44. Gender Distinctions
in Independent Personal Pronouns

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1.   Introduction

Independent personal pronouns, in contrast to bound forms (i.e. clitics and affixes), are separate words capable of taking primary stress. Virtually all languages have independent personal pronouns, though in some they occur rather infrequently. Gender, as defined by Corbett (1991), is a form of classification of nominals, as shown by agreement (see Map 30). Most gender contrasts on personal pronouns are sex-based, i.e. pronouns used for male referents are masculine and those used for females are feminine. The treatment of other referents varies. They may be referred to by a separate set (or sets) of neuter pronouns, as is the case in English and many other European languages. Alternatively, they may be grouped with the referents of masculine gender (e.g. Amharic), or less commonly with the referents of feminine gender (e.g. Warekena), or split over the masculine and feminine genders in an arbitrary way or according to some semantically based principle (e.g. Garifuna).

Gender oppositions in personal pronouns are characteristic of the third rather than the first or second person. This is suggested by Greenberg's (1963: 96) Universal 44: "If a language has gender distinctions in the first person, it always has gender distinctions in the second or third person or in both". Moreover, gender is seen as being typical of singular rather than non-singular personal pronouns. This, in turn, is expressed in Greenberg's Universal 45: "If there are any gender distinctions in the plural of the pronoun, there are some gender distinctions in the singular also". There are some exceptions to

universals 44 and 45 involving independent personal pronouns, but not many (cf. especially Plank and Schellinger 1997).

2.   Defining the values

The distribution of gender marking on independent personal pronouns is shown in Map 44. In the case of languages which have more than one series of independent personal pronouns, the forms considered are those that may be used as subjects. The six values depicted in the map are based on the relationship between gender and person as reflected in the above-mentioned Greenbergian universals. The values are:

@	1.	Gender distinctions in 3rd person plus 1st and/or 2nd person	18
@	2.	Gender distinctions in 3rd person only, but in both singular and non-singular	42
@	3.	Gender distinctions in 3rd person singular only	61
@	4.	Gender distinctions in 1st or 2nd person but not 3rd	2
@	5.	Gender distinctions in 3rd person non-singular only	1
@	6.	No gender distinctions	254
		total	378

The first value represents languages in which gender is highly prominent in the pronominal system, i.e. in addition to gender in the third person, there is also gender in either second person or first person or both. The gender distinctions in question may involve just the singular, or any combination of both singular and non-singular. For instance, in Hausa (Chadic; Nigeria and Niger) and many other Chadic and Semitic languages, gender is exhibited only in the second and third person singular:

(1)   Hausa (Newman 2000: 477)

1SG	*nī*	1PL	*mū*
2SG.M	*kai*	2PL	*kū*
2SG.F	*kē*		
3SG.M	*shī*	3PL	*sū*
3SG.F	*ita*		

In Ngala (Ndu, Sepik; north-western Papua New Guinea), there are gender distinctions in all three persons in the singular:

(2)   Ngala (Laycock 1965: 133)

1SG.M	*wn*	1DU	*ʌyn*	1PL	*nan*
1SG.F	*ñən*	2DU	*ən*	2PL	*gwn*
2SG.M	*mən*	3DU	*kəbər*	3PL	*rʌr*
2SG.F	*yn*				
3SG.M	*kər*				
3SG.F	*yn*				

Rif Berber (Morocco) has a gender contrast in the second and third person in both the singular and plural (see (3)), while the Murui dialect of Huitoto (Huitotoan; Colombia and Peru) has a two-way gender contrast in the first and second person dual and a three-way gender contrast in the third person singular, dual and plural (see (4)).

