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An epistemological approach to English gender: a grammar-based perspective

Laure Gardelle

As the linguistic knowledge of a community evolves, so do its grammars, which are the repository of that knowledge. Over the centuries, what used to be modern descriptions thus becomes the archive of a past era. The claim made here is that it is important that they should not be forgotten: among other things, they help the modern linguist remember that descriptions are not set in stone, but are the result of major evolutions and influences, and liable to further changes and innovations. This holds even for categories whose main characteristics might seem relatively straightforward today; this is what the present study wishes to show, with the example of English gender. Analyses are based on a corpus of 34 grammars of English: 1 for the late 16th centuryⁱ, 5 for the 17th, 2 for the 18th, 16 for the 19th, 9 for the 20th and 1 for the 21st (full references are given at the end of the chapter).

Today, gender in English is commonly thought of as having the following characteristics – see for instance Huddleston & Pullum (2002):

1. English has gender;
2. it has three genders: the masculine, the feminine and the neuter;
3. gender is not a fixed property of at least a number of nouns. For instance, *bull* can be found with *he* or *it*;
4. gender selection relies partly, but not solely, on sex – so that a male, e.g. a bull, can be referred to as *it*;
5. the parts of speech that carry gender are chiefly the personal pronouns *he*, *she*, *it* (and their derivatives) and the relative pronouns *which* and *who*.

A study of older English grammars, however, shows that not a single one of these characteristics has been permanent in descriptions:

1. the existence of a gender category was rejected by a few 20th-century grammarians (e.g. Kruisinga & Erades 1960, Leech & Svartvik 1994) as well as by some recent cross-linguistic studies (Aikhenvald 2000, Creissels 2006)ⁱⁱ;
2. the number of genders in English grammatical descriptions varies from 7 to 2 between the 16th and early 20th centuries (e.g. 7 for Poole 1646, 6 for Bullokar 1586 and Jonson 1640, 5 for Howell 1661, 4 for Miège 1688 or Nesfield 1924, 2 for Ash 1760 or Bain 1873, and of course 3 for many grammarians, as early as Gil 1621). Mid-20th century structuralist grammars define a much higher number of gender classes (e.g. 10 for Quirk *et al.* 1985), and more recently, Biber *et al.* (1999: 312) propose four: masculine, feminine and dual (e.g. *the doctor* can be found in association either with *he* or *she*), all subsumed under the label “personal/human”, and “non-personal/neuter” (e.g. *the house* is found with *it*);
3. all descriptions down to the turn of the 21st century define the gender of English *nouns*, but Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 488) consider that English nouns do not themselves carry gender;
4. in many 19th-century grammars, gender is defined solely with regards to sex, as in Morgan (1814): “[g]ender is the distinction of the male sex from the female”ⁱⁱⁱ;
5. as for the parts of speech that carry gender, while all grammars include *he* and *she*, some reject *it*, others include *I / you*, relative *that*, interrogative *who* and *what*, adjectives, or compounds in *-body* and *-thing* (e.g. *somebody*, *something*).

As the analysis of all five aspects would go far beyond the scope of a single study, the present contribution will focus on the last one, viz. the identification of the parts of speech that carry gender. The aim is twofold: contribute to a better knowledge of older grammatical descriptions of gender, and identify some factors that influence theorisation and its evolution. The study will proceed from one part of speech to another, from those most commonly found in the corpus to the least often mentioned.

1. Nouns

Since the earliest descriptions and except for one grammar (Huddleston & Pullum 2002), gender has been regarded as a property of *nouns* – in other parts of speech, it is the indication of concord, or agreement, with the noun, like case or number^{iv}. Down to the turn of the 20th century, gender classes are defined solely in reference to sex. Thus the earliest grammar in the corpus (Bullock 1586), heavily influenced by Lily's Latin grammar and its seven genders (but relying on meaning as well as on grammatical agreement), establishes five genders for English substantives^v, according to whether they “mean” [*sic*] the male (masculine gender), the female (feminine), both (double gender), neither (neuter), or either (doubtful gender, e.g. *swine*) (Bullock 1586 [1977]: 11). While the number of genders is a matter of disagreement^{vi}, the idea of a correlation between gender and sex is shared by all grammarians, and from Murray (1795)'s massively influential grammar to the mid-19th century at least, many^{vii}, both in England and North America, make it a definition of the category. This definition opens the section on gender in the chapter devoted to nouns; for instance, “Gender is the distinction of nouns, with regard to sex” (Murray 1795: 47). This correlation of gender with sex leads a few grammarians (in the corpus, only Quackenbos 1869, but Brown [1851: 244] mentions the existence of a debate at the time) to consider that there are only two genders in English, as there are two sexes; nouns for inanimates are then described as “destitute of gender” – with a shift in the conception of gender, from a grammatical property of a part of speech to a strictly meaning-based distinction that concerns only a minority of nouns.

