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Slavonic versus Finno-Ugric languages:
On missing categories in grammar and cognition

Abstract

Different languages realize different grammatical categories. The paper deals with the following questions:

1) Do grammatical categories have any correspondence in cognition?

2) Do the grammatical categories of one´s mother tongue influence the perception of other languages and of the world?

3) Is category-explicitness conditioned by the typological character of the language?

I concentrate on the grammatical category of gender in inflecting, isolating and agglutinating languages. I compare six languages (Czech, Russian, English, Swedish, Hungarian and Finnish) and argue that gender-explicitness is mainly conditioned by the typological characteristics of the language. However, the category of gender is realised to a different degree not only in different language types (e.g. inflecting and agglutinating) but to a lesser extent also within the same type (e.g. Czech and Russian).

Having established a hierarchy of gender-explicitness I discuss its consequences for translation, interpretation and language learning. I concentrate on examples of contrasts between Czech, the most gender-explicit language, and Finnish, the most gender-indifferent one.

 Introduction

Gender can be dealt with in many ways. There are languages which make it clear at every occasion whether a man or a woman is being referred to, but there are also languages which do not express this difference at all, or at least keep it concealed for

quite a long time. The question I am going to deal with is: Is gender explicitness conditioned by the typological character of the language?

Gender distinction can be expressed:

i) by lexical means (e.g. *bratr* "brother" - *sestra* "sister",

ženich "groom" - *nevěsta* "bride")

ii) by grammatical means: paradigmatically (e.g. *profesor - profesorka* "professor")

syntagmatically (e.g. *nový - nová* "new")

iii) by pragmatic means (e.g. expressions used exclusively by male or exclusively by female speakers)

Type (i) is realized using different lexemes for males and females. It exists in all the languages I am going to deal with. However, it is always restricted to a small number of lexical items (mostly kinship terms) and it is not productive.

Type (ii) is realized within the grammatical system of a given language; the means and range of realization may vary considerably.

Type (iii) is described e.g. in Japanese particles (Makino - Tsutsui, 1986, p. 45-49).

This paper will concentrate on type (ii), which is the most appropriate type for typological considerations.

Typology

Typology is a widely used term with a broad range of meanings. My notion of typology in this paper follows the typology of languages elaborated by the Prague School, mainly Vladimír Skalička (1935 and later). It is based on the relation between lexicon and grammar.

While lexical items are almost always expressed by morphs, grammatical items can be expressed:

1) by grammatical morphs which have the form of:

a) independent grammatical words -   isolation

b) affixes   -   agglutination

2) by alternations of lexical morphs which are realized:

	a) at the end of lexical morphs	-	inflection
	b) within lexical morphs	-	introflection
3) by the order of lexical morphs		-	polysynthesis

Skalička (collected papers e.g. 1981) used the relationship between grammatical meanings and the means of their expression as the basis for distinguishing five principles characteristic of five language types. Due to lack of space I am not going to deal with the types (2b) and (3), as they are not typical of the languages discussed here. Types (1a), (1b) and (2a) can be characterized by the following features:

(1a) Isolation:

1. lack of grammatical affixes

2. stems without endings

3. abundance of functional words (articles, modal verbs, prepositions, conjunctions)

4. lack of classification (unclear differentiation of parts of speech)

5. lack of derivational affixes

6. no agreement

7. fixed word order

8. basic sentence structure: noun / pronoun + verb

(1b) Agglutination:

1. many monofunctional affixes

2. one stem can have several concatenated affixes

3. lack of functional words

- personal pronouns in subject position replaced by personal endings

- personal pronouns in genitive replaced by possessive suffixes

- personal pronouns in accusative replaced by objective conjugation

4. lack of classification (unclear differentiation of parts of speech)

5. derivation by affixes

- no difference between derivational suffixes and endings

- reduction of synonymy and homonymy of affixes

6. no agreement (no redundant affixes)

7. fixed word order

8. basic sentence structure: noun / pronoun + verb with an ending

verb with an ending

noun / pronoun + noun

(2a) Inflection:

