STRUCTURAL PECULARITIES OF NOUNS OF
MASCULINE, FEMININE, NEUTER, AND COMMON
GENDERS IN ENGLISH LINGUISTICS
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General statement of the problem and its connection with important scientific or practical aims. While grammatical gender was a fully productive inflectional category in Old English, Modern English has a much less pervasive gender system, primarily based on natural gender.

The category of gender is oppositional. It is formed by two oppositions related to each other on a hierarchical basis. One opposition functions in the whole set of nouns, dividing them into person (animate, human) nouns and non-person (inanimate, non-human) nouns. The other opposition functions in the subset of person nouns only, dividing them into masculine and feminine gender.

Laying out of the main research material. As a result of the double oppositional correlation, a specific system of three genders arises, which is represented by the neuter (inanimate, non-human) gender, the masculine (masculine person) gender, and the feminine (feminine person) gender.

There are a few traces of gender marking in Modern English:

- some foreign nouns inflect according to gender, such as actor/actress, author/authorress, jew/jewess, peer/peeress, instructor/instructress, emperor/empress, traitor/traitress, conductor/conductress, manager/manageress, poet/poetess;
- a glint of gender endings live on the cultural memory of novel terms such as fella from “fellow” or blonde from “blond”. Neuter genders tend to end in t:that, it, might. But these are insignificant features compared to a typical language with grammatical gender.

The English nouns that inflect for gender are a very small minority, typically loanwords from non-Germanic languages (the suffix –ress in the word “actress”/ for instance, derives from Latin –rixvia French –rice). In languages with grammatical gender, there are typically thousands of words which inflect or gender.

The third-person singular forms of the personal pronouns are the only modifiers that inflect according to gender.

It is also noteworthy that, with few exceptions, the gender of an English pronoun coincides with the real gender of its referent, rather than with the grammatical gender of its antecedent, frequently different from the former in languages with true grammatical gender. The choice between “he”, “she”, and “it” invariably comes down to whether they designate a human male, a human female, or something else.

A great many animate nouns in English are capable of expressing both feminine and masculine person genders. They are referred to as nouns of the “common gender”. Here belong such nouns as person, parent, friend, doctor, president, cousin, teacher, architect, supervisor, cleaner, etc. The sex of the referent is marked by the personal pronoun:

I went to see the doctor about my cough but she said...
there was nothing wrong with me².

As days turned into weeks, Ned’s owner began thinking that his dog had developed an unhealthy obsession with his lump of rock².

The majority of men say that sex makes no difference to them when it comes to choosing a doctor, surgeon, lawyer, MP or boss².

... his nephew (but conventionally styled his “cousin” in the will); and Julian, his wife — had the function of approving rather than initiating².

Smart’s nephew and biographer, Christopher Hunter, records the fact that “After an interval of little more than two years, Mr. Smart appeared to be pretty well restored”²³.

When there is no special need to indicate the sex of the referent of these nouns, they are used neutrally as masculine.

... hemade the following annotation: “Change the animal: make it a dog instead of a parrot”²².

Dog lover Jilly Cooper’s grub’s a howling success with her pets. Then, said the Bishop to the assembled Conference, “Who was the missionary — the dog or the doctor?”²⁴

“I am spared the anxiety of being made the object of an attack if I can instead become the attacker ...”²⁵

Professor Wood has noted the paradox that in Normandy “the rights and powers or its rules so far exceeded those possessed by the king that it was desirable to maintain the duchy as a territory apart, and provide for its continued semi-autonomous existence”²⁶.

In the plural, all the gender distinctions are neutralized in the immediate explicit expression, though they are rendered through the correlation with the singular.

Courtseying was not a country custom, and besides, even had they been in town, she wasn’t sure she should to one of her brother’s friends, whom she’d known since he was a boy²².

Nouns that belong to the group of those having masculine referents can be structurally subdivided into the following groups:

Simple nouns, devoid of inflections.

masculine nouns serving as the base form for the formation of feminine nouns (e.g. count, heir, priest, poet, steward, lion, tiger).

