68	5.62/5.75
<i>Floristin</i> [FEM.] 'female florist'	5.90	5.97/5.81
<i>Ehegattin</i> [FEM.] 'female spouse'	5.95	5.84/6.07
<i>Krankenschwester</i> [FEM.] 'female nurse'	6.06	6.00/6.14
<i>Hausfrau</i> [FEM.] 'housewife'	6.15	6.24/6.04
<i>Mädchen</i> [NEUT.] 'girl'	6.36	6.44/6.26
<i>Frau</i> [FEM.] 'woman'	6.56	6.62/6.50
<i>Mutter</i> [FEM.] 'mother'	6.67	6.66/6.68

Note: 1 = "strongly male," 7 = "strongly female"

Table 3. Social gender ratings for German lexically female personal nouns

This study certainly has its limitations. It concentrates on a rather restricted, homogeneous group of subjects that cannot be considered representative for the entire German speech community. But this is to some extent a negligible concern because social gender is bound to vary considerably even inter-individually. Further studies are certainly needed, especially ones that are not based on a gender language like German in which grammatically masculine personal nouns do not have male-specific lexical status per se. Nevertheless the study clearly points to the fact that lexically female and male personal nouns can be just as much perceived as socially gendered as lexically gender-neutral personal nouns. Biases like these are more difficult to challenge from a linguistic perspec-

tive. Whereas the social gender of lexically gender-neutral personal nouns may manifest itself formally in anaphoric pronouns (*a nurse – she; a surgeon – he*), this is not usually true for social gender in lexically female and male personal nouns, for which lexical gender (*Mutter – sie* ‘mother – she’; *Soldatin – sie* ‘female soldier – she’) or, in gender languages, grammatical gender (e.g., *die Tunte – sie* ‘the fag.FEM. – she’; *das Mädchen – es* ‘the girl.NEUT. – it’) is clearly dominant as far as pronominalization is concerned. The term “covert gender” is therefore even better applied to lexically female and male personal nouns that are additionally socially gendered.

Personal noun [grammatical gender]	Average rating (overall)	Average rating (female/ male subjects)
<i>Mann</i> [MASC.] ‘man’	1.25	1.29/1.21
<i>Vater</i> [MASC.] ‘father’	1.44	1.50/1.38
<i>Soldat</i> [MASC.]* ‘soldier’	1.48	1.43/1.52
<i>Macho</i> [MASC.] ‘macho’	1.48	1.58/1.38
<i>Schreiner</i> [MASC.]* ‘carpenter’	1.79	1.91/1.64
<i>Ehegatte</i> [MASC.]* ‘spouse’	1.82	1.79/1.85
<i>Junge</i> [MASC.] ‘boy’	1.90	2.18/1.59
<i>Verbrecher</i> [MASC.]* ‘criminal’	2.00	1.94/2.07
<i>Bundeskanzler</i> [MASC.]* ‘chancellor’	2.13	2.29/1.93
<i>Richter</i> [MASC.]* ‘judge’	2.22	2.41/2.00
<i>Professor</i> [MASC.]* ‘professor’	2.35	2.48/2.21
<i>Trommler</i> [MASC.]* ‘drummer’	2.44	2.68/2.14
<i>Sänger</i> [MASC.]* ‘singer’	3.21	3.47/2.89
<i>Schwuler</i> [MASC.] ‘gay man’	3.60	3.68/3.50
<i>Hausmann</i> [MASC.] ‘house-husband’	3.65	3.74/3.54
<i>Krankenpfleger</i> [MASC.] ‘male nurse’	3.94	3.97/3.89
<i>Flugbegleiter</i> [MASC.]* ‘flight attendant’	4.18	4.38/3.96
<i>Florist</i> [MASC.]* ‘florist’	4.43	4.65/4.15
<i>Friseur</i> [MASC.]* ‘hairdresser’	4.69	4.79/4.57
<i>Tunte</i> [FEM.] ‘fag’	5.69	5.88/5.46
Notes: * indicates a contrasting masculine form. “Contrasting masculine” refers to grammatically masculine personal nouns whose derived feminine counterpart was presented in the preceding question. As most masculine personal nouns in German are ambiguous between male-specific and generic meanings, this was done to facilitate a male-specific interpretation of the forms. 1 = “strongly male,” 7 = “strongly female”		

Table 4. Social gender ratings for German lexically male / grammatically masculine personal nouns

Personal noun [grammatical gender]	Average rating (overall)	Average rating (female/male subjects)
<i>Sträfling</i> [MASC.] ‘convict’	2.08	2.03/2.14
<i>Geizhals</i> [MASC.] ‘miser’	2.34	2.35/2.32
<i>Parteimitglied</i> [NEUT.] ‘party member’	2.56	2.59/2.51
<i>Dummkopf</i> [MASC.] ‘idiot’	2.87	2.68/3.10
<i>Flüchtling</i> [MASC.] ‘fugitive’	3.15	3.03/3.28
<i>Vormund</i> [MASC.] ‘guardian’	3.22	3.32/3.10
<i>Hauptfigur</i> [FEM.] ‘protagonist’	3.41	3.59/3.21
<i>Koryphäe</i> [FEM.] ‘expert’	3.52	3.59/3.45
<i>Fachkraft</i> [FEM.] ‘skilled worker’	3.52	3.72/3.31
<i>Gast</i> [MASC.] ‘guest’	3.55	3.52/3.59
<i>Person</i> [FEM.] ‘person’	3.63	3.62/3.66
<i>Individuum</i> [NEUT.] ‘individual’	3.73	3.76/3.69
<i>Mensch</i> [MASC.] ‘human being’	3.76	3.79/3.72
<i>Waise</i> [FEM.] ‘orphan’	3.83	3.94/3.69
<i>Fernsehstar</i> [MASC.] ‘TV star’	4.05	4.33/3.72
<i>Nervensäge</i> [FEM.] ‘nag’	4.06	3.97/4.17
<i>Aushilfe</i> [FEM.] ‘temporary worker’	4.06	4.26/3.82
<i>Opfer</i> [NEUT.] ‘victim’	4.43	4.62/4.21
<i>Bedienung</i> [FEM.] ‘waiter’	4.81	4.74/4.90
<i>Model</i> [NEUT.] ‘model’	5.74	5.71/5.79
Note: 1 = “strongly male,” 7 = “strongly female”		

Table 5. Social gender ratings for German lexically gender-neutral personal nouns

One could speculate about a connection between the social gender of lexically gendered personal nouns and their grammatical gender. To test this and in order to supplement the data, subjects were also asked to list terms for feminine men and masculine women at the end of the questionnaire. The results are given in Tables 6 and 7.

