

## Sex, Gender, and Noun Classes<sup>1</sup>

- Three distinct concepts:

- (i) *Biological Sex*: Male vs. Female
- (ii) *Grammatical Gender*: Masculine vs. Feminine
- (iii) *Noun Class*: /-o/ suffix vs. /-a/ suffix vs -∅ suffix, etc.

### 1. Gender and Noun Class

- (1) **Noun Classes:**
  - o      hij-o ‘son’
  - a      hij-a ‘daughter’
  - ∅      padre ‘father’ (note the final *e* is epenthetic)
  - mujer ‘woman’
  - others (-*u*, -*i*, non-epenthetic -*e* ...)

### Regular Cases

#### *‘Inner Core’*

- (2) masculine → -o class
- (3) feminine → -a class

- (4) *masculine*                      *feminine*
- hijo    ‘son’                      hija    ‘daughter’
- libro   ‘book’                      mesa   ‘table’
- brazo   ‘arm’                      pierna ‘leg’

#### *‘Outer Core’*

- (5) masculine, feminine → ∅-class
- (6) *masculine*                      *feminine*
- padre   ‘father’                      madre   ‘mother’
- árbol   ‘tree’                      corriente ‘current’
- capital ‘capital (investment)’    capital   ‘capital (city)’

There are about twice as many inner core nouns than outer core nouns.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Harris, J. (1991) “The Exponence of Gender in Spanish,” *Linguistic Inquiry*, 22.1, pp. 27-62.

**Irregular Residue**(7) *masculine**feminine*

problema	‘problem’	mano	‘hand’
día	‘day’	tribu	‘tribe’ (-u class)
idioma	‘language’	metrópoli	‘metropolis’ (-i class)

- The class of irregular residue is *much* smaller than the regular classes (The largest irregular subclass are masculine -a class nouns - about 600).
- Loan words are treated as regular.
- Irregular residue words sometimes regularize, but not vice versa:

(8) *la tribu* > *el tribo* (in Southwestern US)  
*el idioma* > *la idioma* (in some dialects)

**2. Sex and Gender: the Mating Problem**

- Human nouns and all adjectives exhibit ‘mated pairs’; that is, they can be either masculine or feminine.
- For human nouns this is because usually the following rule holds:

(9) male → masculine  
female → feminine

For adjectives this is because an adjective agrees in gender with the noun it modifies:

(10) noun<sub>[α gender]</sub> adjective → noun<sub>[α gender]</sub> adjective<sub>[α gender]</sub>

**(11) Possible Pairs:**

a. -o ~ -a

**Human Nouns***masculine**feminine*

chico	chica	‘kid’
secretario	secretaria	‘secretary’
cocinero	cocinera	‘cook’
amigo	amiga	‘friend’

**Adjectives***masculine**feminine*

italiano	italiana	‘Italian’
bonito	bonita	‘pretty’
crudo	cruda	‘raw’
rojo	roja	‘red’

## b. -Ø ~ -a

<b>Human Nouns</b>		<b>Adjectives</b>			
<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>	<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>		
colegial	colegiala	‘student’	español	española	‘Spanish’
profesor	profesora	‘teacher’	anglosajón	anglosajona	‘Anglo-Saxon’
monje	monja	‘monk/nun’	francés	francesa	‘French’

## c. -Ø ~ Ø

<b>Human Nouns</b>		<b>Adjectives</b>			
<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>	<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>		
estudiante	SAME	‘student’	posible	SAME	‘possible’
intérprete	SAME	‘interpreter’	verde	SAME	‘green’
joven	SAME	‘young person’	azul	SAME	‘blue’
mártir	SAME	‘martyr’	fácil	SAME	‘easy’

## d. -a ~ -a

<b>Human Nouns</b>		<b>Adjectives</b>			
<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>	<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>		
acrobata	SAME	‘acrobat’	cosmopolita	SAME	‘cosmopolitan’
patriota	SAME	‘patriot’	agrícola	SAME	‘agricultural’
policía	SAME	‘cop’	belga	SAME	‘Belgian’
colega	SAME	‘colleague’	indígena	SAME	‘indigenous’

## e. -o ~ -o

<b>Human Nouns</b>		<b>Adjectives</b>			
<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>	<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>		
contralto	SAME	‘contralto’	- NONE -		
soprano	SAME	‘soprano’			
testigo	SAME	‘witness’			
modelo	SAME	‘model’			

- The adjectives in (11b) tend to refer to nationalities or ethnic groups; These are ‘gentilic’ adjectives. A morphological characteristic of gentilic adjectives is that they are -Ø class when masculine and -a class when feminine.