The turn of the 20th century heralds a major change, as attention gets paid to cases of discrepancy between gender and sex. The first grammar that mentions them (in the corpus at least) is Bain (1873), which, however, only indicates the existence of “a few exceptions” (no examples are given). Sweet (1898: 53) writes more forcefully that “gender and sex don't always agree”, although he retains the traditional definition of gender as “the expression of sex-distinctions by means of grammatical forms” (52). Jespersen (1942: 174) is the first to explain at length that gender “cannot be defined as the grammatical expression of sex”, as in a number of languages, they are largely unrelated. To him, Modern English has lost gender, although a “triple” division remains in personal pronouns, as well as a distinction between “a two-sex word and a no-sex word” in relative pronouns. Instead of “gender”, therefore, his grammar describes “how sex is indicated in English” (179), both for nouns and pronouns. For instance, *father*, *bull* and *he* indicate “male sex”, or *reader*, *eagle* and *who* indicate “both sexes” (ibid.).

The 20th century also sees a concern for gender variations, which pose a theoretical difficulty: can there still be agreement, the core criterion for gender, when a noun, e.g. *bull*, can be found with anaphoric pronouns, e.g. *he* and *it*? This leads a few more grammarians to deviate from the mainstream description of English as having three genders. One position is that of Kruisinga & Erades (1960) and Leech & Svartvik (1994): they do not use the term “gender” at all. For instance, Kruisinga & Erades describe “uses of *he*”, “uses of *she*” and “uses of *it*”. Quirk et al. (1985) retain gender but, making agreement their starting-point, redefine the gender classes according to the agreement patterns they license. They find not three classes, but nine. For instance, “higher organisms” (e.g. *ship*) form a gender class because they are compatible with *which* and *it/she*; *doctor* belongs to the “personal – dual” gender because it is compatible with *who* and *he/she*; etc. This approach, however, is counter-intuitive in that the number of gender classes does not correspond to that of gender markers (*he*, *she* and *it* only provide a three-fold distinction, *wh*-relative pronouns a two-fold one). A third path is proposed by Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 484-

489), who retain the idea of gender as a “system of noun classes differentiated by their agreement patterns”, as do studies of general linguistics (e.g. Corbett 1991, Aikhenvald 2002), but reject the idea that the nouns themselves have gender. They define “single-gender”, “dual gender” and “triple gender nouns”, but insist that the labels only mean that the nouns are *compatible with* anaphoric pronouns of one, two or three genders respectively. Indeed, gender agreement in English is of a looser kind than that found in highly grammaticised systems (e.g. French or German), and only involves compatibility of features between the anaphor and the antecedent. Huddleston & Pullum (2002)’s grammar is unique in rejecting gender for nouns without rejecting the category altogether for English.

To conclude on nouns, the study clearly shows the influence of theoretical backgrounds on the evolution of grammatical descriptions, whether it be the Latin model, the idea that nouns substitute for substances, the correlation between gender and sex (which, in its most extreme application, led to consider that there are only two genders in English), or the definition of gender in general linguistics. Moreover, even though Bullokar (1586) himself already stated that it is mainly the pronouns (rather than the nouns) that overtly mark gender in English, the 20th century seems to see a shift in importance from nouns to pronouns in the description of gender, as a few grammars reject gender, or gender in nouns. It is worth noting that similarly, pronouns (especially personal pronouns) are the sole focus of several studies specifically devoted to English gender (e.g. Morris 1996, Gardelle 2006, Siemund 2008).