Overall many more terms for feminine men (48 types, 112 tokens) were listed than for masculine women (31 types, 84 tokens), which indicates that the former are more easily seen as deviations from normative gender roles and therefore require special terminology. Most of these are clearly dysphemistic, bearing witness to the stigmatization that these masculinities and femininities are still subject to. Feminine masculinities seem to fall into three main groups as far as the listed personal nouns are concerned:

- 1) gay men (e.g., *Schwuchtel*, *Tucke*, *Schwuler*, *Schwulette*),
- 2) weak or powerless men (e.g., *Weichei*, *Warmduscher*, *Memme*, *Heulsuse*), and
- 3) men in traditionally female professions (e.g., *Friseur*, *Putzmann*, *Kosmetiker*, *Kindergärtner*).

<b>Personal noun</b> [grammatical gender]	<b>Total occurrences</b> (male/female subject count)
<i>Schwuchtel</i> [FEM.] ‘poof’	20 (m12/f8)
<i>Transe</i> [FEM.] ‘transvestite’	9 (m3/f6)
<i>Weichei</i> [NEUT.] ‘wimp’	9 (m3/f6)
<i>Tucke</i> [FEM.] ‘fag’	7 (m2/f5)
<i>Warmduscher</i> [MASC.] ‘mollycoddle’	3 (m1/f2)
<i>Memme</i> [FEM.] ‘sissy’	3 (m1/f2)
<i>Mädchen</i> [NEUT.] ‘girl’	3 (m2/f1)
<i>Sissi/Sissy</i> [FEM.] <sup>15</sup> ‘sissy’	3 (m2/f1)
<i>Friseur</i> [MASC.] ‘hairdresser’	3 (m1/f2)
<i>Transvestit</i> [MASC.] ‘transvestite’	3 (m0/f3)
<i>Schwuler</i> [MASC.] ‘gay man’	2 (m0/f2)
<i>Schwulette</i> [FEM.] ‘gay man’	2 (m1/f1)
<i>Schlampe</i> [FEM.] ‘slut’	2 (m1/f1)
<i>Hure</i> [FEM.] ‘whore’	2 (m1/f1)
<i>Tussi</i> [FEM.] ‘bimbo’	2 (m1/f1)
<i>Metrosexueller</i> [MASC.] ‘metrosexual’	2 (m0/f2)
<i>Heulsuse</i> [FEM.] ‘cry-baby’	2 (m1/f1)
<i>Mimose</i> [FEM.] ‘wuss’	2 (m1/f1)
<i>Putzmann</i> [MASC.] ‘male cleaner’	2 (m1/f1)
<i>Kosmetiker</i> [MASC.] ‘cosmetician’	2 (m1/f1)
<i>Waschlappen</i> [MASC.] ‘wimp’	2 (m0/f2)
<b>Named only once (by women):</b>	<b>Named only once (by men):</b>
<i>Schönling</i> [MASC.] ‘pansy’	<i>Fummeltrine</i> [FEM.] ‘fag’
<i>Milchbubi</i> [MASC.] ‘mama’s boy’	<i>Mädel</i> [NEUT.] ‘girl’
<i>Muttersöhnchen</i> [NEUT.] ‘mama’s boy’	<i>Fotze</i> [FEM.] lit. ‘pussy’
<i>Mamasöhnchen</i> [NEUT.] ‘mama’s boy’	<i>Hinterlader</i> [MASC.] lit. ‘breech-loader’
<i>Softie</i> [MASC.] ‘softie’	<i>Homo</i> [MASC.] ‘homo(sexual)’
<i>Schwächling</i> [MASC.] ‘weakling’	<i>Gärtner</i> [MASC.] ‘gardener’
<i>Schlappschwanz</i> [MASC.] ‘weenie’	<i>Kindergärtner</i> [MASC.] ‘nursery teacher’
<i>Tiffy</i> [FEM.] (female character from <i>Sesame Street</i> )	
<i>Miststück</i> [NEUT.] ‘bitch’	
<i>Trulla</i> [FEM.] ‘broad’	
<i>Schwuli</i> [MASC.] ‘gay man’	
<i>Rockstar</i> [MASC.] ‘rock star’	
<i>Erzieher</i> [MASC.] ‘educator’	
<i>Sahnehäubchen</i> [NEUT.] lit. ‘cream in one’s coffee’	
<i>Wattebäuschchen</i> [NEUT.] lit. ‘dabber’	
<i>Pantoffelheld</i> [MASC.] ‘henpecked husband’	
<i>Teekännchen</i> [NEUT.] lit. ‘small teapot’	
<i>Homo-Zicke</i> [FEM.] ‘homo-bitch’	
<i>Kindermann</i> [MASC.] ‘male nanny’	
<i>Haushälter</i> [MASC.] ‘male housekeeper’	

Table 6. German personal nouns denoting feminine men

<sup>15</sup> The question enabled subjects also to specify non-German terms, but they were also asked to specify the language of origin for each term. The instances of *Sissy/Sissi* included here are only those that were declared as German by the participants and must be considered German anglicisms.