(3)   Rif Berber (McClelland 2000: 27)

1SG	*nəš*	1PL	*nəšnin*
2SG.M	*šək*	2PL.M	*kəniw*
2SG.F	*šəm*	2PL.F	*kənint*
3SG.M	*nətta*	3PL.M	*nitnin*
3SG.F	*nəttæθ*	3PL.F	*nitənti*

(4)   Murui Huitoto (Wise 1999: 322)

	SG	DU	PL

1	*kuè*	1.M	*kɔkɔ*	1	*kaɯ̃*
		1.F	*kaìɲaɯ̀*		
2	*ɔ*	2.M	*ɔmɯɯkɔ*	2	*ɔmɔɯ̀*
		2.F	*ɔmɯɲɔɯ̀*		
3.M	*imɯɯe*	3.M	*iaɯ̀maìaɯ̀*	3.M	*imakɯ*
3.F	*ɲaìɲɔ*	3.F	*iaɯ̀ɲuaɯ̀*	3.F	*ɲaìɲuaɯ̀*
3.N	*ie*	3.N	*ie*	3.N	*ie*

And Korana (Central Khoisan; South Africa) has gender distinctions for all three persons in three numbers and in both the exclusive and inclusive forms in the dual and plural (here C = common gender):

(5)   Korana (Meinhof 1930: 43, via Tom Güldemann)

		SG	DU	PL
1	C		*sa–m*	*sa–da*
INCL	F		*sa–sam*	*sa–sē*
	M		*sa–kham*	*sa–tjē*
1	C		*si–m*	*si–da*
EXCL	F	*ti–ta*	*si–sam*	*si–sē*
	M	*ti–re*	*si–kham*	*si–tjē*
2	C		*sa–khao*	*sa–du*
	F	*sa–s*	*sa–saro*	*sa–sao*
	M	*sa–ts*	*sa–kharo*	*sa–kao*
3	C	*∥’ãi–’i*	*∥’ãi–kha*	*∥’ãinē*
	F	*∥’ãi–s*	*∥’ãi–sara*	*∥’ãidē*
	M	*∥’ãi–b*	*∥’ãi–khara*	*∥’ãiku*

The Korana paradigm is particularly worthy of attention as it is the most complete person/number/gender paradigm in the sample.

Languages in which gender in personal pronouns is confined to the third person but not just to the singular are covered by value two. The relevant languages may display gender in all the singular and non-singular third person forms, as in Worora (Wororan; Western Australia), which has gender distinctions in the singular, dual, trial and plural.

(6)   Worora (Love 2000: 8–10)

	SG	DU	TRI	PL
1 INCL		ŋa'rendu	'ŋariŋ'guri	'ŋari
1 EXCL	'ŋaiu	a'rendu	'ariŋguri	'a̱ri
2	'ŋundju	nji'rendu	'njiriŋguri	'njiri
3.M	'indja	iŋ'gandu	'iŋguri	'arka
3.F	'njina	njiŋ'gandinja	'njiŋgurinya	'arka
3.N1	'wuna	wun'ga̱ndu	'wunguri	'wuna
3.N2	'ma̱na	ma̱n'ga̱ndum	'ma̱ngurim	'ma̱na

Alternatively, they may have gender in the singular and only some of the non-singular numbers, for instance, the dual but not the plural, as in Lavukaleve (Solomons East Papuan; Solomon Islands):

(7)   Lavukaleve (Terrill 2003: 170, 172)

	SG	DU	PL
1 EXCL	ngai	el	e
1 INCL		mel	me
2	inu	imil	imi
3.M	fona	fonala	fova
3.F	fo	fol	fova
3.N	foga	fogala	fova

(In Lavukaleve four degrees of distance are distinguished in the third person forms. Only the proximal forms are given in (7).)

Value three encompasses languages which have a gender contrast solely in the third person singular, irrespective of the

variety of number oppositions exhibited: singular/plural as in English, singular/dual/plural as in Mundari (Munda; India), Trumai (isolate; Brazil), and Yessan-Mayo (Sepik; Papua New Guinea), or even singular/dual/paucal/plural as in Ungarinjin (Wororan; Western Australia).