1. many polyfunctional grammatical affixes

2. only one ending with one stem

- endings have a high degree of synonymy and homonymy

3. few grammatical words

4. the ending classifies a word as to parts of speech

- further classification possible: gender, word classes (e.g. Swahili)

5. rich derivation by affixes

- endings and derivational suffixes differentiated

- new nouns formed by transfer into a different word class (e.g. Bantu,

Spanish)

6. agreement

7. free word order

8. basic sentence structure: noun / pronoun + verb with an ending

verb with an ending

Table 1. Realization of features important for gender-explicitness in different language types

(+ means "applies", - means "does not apply")

	ISOLATION	AGGLUTINATION	INFLECTION
word structure	stem without endings	stem with several affixes	stem with one ending
grammatical affixes	-	+ monofunctional	+ polyfunctional
grammatical words	+	-	-
derivational affixes	-	+	+

What possibilities do these language types offer for explicit reference to a man or a woman? Paradigmatic relations between genders can be expressed in the inflecting and agglutinating prototypes by derivational affixes. The isolating prototype offers no means for derivation, but the gender difference can be expressed by grammatical words. Syntagmatic relations are realized as agreement, which is typical for the inflecting prototype only. The isolating prototype lacks grammatical items for showing agreement, while the agglutinating prototype, rich in affixes as it is, avoids all redundance in their use.

Table 2. Paradigmatic and syntagmatic means for expressing gender
(+ means "applies", - means "does not apply")

	ISOLATION	AGGLUTINATION	INFLECTION
paradigmatic means	- / +	+	+
syntagmatic means	-	-	+

The above-mentioned types represent rich clusters of properties, the co-occurence of which appears as probable. All these properties are present in typological constructs only, i.e. in ideal prototypes of language realizing the characteristic features of one language type only. Natural languages never correspond with the ideal completely. They

usually combine characteristics of different types but they show a predominance of features of one type, which is then the basis for their typological classification.

The fact that a certain type dominates in several languages does not mean that its features are realized to the same extent in all of them. In what follows I investigate whether the pairs of related languages which represent the same dominant type behave in the same way when expressing the difference man / woman.

Grammatical gender

As has been shown, the lexical means for expressing gender are strongly limited. I shall now deal with the grammatical means, which can be manifested in two ways:

i) in the nouns themselves (words referring to females are usually derived from masculines):   e.g. *kolegyně, Češka, profesorka*

ii) in associated words (through agreement):

e.g. *moje, nová, představila, naše*

In the following example the same 3 sentences are given in 3 pairs of typologically different languages: inflecting Czech (1) and Russian (2), isolating Swedish (3) and English (4), agglutinating Hungarian (5) and Finnish (6). In the first line (a) all referents are male, in the second line (b) all referents are female. The underlined word-forms are gender explicit, the others can refer to both men and women.

 (1) CZ:

(a) Mám <u>nového kolegu</u>.   Je to <u>Čech</u>.   <u>Náš profesor</u> mi <u>ho</u> <u>představil</u>.

(b) Mám <u>novou kolegyni</u>.   Je to <u>Češka</u>.   <u>Naše profesorka</u> mi <u>ji</u> <u>představila</u>.

(2) RU:

(a) У меня есть <u>новый</u> коллега.   <u>Он</u> <u>чех</u>.   <u>Наш</u> профессор мне <u>его</u> <u>представил</u>.

(b) У меня есть <u>новая</u> коллега.   <u>Она</u> <u>чешка</u>.   <u>Наша</u> профессор мне <u>её</u> <u>представила</u>.

(3) SW:

(a) Jag har en ny kollega.   <u>Han</u> är <u>tjeck</u>.   Vår professor presenterade <u>honom</u> till mig.

(b) Jag har en ny kollega.   <u>Hon</u> är <u>tjeckiska</u>. Vår professor presenterade <u>henne</u> till mig.

(4) EN:

(a) I have a new colleague.   <u>He</u> is Czech.   Our professor introduced <u>him</u> to me.