<b>Personal noun</b> [grammatical gender]	<b>Total occurrences</b> (male/female subject count)
<i>Mann(s)weib</i> [NEUT.] ‘virago’	30 (m12/f18)
<i>Lesbe</i> [FEM.] ‘lesbian’	12 (m3/f9)
<i>Kampflesbe</i> [FEM.] ‘bull dyke’	8 (m3/f5)
<i>Emanze</i> [FEM.] ‘women’s libber’	4 (m2/f2)
<i>Amazonen</i> [FEM.] ‘amazon’	2 (m2/f0)
<i>Wuchtbrumme</i> [FEM.] ‘burly woman’	2 (m1/f1)
<i>(Kfz-)Mechanikerin</i> [FEM.] ‘female (motor) mechanic’	2 (m1/f1)
<b>Named only once (by women):</b>	<b>Named only once (by men):</b>
<i>Würfellesbe</i> [FEM.] lit. ‘dice lesbian’	<i>Drache</i> [MASC.] ‘dragon’
<i>Kraftmeier</i> [MASC.] ‘bruiser’	<i>Domina</i> [FEM.] ‘dominatrix’
<i>Müllfrau</i> [FEM.] ‘dustwoman’	<i>Brauereigaul</i> [MASC.] lit. ‘brewery’s hack’
<i>Kampfweib</i> [NEUT.] lit. ‘fightwoman’	<i>Bäuerin</i> [FEM.] ‘female farmer’
<i>Kampfemanze</i> [FEM.] lit. ‘fighting women’s libber’	<i>Chefin</i> [FEM.] ‘female boss’
<i>Funtenweib</i> [NEUT.] (meaning unclear)	<i>Feministin</i> [FEM.] ‘female feminist’
<i>Rottweiler</i> [MASC.] ‘Rottweiler’	<i>Sportlerin</i> [FEM.] ‘sportswoman’
<i>Polizistin</i> [FEM.] ‘policewoman’	<i>Gewichtheberin</i> [FEM.] ‘female weightlifter’
<i>Feuerwehrfrau</i> [FEM.] ‘firewoman’	<i>Postfrau</i> [FEM.] ‘postwoman’
<i>Schreinerin</i> [FEM.] ‘female carpenter’	
<i>Gärtnerin</i> [FEM.] ‘female gardener’	
<i>Boxerin</i> [FEM.] ‘female boxer’	
<i>Xanthippe</i> [FEM.] ‘termagant’	
<i>Karrieregirl</i> [NEUT.] ‘career girl’	
<i>Blaustrumpf</i> [MASC.] lit. ‘bluestocking’	

Table 7. German personal nouns denoting masculine women

It is obvious from the data that some subjects took this exercise to be a matter of referential gender because some lexically female personal nouns were also named that may serve to construct feminine masculinities when applied to men (e.g., *Mädchen*, *Tussi*, *Mädel*, *Hure*, *Schlampe*). Returning to the question of whether the social gender of lexically male personal nouns is related to grammatical gender, one finds that indeed many of the listed nouns are grammatically feminine: *Schwuchtel*, *Transe*, *Tucke*, *Memme*, *Sissi/Sissy*, *Schwulette*, *Schlampe*, *Hure*, *Tussi*, *Heulsuse*, *Mimose* (to name the ones that were mentioned more than once).

The personal nouns listed for masculine femininities also show this trend, but it is much weaker and can be detected exclusively among the terms that were listed only once. Among these the following grammatically masculine forms can be found: *Drache*, *Brauereigaul*, *Kraftmeier*, *Rottweiler*, *Blaustrumpf*. This pattern is also documented in the material of Skinner’s (1997) German dictionary of terms for lesbians and gay men, which even carries a grammatically masculine synonym for lesbian in its title: *kesser Vater* (‘pert father’). Overall a mirror image evolves concerning the groups that the female terms listed belong to: masculine women are mainly constructed as

- 1) lesbians (e.g., *Lesbe*, *Kampflesbe*),
- 2) strong, dominant or pugnacious women (e.g., *Domina*, *Wuchtbrumme*, *Amazone*, *Kampfemanze*), or
- 3) women in traditionally male professions (e.g., *Boxerin*, *Kfz-Mechanikerin*, *Polizistin*, *Feuerwehrfrau*).

### 4.3 Grammatical gender

Grammatical gender is sometimes considered a straitjacket that forces speakers to specify gender even in situations in which they would prefer not to (for whatever reason). A notorious example is Hebrew, which is a highly inflected language with grammatical gender distinctions in pronominal, verbal, prepositional, and adjectival forms (Tobin, 2001). Grammatical gender can usefully be employed for gender deconstruction where deviances from the tendency of “feminine equals female” and “masculine equals male” can be found. A critical point is that grammatical gender systems are not homogeneous, i.e., not all of them show a masculine-feminine binarism. Most North Germanic languages, for example, possess a distinction between neuter and uter (also called “common gender”), with originally masculine and feminine forms historically falling together in the latter class. Languages may even synchronically show considerable variation in this respect. Within the Dutch speech community, for example, younger speakers of Netherlands Dutch tend to make no masculine-feminine distinction (“common gender”), whereas Belgian speakers and older speakers of Netherlands Dutch still practice it because they use more conservative varieties (Gerritsen, 2002). The very fact that grammatical gender classes are subject to processes of language change contests the notion that they are inextricably linked to a “natural” binary female-male classification. Furthermore, masculines and feminines can develop subclasses that are not relevant for the linguistic construction of gender. This is true, for instance, for Croatian, in which masculines display different accusative forms depending on whether a lexeme denotes an animate or inanimate concept.<sup>16</sup> But Croatian is also remarkable because it shows a significant number of personal nouns that eschew a strictly binary grammatical gender representation as exclusively masculine or feminine. The dominant pattern for Croatian personal nouns is as follows: *a*-stem—grammatically feminine—lexically female; *o*-stem—grammatically masculine—lexically male (Hentschel, 2003, pp. 289–291; Sims, 2005, pp. 205–206; see Tables 8 and 9).