The lion just moaned and looked forlorn²².

masculine nouns having as their a completely different words denoting feminine (e.g. boy — girl, monk — non, husband — wife, uncle — aunt, wizard — witch, nephew — niece, king — queen, man—woman).

Er, mine died when I was nine and my mother has been my mother and a father to both myself my brother and sister and I feel she’s done just as good a job as I could of as my father could have done²³.

The eldest son, who lived out his life as a bachelor of somewhat eccentric habits, became deeply life as a bachelor of somewhat eccentric habits, became deeply estranged from his parents as a young man²⁴.

Derivative, formed with the help of the suffixes:

– er (e.g. manager, master, murderer, pensioner)

“The dog seemed and there was no sign of his master”²⁵.

— or (e.g. sailor, tailor, creator)

The prosecutor said her former husband “was trying to destroy her happiness and the prospects of her remarrying”²⁶.

— ist (e.g. novelist, linguist, novelist, machinist, guitarist)

Then Charlie was swearing blood over his face and wiping it over the bass guitarist².

A brilliant linguist, he was also deeply interested in botany, chemistry and other scientific subjects²⁶.

— ent, — ant (e.g. servant, president, resident)

e.g. The police have arrested residents for being under the influence of drugs, he said²⁷.

— ce (addressee, referee, trustee, refugee)

e.g. So far, the most desperate of measures has not been taken, perhaps because would-be refugees have nowhere to run²⁸.

— an, — ian (musician, historian, politician)

e.g. By using such evidence the historian can come to terms with some of the everyday reality of the war, and how it touched the lives and outlook of men and women, famous and not so famous, rich or poor, whose experiences are described in the proceedings of civil and criminal cases which have come down to us in some number²⁹.

We should bare in mind, however, that the majority of the above mentioned nouns formed with the help of prefixation may be used as “common gender” nouns, they may have a female referent (except for the nouns “widower”, “master”).

e.g. ... overlooking the terrace where a few customers were sitting in the open, a glass or two in front of them in the freshening air²².

The noun “murderer” is, nowadays, also used as the

⁴ Ibidem, P. 44.
⁵ Ibidem, P. 32.
⁶ Ibidem, 85.
⁷ Ibidem, 183.
¹⁰ Ibidem, P. 20.
¹¹ Ibidem, P. 274.
¹² Ibidem, P. 34.
¹⁴ Ibidem, P. 47.
¹⁵ Ibidem, P. 85.
¹⁶ Ibidem, P. 114.
¹⁸ Ibidem, P. 286.
¹⁹ Ibidem, P. 286.
²¹ Ibidem, P. 287.
noun of common gender, however, it has a feminine pair “murderess” – old-fashioned “a woman who murders another person”

e.g. Do you think the police will ever catch her murderer? 23

I nearly became a murderer tonight 24.

Compound:
With the stem “man” spelled solidly (e.g. gentlemen, policemen, sportsman, fireman)
e.g. “This bloody thing?”, exclaimed the fireman 25.
He was once an active sportsman.

Having in its composition the stems “man”, “male”, “father”, “brother”, “son”, “boy” spelled hyphenated (e.g. father-in-law, brother-in-law, son-in-law, man-friend, male-cousin, step-father, step-son)
e.g. Thomas Rich, Mercer, his son-in-law; John Shain, when Kress questioned the nephew about the man’s appearance, he decided it could just be our friend. 26
Dad, this is my boy-friend Steve.

With the stems “father” and “son” spelled solidly (e.g. godfather, godson)
e.g. One day he thought he would be godfather to Lack’s first child 27.
d) Having in its composition the pronoun “he”, generally used to show the animal’s sex.
e.g. They were shown to a small table in the corner, next to a life-sized plaster he-wolf 28.
e) Nouns that already have in their composition derivative stems combined with other noun stems. These nouns may be spelled solidly, separately or hyphenated (e.g. In one, for example, a casual laborer and his wife in their sixties lived with a woman of 79, her son of 57 who was a street match seller, and six younger tenants ...