2. Personal pronouns

For third-person singular pronouns, grammatical descriptions that acknowledge the existence of gender in English are quasi-unanimous: apart from Quackenbos (1869: 55), all consider that *he*, *she* and *it* carry gender, respectively the masculine, the feminine and the neuter^{viii}. In descriptions that establish more than three genders, these three are always given first; they therefore constitute the core of the system. This consensus is in keeping with the fact that the third-person singular pronouns are the only ones that display a three-term gender alternation in their morphology.

As regards the other persons, five 19th-century grammars include *I*, *we* and *you* among gendered pronouns. One of them is English (Brown 1851), four American (Ingersoll 1832, Hamlin 1833, Covell 1853 and Quackenbos 1869). For instance, one reads:

(1) (Hamlin 1833: 27) *I* and *thou*, and their plurals *we* and *ye*, are sometimes masculine: as, *I am the man, thou art the man*; sometimes feminine: as, *I am the woman, thou art the woman*; hence they may be called of the common gender^{ix}; but as the first and second persons are supposed to be known as to their sex from their being present, it is not necessary to notice the gender. *I* and *thou*, when they are used instead of nouns naturally neuter, are still masculine or feminine, because their nouns are, by a figure of speech.

(2) (Brown 1851: 295) The personal pronouns of the first and second persons, are equally applicable to both sexes; and should be considered masculine or feminine, according to the known application of them. The speaker and the hearer, being present to each other, of course know the sex to which they respectively belong; and, whenever they appear in narrative or dialogue, we are told who they are. In *Latin*, an adjective or a past participle relating to these pronouns, is varied to agree with them in *number*, *gender*, and *case*. This is a sufficient proof, that *ego*, *I* and *tu*, *thou*, are not destitute of gender, though neither the Latin words nor the English are themselves varied to express it^x.

(3) (Quackenbos 1869: 55) The simple personal pronouns are:

I, first person, masculine gender if a male is denoted, feminine if a female.

Thou, second person, masculine gender if a male is denoted, feminine if a female.

He, third person, masculine gender.

She, third person, feminine gender.

It, third person, destitute of gender.

The emergence of this idea of gendered first- and second-person pronouns in the 19th century is the result of a new conception of personal pronouns: although their function as noun substitutes had been well established since Dyonisius Thrax (2nd century BC), in the course of the 18th century “substitute” was reinterpreted from “standing for” distributionally to “substituting for” (Michael 1970: 321). The turning-point is thought to be Lye (1671)’s statement that “a Pronoun is a word put for a noun and supplying its stead” (Michael 1970: 320, Adamson 2007: 1). As a pronoun was a noun substitute, it had to carry the same grammatical features. This emphasis on agreement culminated in Murray’s fifth rule of syntax, which is also mentioned in the five grammars cited above^{xi}:

- (4) Murray’s fifth rule of syntax: “Pronouns must always agree with their antecedents, and the nouns for which they stand, in gender and number” (first edition 1795, 50 editions in Britain and the US).

What is interesting here is that the five grammars do not derive the presence of gender from facts (there is no actual alternation in forms), but from linguistic theory (pronouns should agree in gender with nouns because they are noun substitutes).

It should be noted that Murray actually contradicts himself: despite the word “always” in his rule of syntax, for personal pronouns he states that “[g]ender has respect only to the third person singular of the pronouns, *he, she, it*” (1834: 61)^{xii}. This inconsistency enables him to take facts (the lack of morphological alternation) into account. Like him, three grammarians from the same period as those cited above explicitly reject the idea of gender for first- and second-person pronouns (Greenleaf 1823: 23 in Canada; Walker 1839: 12 and Mason 1873: 33 in England); but they also provide a theoretical explanation for the facts. This account is the same in all three grammars, and illustrated for instance by (5).

- (5) (Greenleaf 1823: 23) Pronouns are the class of words most nearly related to nouns; being, as the name imports, representatives or substitutes of nouns. Accordingly, they are subject to the same modification with nouns, of number, gender, and case. But with respect to gender, we may observe, that the pronouns of the first and second persons, as they are called, *I* and *thou*, do not appear to have had the distinction of gender given them in any language; for this plain reason, that, as they always refer to persons who are present to each other when they speak, their sex is commonly known, and therefore needs not be marked by a masculine or feminine pronoun.