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	<i>žen-a</i>	<i>žen-e</i>
Genitive	<i>žen-e</i>	<i>žen-a</i>
Dative	<i>žen-i</i>	<i>žen-ama</i>
Accusative	<i>žen-u</i>	<i>žen-e</i>
Locative	<i>žen-i</i>	<i>žen-ama</i>
Instrumental	<i>žen-om</i>	<i>žen-ama</i>

Table 8. Declension of feminine *a*-stem: *žena* (‘woman’)

<sup>16</sup> For example: *student-a* ‘student.MASC.ACC.’ vs. *stol-o* ‘table.MASC.ACC.’. Although the discussion throughout this article will deal explicitly with Croatian, most gender-relevant phenomena are similar in Bosnian, Montenegrin, and Serbian, which are very closely related.

Case	Singular	Plural
Nominative	<i>muškarac</i>	<i>muškarc-i</i>
Genitive	<i>muškarc-a</i>	<i>muškarac-a</i>
Dative	<i>muškarc-u</i>	<i>muškarc-ima</i>
Accusative	<i>muškarc-a</i>	<i>muškarc-e</i>
Locative	<i>muškarc-u</i>	<i>muškarc-ima</i>
Instrumental	<i>muškarc-em</i>	<i>muškarc-ima</i>

Table 9. Declension of masculine *o*-stem: *muškarac* ('man')

However, Croatian also possesses personal nouns, such as *mladoženja* ('bridegroom') that are *a*-stems, i.e., inflected like grammatically feminine nouns, and at the same time show masculine agreement in their satellite forms (see 1c). The latter personal nouns, widely known as "masculine *a*-stems," are anything but rare in Croatian. Sims (2005, p. 211), for instance, identifies 336 of them in a Croatian dictionary.<sup>17</sup> Contrary to the majority of *a*-stem personal nouns, these are not lexically female. Some of them are lexically male (and often have derived lexically female counterparts; e.g., *kolega* 'male colleague', *kolegica* 'female colleague'; *izdajica* 'male traitor', *izdajnica* 'female traitor'). Others are lexically gender-neutral (and often socially male; see Table 10). As will become clear somewhat later in the discussion, the term "masculine *a*-stems" clearly is a misnomer because to designate this group of personal nouns as grammatically masculine is overly simplistic.

## (1) Agreement patterns in Croatian noun phrases headed by personal nouns

- a. *ovaj muškarac* 'this.MASC. man.O-STEM'
- b. *ova žena* 'this.FEM. woman.A-STEM'
- c. *ovaj mladoženja* 'this.MASC. bridegroom.A-STEM'

Prescriptive grammar dictates that these personal nouns must have masculine agreement in the singular and feminine agreement in the plural, regardless of whether they are lexically male or gender-neutral (Silić & Pranjković, 2005, p. 297; Sims, 2005, p. 207), as shown in (2). Note that the singular sentence can refer only to men, whereas the plural sentence may refer to female or male drunkards or a mixed-sex group. Normative grammar, as a consequence, renders it impossible to refer to a female drunkard in a grammatically correct way because feminine agreement is ruled out in the singular. However, Sims (2005, p. 208) demonstrates that in actual speech all kinds of agreement can be found: singular masculine, singular feminine, plural masculine, plural feminine, and even combined feminine and masculine in the same phrase or sentence (see also Corbett, 1991, p. 239). (Non-normative) Feminine agreement in the singular can occur only with lexically gender-neutral "masculine *a*-stems" that refer to women (female referential gender), as in *Ova pijanica je previše popila* 'this.FEM. drunkard has drunk.FEM. too much'; see also Kunzmann-Müller, 2002, p. 228). In the plural, (non-normative) masculine agreement is also occasionally found and is then

<sup>17</sup> In Serbian, this number is even higher because it has many personal nouns formed with the suffix *-ista* which do not exist in Croatian (e.g., *lingvista* 'linguist', *artista* 'artist').

due to lexical gender for the lexically male, and referential gender for the lexically gender-neutral “masculine *a*-stems.”

<b>Lexically male <i>a</i>-stem personal nouns of Croatian</b>
<i>buregdžija</i> ‘male burek maker/seller’, <i>drvodjelja</i> ‘male carpenter’, <i>drvosječa</i> ‘male woodcutter’, <i>gazda</i> ‘landlord’, <i>izdajica</i> ‘male traitor’, <i>kolega</i> ‘male colleague’, <i>listonoša</i> ‘mailman’, <i>mladoženja</i> ‘bridegroom’, <i>papa</i> ‘pope’, <i>Sarajlija</i> ‘male inhabitant of Sarajevo’, <i>sluga</i> ‘male servant’, <i>starješina</i> ‘male principal’, <i>tata</i> ‘daddy’, <i>ubojica</i> ‘male murderer’, <i>vodonoša</i> ‘male water bearer’, <i>vođa</i> ‘male leader’, <i>vojskovođa</i> ‘male military leader’, <i>vojvoda</i> ‘duke’
<b>Lexically gender-neutral <i>a</i>-stem personal nouns of Croatian</b>
<i>bubalica</i> ‘geek’, <i>budala</i> ‘fool’, <i>izbjeglica</i> ‘refugee’, <i>izjelica</i> ‘eater’, <i>kukavica</i> ‘coward’, <i>luda</i> ‘simpleton’, <i>mušterija</i> ‘customer’, <i>neplatiša</i> ‘defaulter’, <i>neznalica</i> ‘ignoramus’, <i>pijanica</i> ‘drunkard’, <i>pričalica</i> ‘chatterbox’, <i>pristaša</i> ‘follower’, <i>sanjalica</i> ‘dreamer’, <i>skitnica</i> ‘vagabond’, <i>spavalica</i> ‘sleepyhead’, <i>svađalica</i> ‘arguer’, <i>šaljivčina</i> ‘jester’, <i>tvrdica</i> ‘thrifty person’, <i>ulizica</i> ‘sycophant’, <i>varalica</i> ‘imposter’, <i>zloća</i> ‘evil person’
Sources: Kunzmann-Müller, 2002; Sims, 2005

Table 10. Croatian “masculine *a*-stems”

(2) Normative agreement patterns of Croatian “masculine *a*-stems”

- a. *Ov-aj pijanic-a je previše popi-o.*  
this.MASC. drunkard.A-STEM AUX too much drunk.MASC.  
‘This male drunkard has drunk too much.’
- b. *Ov-e pijanic-e su previše popi-le.*  
these.FEM. drunkards.A-STEM AUX too much drunk.FEM.  
‘These drunkards have drunk too much.’