See that newspaper seller, Jackson?

They tend to hold the most highly skilled and responsible positions, such as head waiter or wine butler, and to be found in organizations with a substantial volume of banquetting activities.

Noun phrases with the nouns “boy”, “man”, “master”, etc. spelled separately

e.g. ... hold my hands over the cooker like I was a boy scout crouched over a camp-fire 29.
The bride walked to the church with the best man with groom following 30.
We regret to announce the death of a distinguished man of letters.

He spoke Navajo and once sang with a Navajo medicine man at the bedside of a sick girl 31.

Derived. Feminine nouns are generally formed from masculine nouns with the help of suffixation.

– ess added to the masculine to form the feminine

e.g. I am the baron de Chavigny.
The baronne had her jail term cut for good behavior 32.

Omission of the vowel in the last syllable: tiger-tigress, actor-actress, waiter-waitress.
e.g. He tried to avoid it, but after the first blow struck, he went after them like a tiger 4.

“Behold your prince and sovereign!” he cried, indicating his nephew and receiving in response a tumultuous roar of approval 33.

Article II laid down that if Queen Anne failed to leave an heir the succession should pass to a relatively distant claimant, the most excellent Princess.

Other modifications: duke-duchess, master-mistress

e.g. He was a master at economizing on his investments. At midnight he would ride to his mistress, stay with her until four and then return home 34.

d) foreign less productive suffixes added to the masculine: - ine (hero- heroine), - ina (czar-czarena), -a (donna)
e.g. Only a Tsarina can wield it and if any man were even to touch the blade he would be instantly frozen to death 35.

b) Having in its composition the pronoun “she”, generally used to show the animal’s sex.
e.g. She then swore that she would throw Dudley and his she-wolf into the tower 36.
c) Noun phrases formed with the help of words denoting sex “female”, “girl”, “woman”, spelled separately.
A female doctor walked into the room.

“... speech of reply by bachelor girl” 37.

Gendered nouns can provide a stumbling block for the gender-savvy person. The best way to avoid implications these words can carry is simply to be aware of how we tend to use them in speech and writing. Because gendered nouns are so commonly used and accepted by English writers and speakers, we often don’t notice them or the implications they bring with them. Once you have recognized that a gender distinction is being made by such a word, though, conversion of the gendered noun into a gender-savvy one is usually very simple.

“Man” and words ending in “-man” are the most commonly used gendered nouns, so avoiding the confusion they bring can be as simple as watching out for these words and replacing them with words that convey your meaning more effectively. For example, if the founders of America had been gender-savvy writers, they might have written “… all people are created equal” instead of “… all men are created equal…”

Sometimes we modify nouns that refer to jobs or posi-

22 Ibidem, P. 133.
23 Ibidem, P. 45.
24 Ibidem, P. 46.
26 Ibidem, P. 286.
27 Ibidem, P. 286.
28 Ibidem, P. 287.
30 Ibidem, P. 51.
31 Ibidem, P. 254.
32 Ibidem, P. 267.
33 Ibidem, P. 268.
34 Ibidem, P. 268.
36 Ibidem, P. 274.
37 Ibidem, P. 274.
38 Ibidem, P. 274.
tions to denote the sex of the person holding that position. To get a sense of these expectations, think about what sex you would instinctively assume the subject of each of these sentences to be:

* e.g. The doctor walked into the room.
  The nurse walked into the room.

**Conclusions.** Traditional theories attribute the origin of grammatical gender systems to the human-primitive tendency to anthropomorphize nature, when one endows human qualities to non-human creatures and objects. Gender is merely related to the class of referent involved, so that human animates take masculine or feminine gender while all other classes of referents (animates, plants, objects, abstractions) receive neuter gender. Therefore, the English gender system in general is not so much based on natural sex, or grammar, but on the class distinction between animate and non-animate referents.

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