In the 20th century, theoretical advances on anaphora and deixis lead grammarians to consider that first- and second-person pronouns are not anaphoric, but deictic, so that there is no agreement with an antecedent (e.g. Huddleston & Pullum 2002: 425). Again, theory and facts therefore converge. Quirk *et al.* (1985: 341), though, retain the idea of gender: “The first and second person pronouns are inevitably of personal rather than nonpersonal gender.” Their position may be seen to reflect the hesitation, mentioned in the previous section, between gender as a strictly grammatical category characterized by agreement with an antecedent noun (which should not include first- and second-person pronouns), and gender as a category based primarily on reference (expressing the distinction between humans and non humans, or animates and inanimates, and that between males and females).

3. Relative pronouns

Relative pronouns do not appear to be specifically mentioned in relation to gender until the 19th century, and there, gender is not always posited explicitly (although it is not explicitly rejected either). Murray (1808: 90) himself only states that “[w]ho is applied to persons, *which* to animals and inanimate things”, and this is the dominant approach in the 19th and early 20th centuries^{xiii}.

The grammars which do specify “gender” for relative pronouns propose two different treatments. The first one is a maximalist application of the agreement principle, as with personal pronouns: all relative pronouns, including *that*, are said to carry gender. This description is found in only two grammars^{xiv} (i.e. fewer than for the maximalist approach to gender in personal pronouns), both of them American:

(6) (Morgan 1814: 74) [*which* is] the neuter gender of *who*. *That* is really a relative and has all the genders in both numbers.

(7) (Hamlin 1833: 29) *Who* is used instead of persons, and it has two genders, masculine and feminine. [...] *Which* is used instead of animals and inanimate things; as, *this is the horse which won the race; this is the tree which produces no fruit*. It may be in the masculine, feminine, or neuter gender. [...] NOTE – The pronouns agree with the nouns they represent, in person, number, and gender. [...] *That* is used to prevent too frequent repetition of *who* or *which*. Hence it may be of the masculine, feminine, or neuter gender; as, *the greatest man that ever lived, has had misfortunes; the hum-bird that was sipping dew from the flower, has flown away; and this is the flower that drops*.

The second approach, which, too, begins in the 19th century (Lowth 1838: 168, Lowres 1863: 140), considers explicitly that gender is only carried by *wh-* pronouns. It is found only in). For instance, Lowth states:

(8) (Lowth 1838: 168) *Who* is appropriated to persons; and so may be accounted Masculine or Feminine only; we apply *which* now to things only; and to irrational animals, excluding them from personality, without any consideration of sex: *which* therefore may be accounted Neuter.

In the 20th century, the idea of gender in relative pronouns spreads, with facts (a two-term alternation) leading some grammarians to create labels that establish a two-term contrast. Quirk *et al.* (1985: 366) thus use the labels “personal” and “non personal”, which they also apply to *he / she* vs. *it*. Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 498) use the same terms, but do not apply them to personal pronouns, for which they distinguish only between *masculine*, *feminine* and *neuter*. Their terminological distinction is again explicitly based on facts: as there are occasional discrepancies of use (e.g. *which* co-occurring with *he* for the same referent), the two gender systems might not be similar.

To conclude on relative pronouns, as with personal pronouns, the maximalist approach is found to disregard linguistic facts (there is no morphological gender alternation for *that*) in the name of a rule of syntax. As for the low number of grammars which explicitly use the term “gender”, it can seem surprising, especially as relative pronouns inflect for gender in Latin, the model language for the first grammars of English. It might be partly due to the focus on the distinction of sex in descriptions of gender, a distinction which is absent from the *who / which* alternation.

4. Adjectives

Today, the idea of gender for English adjectives appears totally outdated, if not absurd. Yet it is found in some of the early descriptions (Bullokar 1586, Jonson 1640, Poole 1646), as well as in one 19th-century grammar (Morgan 1814). In the early descriptions, the gender of adjectives makes a gender class of its own (in those grammars, there were thought to be 6 to 7 genders in

English), labelled *common of three* because an adjective is compatible with any substantive. A typical description is that of Jonson (1640):

(9) (Jonson 1640 [1972]: 57) Sixth is the *Common of three Genders*: by which a *Noune* is divided into *Substantive* and *Adjective*. For a *Substantive* is a *Noune* of one only gender, or (at the most) of two. And an *Adjective* is a *Noune* of three Genders, being always in the infinite.