The picture one gets from all this is much more complex than a simply binary gender representation and bears witness to a discursive gender struggle in the use of one and the same personal noun. Due to the double function of grammatical gender as a) a morphological means of reference tracking and b) an index of extralinguistic gender, one could argue that Croatian “masculine *a*-stems” are a site of competing discourses. Corbett (1991, p. 225) deals with these “masculine *a*-stems” under the heading “hybrid nouns” and defines them as nouns that show diverging agreement patterns due to a conflict between syntactic and semantic agreement. Although “semantic” seems to point in the direction of lexical gender, the way Corbett uses it is more in accordance with referential gender. In many cases, lexical and referential gender will correspond, but this does not legitimate a conflation of the two concepts. As an illustration, Corbett (1991, pp. 227–228) uses the German noun *Mädchen* ‘girl’, which is grammatically neuter (*das Mädchen* < *es*), lexically female, and referentially, in most contexts, female (*das Mädchen* < *sie*). For Croatian “masculine *a*-stems,” this would mean that masculine agreement (normatively in the singular only) is due to male lexical and/or referential gender and feminine agreement (normatively in the plural only) is syntactically motivated

(Corbett, 1991, p. 232).<sup>18</sup> Feminine *a*-stem and masculine *o*-stem personal nouns show relatively simple (binary) agreement patterns, as shown in Figure 1.

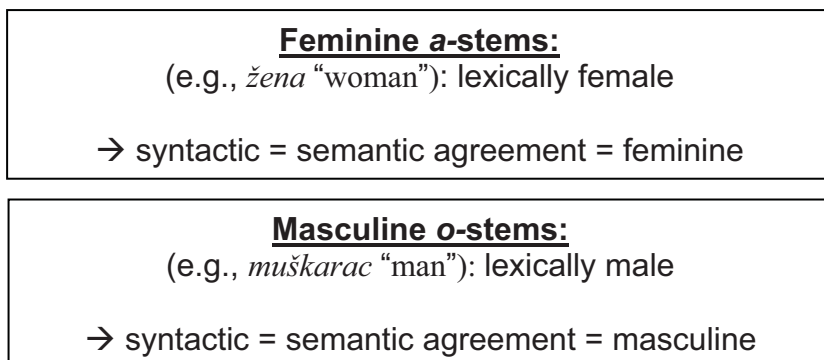


Figure 1. Agreement patterns for Croatian personal nouns: feminine *a*-stems and masculine *o*-stems

For “masculine *a*-stems,” the picture is somewhat more complex (Figure 2). Looking at the singular forms, it turns out that the two subgroups identified above relate to the agreement pattern in different ways. For the lexically male forms, masculine agreement would have to be interpreted as a consequence of lexical gender. For the lexically gender-neutral forms, masculine agreement can only be a matter of referential gender. Moreover, for the lexically gender-neutral forms, feminine agreement (against normative grammar) cannot automatically be assigned a syntactic function because it might also be due to referential gender. One might be tempted to explain the prescription of masculine agreement in the singular for these lexically gender-neutral personal nouns by their male social gender (e.g., *pijanica* ‘drunkard’), but not all of them are clearly socially male (compare, e.g., *mušterija* ‘customer’ or *pričalica* ‘chatterbox’). Therefore normative grammar could even be said to impose masculine grammatical gender on these forms, which here is neither semantically nor syntactically motivated. Coming to the plural forms, the prescribed feminine agreement can only be seen as syntactically motivated for the lexically male forms, whereas for the lexically gender-neutral set, referential gender might also play a role. (Non-normative) Masculine agreement in the plural is semantically motivated—for the lexically male forms due to lexical gender and for the lexically gender-neutral forms due to referential gender.

<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Corbett (1991, p. 226) relates this alternation between feminine and masculine agreement to an agreement hierarchy, in which the likelihood of semantic (in this case masculine) agreement increases steadily from attributive to predicative satellite forms to relative pronouns and finally to personal pronouns, which, as personal deictics, show the highest likelihood of semantic (i.e. referentially motivated) agreement.