(b) I have a new colleague.   <u>She</u> is Czech.   Our professor introduced <u>her</u> to me.

(5) HU:

(a) Új kollégám van.   Ő cseh.   Professzorunk nekem bemutatta.

(b) Új <u>kollégánőm</u> van.   Ő cseh.   <u>Professzornőnk</u> nekem bemutatta.

(6) FI:

Minulla on uusi kollega.   Hän on tšekki.   Professorimme esitteli hänet minulle.

Minulla on uusi kollega.   Hän on tšekki.   Professorimme esitteli hänet minulle.

Table 3. Referring to referents by gender explicit / unexplicit means

REFE-RENT	I		COLLEAGUE		PROFESSOR	
GEN-DER	+EXPL	-EXPL.	+ EXPL.	-EXPL.	+EXPL.	-EXPL.
CZ		mám mi	nového kolegu Čech ho	je to	náš profesor představil	
RU		меня мне	новый он чех его	есть коллега	наш представил	профессор

SW		jag har mig	han tjeck honom	ny kollega är		vår professor presenterade
EN		I have me	he him	new colleague is Czech		our professor introduced
HU		-m nekem	kolléga	új van ő cseh -a	professzor	-unk bemutatt
FI		minulla minulle		uusi kollega on hän tšekki hänet		professori- mme esitteli

Table 4. Explicit expressing of gender in different grammatical categories:

+   explicit reference to either man or woman

-        both man and woman referred to by the same form

(+)   usually explicit but not always

(-)   usually refers to both genders but sometimes female may be expressed

         explicitly

		CZ	RUS	SWE	ENGL	HUN	FIN
nouns	lexical	+	+	+	+	+	+
	word-forming	+	(+)	(-)	(-)	(+)	-
adject.		+	+	-	-	-	-
	possessive adj.	+	-	-	-	-	-
numer.		+	+	-	-	-	-
pron.	attributes	+	+	-	-	-	-
	1st/2nd pers. pron.	-	-	-	-	-	-
	3rd pers. pron.	+	+	+	+	-	-
verbs	pres. ind. act. 1st/2nd person	-	-	-	-	-	-
	3rd person	-	- /+	-/+	- /+	-	-
	future act. 1st/2nd person	-	-	-	-	-	-
	3rd person	-	- /+	-/+	- /+	-	-
	past 1st/2nd person	+	+	-	-	-	-
	3rd person	+	+	-/+	-/+	-	-
	conditional 1st/2nd person	+	+	-	-	-	-
	3rd person	+	+	-/+	-/+	-	-

		CZ	RUS	SWE	ENGL	HUN	FIN
	passive 1st/2nd person 3rd person	+ +	+ +	- -/+	- -/+	- -	- -
	gerund (transgressive)	+	-	-	-	-	-

It is obvious that gender-explicitness does depend on the typological character of the language but within each type the realization of certain features can be implemented with different intensity.

Finnish and Hungarian, in which agglutination predominates, offer very restricted opportunities for expressing gender. The only potential means available in the agglutinating type are gender-specific affixes. However, this possibility is realized in Hungarian much more than in Finnish: Hungarian nouns referring to females are usually marked by a derivational suffix, while Finnish nouns have no gender.

In Swedish and English, where isolation predominates, gender distinction is expressed to approximately the same extent: it is realized in 3rd-person pronouns and a few derivations only.

Czech and Russian, both considered inflecting languages, differ in the degree of gender explicitness not only from other types, but also from each other. While Czech is noticeably consistent in marking the gender of referents, even in redundant positions, Russian can sometimes refer to both genders with the same form (cf. Table 4).

Gender-explicitness in Czech

Czech is the most inflecting of Slavonic languages. One of the characteristic features of inflection is homonymy of endings. The principle of one ending for each word form leads to the cumulation of functions in endings, and there are usually not enough endings for expressing all the combinations of functions. Homonymy is usual e.g. among cases but, interestingly enough, rare between genders.