Value four represents languages which display gender in either the first or second person but not the third. The only instance of gender just in the first person that I have come across with respect to independent personal pronouns is in Macá (Mataco-Guaicuru; Argentina and Bolivia), in which feminine gender is marked on the first person inclusive (Aikhenvald 2000: 252). Gender just in the second person is slightly more common. It is illustrated in (8) from Iraqw (Cushitic, Afro-Asiatic; Tanzania), which has both long and short forms of independent personal pronouns.

(8)   Iraqw (Mous 1993: 112)

	long	short
1SG	*aníng*	*án*
2SG.M	*kúung*	*kú*
2SG.F	*kíing*	*ki*
3SG	*inós*	*ís*
1PL	*atén*	*át*
2PL	*kuungá*	–
3PL	*ino ín*	*inín*

Some other languages which have gender just in the second person are Burunge (Cushitic, Afro-Asiatic; Tanzania), Kofyar (Chadic, Afro-Asiatic; Nigeria) and Minangkabau (Sundic, Austronesian; Sumatra, Indonesia).

Value five has been assigned to languages which display gender only in the third person non-singular. These languages constitute a sub-type of exceptions to Greenberg's Universal 45. A case in point is Dagaare (Gur; Ghana), which has a

human/non-human distinction only in the third person plural. This is illustrated in (9).

(9)   Dagaare (Bodomo 1997: 71)

1SG	*maa*	1PL	*tenee*
2SG	*foo*	2PL	*yɛnee*
3SG	*onɔ*	3PL.HUM	*bana*
		3PL.NONHUM	*ana*

Plank and Schellinger (1997: 62-65) mention several other languages belonging to this type, which are not in the sample, namely the Sauias dialect of Biak, Wandamen and Windesi (Austronesian; Papua, Indonesia); Katu (Katuic, Mon-Khmer; Vietnam and Laos); and Palauan (Western Malayo-Polynesian; Palau Island).

Finally, value six represents languages that have no overt gender contrasts in the independent personal pronouns. Included in this category are languages in which third person pronouns are confined solely to humans or animates while other referents are referred to by demonstratives, classifiers, or full NPs. Such languages are sometimes interpreted as displaying a covert gender opposition.

3.   Geographical distribution

Gender in independent pronouns is found in about 30 per cent of the languages in the sample. The greatest concentration of languages with gender in personal pronouns is in Africa. Gender is very prominent among the Afro-Asiatic languages of northern Africa, in the Niger-Congo languages of sub-Saharan Africa, and also in the Khoisan languages of the southern part of the continent. It is not, however, a regular feature of Nilo-Saharan languages. The other major area with gender distinctions in independent pronouns is Eurasia and especially Europe. Gender

is also very much in evidence among the non-Pama-Nyungan languages of northern Australia.

Turning to areas where gender is much less prominent, in New Guinea gender is found mainly among the non-Trans-New Guinea languages of northern New Guinea, particularly in the Sepik area and neighboring areas of West Papua. It also occurs among some of the West Papuan languages on the extreme northwest tip of New Guinea and in northern Halmahera. There is even less gender in the Americas, especially North America. The North American languages that do have gender are scattered throughout the continent. In South America gender is found primarily in the northern part of the continent and especially among the languages of the Amazon basin. The area in which gender is encountered most rarely is Southeast Asia and Oceania. Gender occurs in some Austro-Asiatic languages but hardly at all in Austronesian languages. All but one (Drehu) of the languages exhibiting gender from this area are non-Austronesian.

Among the languages that do have gender distinctions in independent pronouns, gender just in third singular is dominant in all areas but Africa. In Africa the dominant pattern seems to be gender in third person irrespective of number. In the case of the Afro-Asiatic and Khoisan languages, the favoured distribution of gender is in both the second and third person. Outside of Africa gender in other than the third person, particularly in the singular, is rare. Instances of gender in the first and second person non-singular are found in Europe (Spanish, Lithuanian, Slovene), New Guinea (Baniata, Dumo) and Australia (Anindilyakwa, Ndjébbana, Nunggubuyu). Only in Africa do we find languages displaying gender exclusively in some person other than the third.