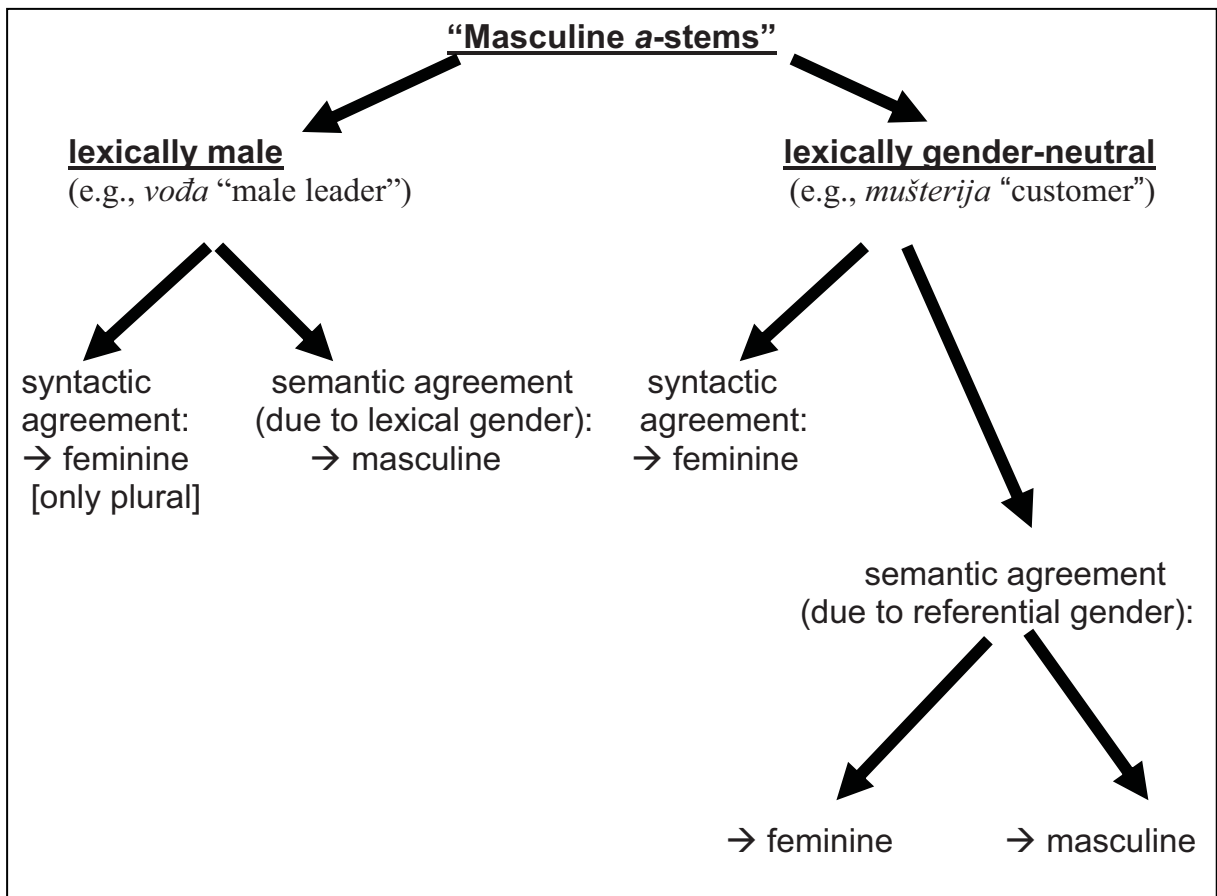


Figure 2. Agreement patterns for Croatian personal nouns: “masculine *a*-stems”

#### 4.3 Referential gender

Referential gender certainly is the mechanism that can be exploited most fruitfully for gender deconstruction because it enables researchers to describe gender constructions that clash with hegemonic norms of gender representation. Context-dependency locates referential gender in the realm of pragmatics. Where lexical and grammatical gender over wide stretches support a binary conceptualization of gender, referential gender is able to deal with gender crossing, but also with contextual gender disambiguation of lexically gender-neutral forms. Nevertheless referential gender also poses a serious problem for poststructuralist linguistics that needs to be addressed first. The concept of reference seems to imply an essentialist existence independent of discursive formation. This is exactly what has been questioned by poststructuralist linguistics, which sees language as a means of discursive construction rather than reality reflection. This problem has been discussed by Hornscheidt (2006), who suggests that what personal nouns do is an act not of reference, but of “appellation” (i.e., construction through naming). Viewed from this perspective, the usage of lexically, socially and grammatically gendered personal nouns in actual language would qualify as appellative. The three structural categories rely on different performative mechanisms. Whereas lexical gender exploits the directly gendering performativity of personal nouns, social gender relies on the indirectly gendering performativity of gendered stereotypes. Grammatical gender builds on a discursive materialization that has ultimately led to the association of the masculine with maleness and

the feminine with femaleness. Referential gender differs considerably from the other three mechanisms in that it is not appellative per se. Strictly speaking, it is not attached to the personal noun in question, but to an extralinguistic materiality. I would like to argue, however, that this materiality is not necessarily to be conceptualized as a pre-discursive fact. Referential gender acknowledges the performative history that bodies have been subjected to in the past. To illustrate this with an example discussed before, when we describe the referential gender of *Herr* in *Sie war nicht Herr ihrer Sinne* as female, we acknowledge that the kind of body that is being constructed here has gone through a performative history in which it has to a great extent been discursively constructed as female. Bodies are often linguistically constructed as gendered bodies, starting immediately at birth with performative utterances such as *It's a girl/boy* and continuing throughout life, for example as *woman/man, wife/husband, nurse/surgeon, der Freund/die Freundin* (German 'friend.MASC./' 'friend.FEM. '), *she/he*, etc. In other words, referential gender invokes the bulk of gendering work that lexical, social, and grammatical gender have performed in the past. As a consequence, referential gender does indeed "refer" to a materiality, but this materiality is neither extralinguistic nor a pre-discursive fact. It is the result of performative sedimentation.