No homonymy between masculine and feminine forms exists in:

- hard adjectives

- possessive adjectives

- 3rd-person personal pronouns

- 1st and 2nd-person possessive pronouns

- demonstrative pronouns

- relative and relative-possessive pronouns

- numerals *jeden* "one", *všechen* "all"

- hard ordinal numerals

- participles and gerunds

Homonymy between masculine and feminine forms appears in:

- nouns: only exceptional and even that in some grammatical cases only (*choť* "spouse", *Jarka, Pavlů*)

- soft adjectives: only in NOM. (*moderní muž* "modern man"- *moderní žena* "modern woman")

- possessive pronoun *její* "her"*: only in NOM.

- possessive pronouns *jeho* "his" and *jejich* "their"*: in all cases

- numeral *dva* "two"*: in GEN., LOC., DAT. and INSTR.

- basic numerals from *tři* "three" upwards: in all cases

- soft ordinal numerals: only in NOM. (*první* "first"*, třetí* "third"*, tisící* "thousandth")

Thus in Czech, the gender of human referents in the singular is usually unambiguously expressed both paradigmatically and syntagmatically. There are only a few cases where it is not explicitly stated whether a man or a woman is referred to. Expressions indifferent to the natural gender of the referent are:

- a few nouns with only one gender (*host* "guest", *miláček* "darling")

- grammatical neuters (*dítě* "child"*, nemehlo* "clumsy clod")

- 1st and 2nd-person personal pronouns

- indefinite pronouns *(někdo, kdosi* "somebody")

- general subject (*člověk* "one")

- generic sentences (*President jmenuje ministerského předsedu.* "The President appoints the Prime Minister." X *Presidentka Halonenová jmenovala ministerskou předsedkyní Anneli Jääteenmäkiovou.* "President Halonen appointed as Prime Minister Anneli Jääteenmäki." *)*

In all other cases the gender of the referent is expressed both in nouns and in congruent words. In Finnish, on the other hand, the gender of the referent is usually not expressed at all and the gender-interpretation is left open.

Explicitness versus indifference

As argued above, Czech is the most explicit language in expressing grammatical gender while Finnish is the most gender-indifferent of the languages in question. In Finnish there are no grammatical means for differentiating the gender of referents and even personal names mostly contain no clue. The only way to refer to a man or a woman is by gender-specific lexemes.

When translating from Czech to Finnish the lack of grammatical means for the identification of referents must be compensated for by lexical means. Let us consider the beginning of Milan Kundera´s short story *Ať ustoupí staří mrtví mladým mrtvým* "Let the old dead make room for the young dead" (Kundera: *Směšné lásky* "Laughable loves", 1991:119):

(7) CZ (a)   **Vracel** se domů ulicí malého českého města

       (b)   a **šel** tak nevšímavě,

       (c)   že **ji** téměř **minul**.

       (d)   Zato **ona ho poznala** už zdaleka

       (e)   a **jdouc** proti **němu**,

       (f)   **dívala** se na **něho** s mírným úsměvem,

       (g)   který teprve v poslední chvíli,

       (h)   až už se téměř minuli,

       (i)   dopladl k signálnámu zařízení v **jeho** paměti

(j)   a **vytrhl ho** z dřímotného stavu.

(8) EN *(a)*   *He was returning home along the street of a small Czech town,*

(b)   *and he was walking so totally without seeing*

(c)   *that he almost passed her by.*

(d)   *But she had already recognized him from a distance,*

(e)   *and coming toward him*

(f)   *she gave him that gentle smile of hers.*

(g)   *Only at the last moment,*

(h)   *when they had almost passed each other,*

(i)   *that smile rang a bell in his memory*

(j)   *and snapped him out of his drowsy state.*

A literal translation of example (7) into Finnish would be quite incomprehensible. True to the original, the Finnish translator started with the personal pronoun of the 3rd person singular (*hän*) but already in the third clause he had to use the noun "woman" (*nainen*). In the last clause the genderless pronoun *hän* would be ambiguous, thus it was replaced by the noun "man" (*miehen*).