(12) **Impossible Pairs:**

a. \* -a ~ -o

<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>
* tindora	tindoro

b. \* -o ~ -Ø

<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>
* tindoro	tindor

c. \* -a ~ -Ø

<i>masculine</i>	<i>feminine</i>
* tindora	tindor

- Mating does not usually hold of non-human animals. Even though they have a biological male/female distinction, this is generally not expressed as a grammatical gender distinction.
- Animals that do not exhibit mating effects must have their grammatical gender lexically specified.

(13) *masculine*      *feminine*

camello [M]	(* camella)	‘camel’
reno [M]	(* rena)	‘reindeer’

(* foco)	foca [F]	‘seal’
gorila [M]	(* gorila [F])	‘gorilla’ ( <i>un gorila embarazado</i> ‘a pregnant gorilla’)

- A few animals, emotionally close to humans, do exhibit mated pairs:

perro	perra	‘dog’
gato	gata	‘cat’

- Animals can show mated pairs if they are personified (e.g. in stories, poems, songs):

lagarto	lagarta	‘lizard’ (García Lorca ‘El lagarto está llorando’)
orangután	orangutana	‘orangutan’ (La Sonora Santanera ‘El Orangután’)

- But not if it would result in an impossible pair:

* gorila	gorilo	‘gorilla’
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- Inanimate nouns have no biological sex, hence, they exhibit no mating effects. Their grammatical gender must be lexically specified.

(14)	techo [M]	‘roof’	silla [F]	‘chair’
	paso [M]	‘step’	carta [F]	‘letter’
	frente [M]	‘front’	pared [F]	‘wall’

### 3. Analysis

- In principle, lexical entries must be able to show whatever is idiosyncratic about the lexical item. With respect to the data in sections 1 and 2, lexical entries for nouns and adjectives must be able to mark the following information:

(15)	<i>Root</i>	Phonemic representation of the root
	<i>Category</i>	Noun or Adjective
	<i>Semantics</i>	In the case of animate nouns, this includes information such as human vs non-human and biological sex.
	<i>Gentilic</i>	A sub-class of adjectives, and by extension, nouns referring to ethnicity and professions
	<i>Gender</i>	Only Feminine is specified; Masculine is the default, hence never specified. Also, adjectives will never be specified for gender, since they get their gender by concord.
	<i>Noun Class</i>	-o class, -a class, -∅ class, etc. – specified only if exceptional

- For any particular lexical entry, the trick is to specify as little as possible. Clearly, the root and the semantics have to be specified; however, the other information may be filled in by the following rules, when not lexically specified. This works like the stress rule: add information as long as it is not lexically specified.

#### (16) Rules:

<i>Human Mating Rule:</i>	If a human noun, then Female → Feminine (also applies to some pet and personified animals)
<i>Adjective Concord:</i>	An adjective gets its gender from the noun it modifies
<i>Gentilic Rule:</i>	If gentilic, then Feminine → -a class; otherwise -∅ class
<i>Feminine Core Rule:</i>	Feminine → -a class
<i>Default Noun Class:</i>	If no Noun Class → -o class

- All other noun classes are lexically specified, e.g.,

(17)	a.	acróbat-a	‘acrobat’	(a-class)	
	b.	testig-o	‘witness’	(o-class)	
	c.	joven	‘young person’	(Ø-class)	
	d.	problem-a	‘problem’	(a-class)	
	e.	man-o	‘hand’	(o-class)	[F]