Linguistic gender-crossing is attested especially for gay male and, to a lesser extent, lesbian communities (see, e.g., Johnsen, 2001; Livia, 2001, pp. 185–192). In gay male contexts, this mainly involves the use of lexically female personal nouns (such as *sister, queen*) and pronouns to refer to (mostly homosexual) men, which is part and parcel in Polari, an originally secret gay variety of British English (Baker, 2002). Livia (2001, p. 189) states that lesbians may use masculine French forms (like *mon chéri* or *je suis ton petit mec*) in in-group talk and that lesbian linguistic gender-crossing may be rarer because the masculine is often perceived to be generic and is less likely to be noticed as an instance of gender-crossing (which might in turn index a lesbian identity). Studies of the linguistic practices of so-called "third genders" are also illuminative in this respect (e.g., Hall, 2002, on Hindi-speaking *hijras* in India). One example is the *travestis* in Brazil as studied by Borba & Ostermann (2007). *Travestis* are physically male transgender people who adhere to feminine manners of identity construction. With respect to referential gender, it is interesting to note that even in cases of in-group references to *travestis* the grammatical gender system of Portuguese is exploited to index diverse versions of "travestility." When talking about their positively evaluated present self or other *travestis* for whom they feel solidarity, *travestis* use feminine grammatical gender (*a travesti*), which is in line with other hegemonically female practices they adopt. However, they also use masculine gender (*o travesti*) to talk about themselves and other *travestis*, namely in contexts in which they want to distance themselves from these constructed identities, e.g., when talking about their identities in their pre-*travesti* times or in relation to their family, when reporting out-group talk about *travesties*, or when distinguishing themselves from other *travestis* they do not wish to be associated with. In other words, even though the referents are always *travestis*, it is not always the same grammatical gender that is used to refer to them. Linguistic cross-gendering may also come in more subtle shades that are not restricted to gay or third-gender subcultures, for instance when referential gender clashes with social gender (e.g., personal nouns like *surgeon* and *nurse* may be used to refer to women and men, respectively, in a specific context), but these can also be said to deconstruct hegemonic gender discourses.

Finally, the usage of gender-neutral forms to refer to women and men is a way to avoid a restrictive binary gender construction because it eschews a binary construction of the

body as gendered. Gender neutralization has been a strategy recommended by feminist linguists to challenge mainly male linguistic gender bias. Examples in English include the replacement of male generics through gender-neutral forms (e.g., *human being* instead of generic *man*, singular *they* instead of generic *he*). This may be less relevant as far as feminist political activism is concerned, which might instead suggest gender splitting and feminization (e.g., *women and men* instead of generic *man*, *he or she* instead of generic *he*) as strategies to make women linguistically more visible (especially in gender languages, where neutralization is much harder to achieve). But compared to this, gender neutralization has the benefit of not promoting gender binarism, which is often seen as the basis on which heteronormativity is built. Even if this does not challenge hegemonic gender constructions, it at least does not actively support them and therefore also has a deconstructionist value (cf. Hornscheidt, 1998).

##### 5. Gendered linguistic structures and performative materialization

As demonstrated in the previous sections, none of the structural categories relevant for linguistic gender representation is perfectly binary. Instead, one finds a certain degree of fissures, leakage, and ambiguity, even though all of them—lexical, social, grammatical, and referential gender—ultimately build on gender binarism. The fact that several of these categories may be of importance for a given personal noun and may not show a “neat” correspondence is another de-stabilizing force. Despite these inconsistencies, one has to acknowledge that gender binarism in linguistic representation is anything but absent. This can be conceptualized as a matter of performatively achieved, discursive formation. In other words, all four mechanisms have the power to construct gender because of the role they have played in previous linguistic performances of gender. This performative history makes them powerful gender indexes (Butler, 1993) and beyond that ensures that they will continue to be used as mechanisms of felicitous gender construction in the foreseeable future. Gendered personal nouns can therefore be linked to a row of other means of linguistic gender construction, such as pronouns, body-part vocabulary, or stereotypically genderlectal features (see Motschenbacher, 2007; in press). An uncritical adoption of the strictly binary conceptualization of these mechanisms in academic research supports further materialization of gender binarism. This is a problem the current article has taken issue with.

If the linguistic mechanisms of gender construction are a matter of performative history, it should be possible to retrieve at least parts of that history that are signposts on the way to increasing discursive materialization. With respect to grammatical gender, this is relatively easy because, as Baron notes,

What is important is that although linguistic gender may originally have had very little to do with sex, three nominal categories did arise in the Indo-European languages, and they were assigned names that do reflect natural gender by Greek grammarians who saw language as a transcription of life. The assignment of these names, masculine, feminine, and neuter, called up in the minds of language speculators our too-often unquestioned assumptions about the qualities of masculinity and femininity, and this in turn has greatly influenced the study of linguistic gender (Baron, 1986, pp. 108–109).

Baron here describes a process in which the nominal classification system of grammatical gender is subjected to what could be termed genderization—i.e., a connection is established between these noun classes and sex, explicitly calling them masculine, feminine, and neuter. Such “sexualistic” theorizations of grammatical gender are widely attested in history, not just for the Greeks (Protagoras) as mentioned above, but also for the Romans (Priscianus) and medieval times (Bußmann, 1995, pp. 124–125; Weber, 1999, p. 496–497; see also Curzan, 1999). They conceive of grammatical gender as a grammatical reflection of the biological sex distinction—i.e., sex is treated as a pre-existent category that was later on extended to inanimate concepts. Many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars embraced this line of thinking, most notoriously among them the German linguist Jacob Grimm, who used to explain the grammatical gender of inanimate concepts through metaphorization of their inherent similarity to femininity and masculinity, e.g., German *die Hand* ‘hand’ being grammatically feminine due to its (supposedly) inherent passivity and smallness compared to *der Fuß* ‘foot’, which is grammatically masculine (Leiss, 1994; Bußmann, 1995). Without a doubt, this is a notion most contemporary linguists would dispute, but it is still a dominant discourse that very much prevails today (especially outside linguistics). Upon closer examination, these theorizations become suspect, not just because sex can be said to be of relevance for only a relatively small subgroup of the nominal lexicon (personal nouns and, to a lesser degree, animal names). Even among Grimm’s contemporaries, dissenting voices existed, but these have not influenced later research to the same extent. Karl Brugmann explicitly set out to demonstrate that grammatical gender was there first and that its function of expressing sex is only a secondary development (Bußmann, 1995, p. 124). As Weber (1999, p. 499) points out, formal-grammatical theories of gender would not accept that the grammatical expression of sex is the main function of gender. Instead it is more likely that grammatical gender used to serve a grammatical function that is no longer evident today and that the expression of sex filled the functional gap after this function had become opaque. Weber (1999, pp. 501–506) further demonstrates that the lost original grammatical function may have been that of a “nominal aspect”—i.e., a particularizing versus non-particularizing perspectivization of a quantity (similar to count noun vs. mass noun). Even more significantly, the dominant sexualized discourse on grammatical gender seems to be a critical factor in language change and language reform. Linguistic developments of regularization have been discussed as instances of analogical language change. These kinds of development may also affect gender-relevant linguistic features. For these, regularization generally seems to move into the direction of a more clear-cut gender binarism. Coming back to grammatical gender in Croatian, Sims (2005, pp. 206–207) detects a trend in informal language use to inflect originally “masculine *a*-stems” in accordance with *o*-stem inflectional morphology.<sup>19</sup> Especially for the male-specific “masculine *a*-stems,” this boils down to an analogical change in which the dominant principle of “masculine equals male” is applied to cases in which it did not originally hold. This results in a loss of complexity in the conceptualization of gender. After all, this is a trend that has also been demonstrated for other Slavic languages such as Czech, Polish, and Belarusian, and therefore points to a more fundamental process. It is, of course, telling that language structure has to undergo quite a high degree of change in order to be made to conform to dominant binary gender discourses. Seen from that perspective, it becomes impossi-