(9) FI (a)   **Hän** oli kotimatkalla, tulossa pitkin pienen böömiläisen kaupungin

katua.

(b)   **Hän** kulki mitään huomaamatta

(c)   ja melkein ohitti **naisen**.

(d)   **Nainen** sen sijaan tunnisti **hänet** jo kaukaa

(e)   ja lähestyi **häntä** hienoinen hymy huulilla**an**.

(g)   Vasta viime hetkellä

(h)   kun he olivat jo ohittamaisillaan toisensa,

(i)   tuo hymy soitti ikään kuin kelloa

(j)   ja havahdutti ajatuksiinsa uinahtaneen **miehen**.

When translating into a less gender-explicit language one is faced with stylistic problems only. On the other hand, when the target language is more explicit the translator must provide the referents in the source text with gender interpretation. While examples (10) and (11) both in Finnish an English are identical for both genders, in Czech they differ considerably depending on the gender of the referents (12):

(10) FI (a) Artikkelin allekirjoitti professori Pauli Saukkonen.

 (b) Artikkelin allekirjoitti professori Auli Hakulinen.

(11) EN *(a)* *The article was signed by* *professor Pauli Saukkonen.*

 (b) *The article was signed by* *professor Auli Hakulinen.*

(12) CZ (a) Článek byl podepsán **profesorem Paulim Saukkonenem**.

 (b) Článek byl podepsán **profesorkou Auli Hakulinenovou**.

This fact causes problems especially in interpreting when there is no time to check for the data. The interpreter may face serious troubles with the coherence of the text if he or she happened to chose a wrong gender:

(13) FI Tšekin suurlähettiläs luovutti kirjan yliopiston rehtori Rauli Lehtoselle.
 Molemmat **naiset** ovat ahkeria lukijoita.

(14) CZ **Český velvyslanec** předal knihu rektoru univerzity **Raulimu Lehtonenovi.**
 Obě ženy jsou **vášnivé čtenářky**.

(15) EN *The Czech ambassador gave a book to the recor of the university Rauli Lehtonen.*

 *Both **women** are ardent readers.*

Finnish fiction may contain many pages where the gender of the characters is unspecified. There are whole stories written in such a way that both gender-interpretations are possible. However, when translating into Czech the text usually has to be deprived of its gender-ambiguity.

Gender-marking in contemporary Czech

The gender-distinction is deeply rooted in Czech. However, there appear examples of increasing insensitivity to it:

(16) CZ   (a)   finská prezidentka Tarja Halonenová

             (b)   finská prezidentka Tarja Halonen

             (c)   finský prezident Tarja Halonen

                      the Finnish president Tarja Halonen

Often it is caused by literal translation:

(17) CZ   Woody Allen má ve filmu jako **ženskou partnerku** Julii **Roberts**.
                 Woody Allen′s female partner in the film is Julia Roberts.

(18) CZ   Konec světa nastane, až se papežem stane **černoch** a ještě k tomu **žena**.
                 The end of the world comes when the Pope is a Negro and not only that but a woman.

Neologisms are not consequently used according to the gender principle. In the dictionary of neologisms (Martincová a kol., 1998) some words are given only in masculine (e.g. *aerotaxikář, akcionář, alternatista*), some are given in both genders (e.g. *asistent - asistentka, azylant - azylantka*), exceptionally only the feminine form is mentioned (e.g. *alternátorka*). The derivation of feminines is neither universal nor impossible (e.g. Martincová, 1998:38):

(18) CZ   (a)   odjela do Anglie dělat **babysittera**

             (b)   při studiu si vydělávala jako **babysitterka**

Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed the influence of one grammatical category on cognition. I have analyzed grammatical gender in six languages and I have shown that gender-explicitness depends on the typological character of the language concerned. Czech is the most gender-explicit language, while Finnish is the most gender-indifferent one.

The category of gender must be paid special attention to in translating and interpreting between these two languages, as well as in teaching them. More difficulties are caused when moving from a less explicit language to a more explicit one because the original text must be additionally interpreted as to the gender of its referents.

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