<sup>19</sup> Sims works with data from Split, where mainly the Čakavian dialect (vs. the Croatian standard dialect Štokavian) is spoken. She finds that *o*-stem forms are perceived to be uneducated and are first and foremost used with words that occur less frequently (Sims, 2005, pp. 210–215).

ble to see grammatical gender as a reflection of natural gender. However, sexualizing approaches to grammatical gender are anything but absent in contemporary linguistics. A recent example is provided in a study by Eddington & Hualde (2008), which exceeds a mere equalization of grammatically feminine/masculine with femaleness/maleness. This is even more problematic, since the study in question does not cover personal nouns but rather nouns denoting inanimate concepts. A sexualized discourse is here enforced by designating as “hermaphroditic nouns” those Spanish nouns that end in *-a* (usually an index of feminine grammatical gender), that are considered to be masculine by normative grammar, but that may show grammatically masculine and feminine satellite forms in actual usage (e.g., *el.MASC. abundante agua fría.FEM.* ‘abundant cold water’). Such designation likens them to a gender-ambiguous human body. In a similar vein, Eddington & Hualde (2008, p. 16) call Spanish nouns that end in *-a* and invariably trigger grammatically masculine agreement (such as *problema* ‘problem’) “transvestite nouns,” indicating that they behave like people of a certain sex that adopt mannerisms stereotypically connected to the other sex.

Lexical gender can safely be considered the most highly sedimented form of linguistic gender construction. Despite this high degree of discursive stabilization, the process of materialization is still well underway. Sticking to Croatian, for example, one can also spot a trend of regularization as far as lexical gender is concerned. As Kunzmann-Müller (2002, p. 93) points out, there is a tendency to create more female derivational nouns based on grammatically masculine personal nouns (e.g., *inženjer < inženjerka* ‘female engineer’; *programer < programerka* ‘female programmer’). On the one hand, this results in an increasing number of lexically female personal nouns. On the other hand, this pushes masculine personal nouns semantically further in the direction of male lexical gender—a trend that has been documented for many gender languages for which feminist linguistics has supported the regular coinage of female personal nouns through derivation (at least where the languages in question possess adequate morphological means, such as in German).

Social gender also is the result of a performative history and is anything but fixed. There are, for instance, personal nouns that have gone through a social gender switch. An example is *secretary*, which nowadays has female social gender, but used to have male social gender up to the nineteenth century. This example is exceptional with respect to the speed with which this discursive shift has taken place.

The discursive sedimentation of mechanisms of linguistic gender construction can be seen as one component of a larger discursive process, namely the materialization of languages as a whole (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). This phenomenon has been discussed by Hopper (1998) under the title “emergent grammar” (as opposed to what he calls “a-priori grammar”). Hopper questions that language should be theorized in a structuralist sense as a system of signs and proposes that the formation of a language takes place performatively through ongoing repetition and imitation of communicative acts that finally lead to sedimentation of those communicative behaviors that have proven to remain in common usage. Any attempt at describing linguistic systematicity must therefore be treated like a perspectivizing filter imposed on actual language use that declares some communicative behaviors as regular and deviating behaviors as “exceptions.” What is widely known as “grammar” is therefore a collective term for categories that have sedimented through repeated occurrences.

## 6. Conclusion

The structural analyses provided here exemplify that a typological approach to language can be illuminating also from a poststructuralist point of view. However, using structural categories for deconstructivist aims can only work if it is done with a sufficient degree of self-reflexivity. Researchers may, of course, conceptualize data in accordance with these hegemonic descriptive categories, but they should also pay attention to the limitations these categories have and directly address them. By doing so, they can avoid further stabilization of dominant academic discourses and foster alternative conceptualizations, acknowledging that all research approaches are discursively mediated, have to rely on categories (of whichever kind) and therefore present us with just one of many possible pictures we might get of a research object. Talking more specifically about language and gender research, critically reflecting on lexical, social, grammatical, and referential gender as mechanisms of linguistic gender construction helps question the dominant discourse of gender binarism, to which much of today's academic work is subject. It also reveals that the dichotomy between natural gender and grammatical gender languages is too simplistic despite its being the dominant explanatory model in foreign language teaching (and beyond). Deconstructing these binarisms can be achieved, for instance, through a scrutinizing look at the categories themselves or through setting up "problematic," incoherent relations between as well as within these categories. Another useful strategy is exposing linguistic gender categories as a result of performative sedimentation, which considerably contributes to their de-naturalization. More research needs to be done along these lines, especially on non-European languages that show discursive formations that may be even more useful for gender-deconstructionist purposes. The end of this exploratory article therefore represents a plea for a greater re-integration of structural approaches into (poststructuralist) language and gender research.

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