This account is the consequence of two theoretical traditions. One is the description of Latin gender by Lily, whose *Grammar of Latin in English* formed the basis of early descriptions of English^{xv}. Lily specifies seven genders, one of which is the *common of three*:

(10) (Lily 1542 [2013]: 162) The [gender] common of three is declyned with *hic hæc* and *hoc*, as *hic hæc et hoc felix*.

The other theoretical tradition is the classification of adjectives as *nouns*, along with substantives, rather than as a distinct part of speech. As stated in Jonson's grammar ([9] above), the gender *common of three* carried by adjectives was taken to be the defining feature that distinguished them from substantives within the class of nouns (Dons 2004: 48).

Not all early grammars mention gender for adjectives (e.g. Greaves 1594, Gil 1621, cited in Dons 2004). On the other hand, as stated at the beginning of this section, the idea is still found in one American 19th-century grammar: Morgan (1814), which from Rule 6 (extract 11 below) derives a declension table for adjectives (12) – note that Morgan (1814) is also maximalist for relative pronouns, considering that relative *that* marks gender.

(11) (Morgan 1814: 201) RULE 6: Adjectives, adjective pronouns and participles agree with their nouns in number, case, gender, and person: as, 'He is a good man.' 'This book.' 'She is a loving mother.'

(12) (Morgan 1814: 88) Declension of Adjectives

	Singular				Plural		
	Mas.	Fem.	Neu.		Mas.	Fem.	Neu.
Nom.	good	good	good		good	good	good
Poss.	good	good	good		good	good	good
Obj.	good	good	good		good	good	good

As a conclusion, the idea of gender for adjectives can again be regarded as an example of theory (adjectives as nouns, Latin tradition) preceding and prevailing over facts (lack of morphological variation).

5. Innovations: quantifiers

Two 19th-century grammars are uniquely innovative in the boundaries they establish for gender markers. Doherty (1841: 39) regards *one* as carrying a gender called *indefinite*.^{xvi} Greenleaf (1823: 24), too, includes *one*, as in, "Both were once mine, but I have parted with one", but also, more generally, all pronominal adjectives (*one*, *other* and quantifiers) when used as pronouns. To him, they carry gender, but also case, number and person. As these terms are anaphoric, this description is most probably a consequence of the rule of agreement between pronouns and their antecedents.

Closer to us, it is the indefinite compounds in *-body*, *-one* and *-thing* (e.g. *somebody*) which are regarded by Quirk *et al.* (1985: 341) as carrying personal (*somebody*) or nonpersonal (*something*)

gender. In another two grammars, this contrast, which is largely reference-based, is mentioned, but not explicitly referred to as gender: Biber *et al.* (1999: 312) merely note a “personal v. neuter” distinction in these pronouns, and Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 423) describe a “personal *-body* and *-one*” and “impersonal *-thing*”^{xvii}. The inclusion of indefinite compounds among gender markers requires further research: Cotte (2012: 26) shows that from a grammatical point of view (rather than just reference), these compounds, like personal and relative pronouns, establish a very general categorization and exhibit morphological alternation. On that basis, he also includes interrogative pronouns (*who* vs. *what*).

Conclusion

The present chapter has shown how much grammatical description can evolve, even for what is sometimes considered a relatively straightforward category. First of all, it has established a number of factors at play in the evolution of grammatical descriptions. The main one is the theoretical debates and tenets of an era, concerning gender as well as related domains. For instance, when gender is unanimously defined in terms of its correlation with sex, it is necessarily regarded as reference-based, which favours theoretical evolutions such as descriptions of a two-gender system; when variations are established, a search for new theoretical models is favoured. The corpus also suggests the influence of nationality: American grammars seem more likely to conform to existing rules than English ones (hence a seemingly more widespread maximalist approach to agreement). But the overview also stresses the lack of consensus among grammarians of a given era: a grammar is not just a repository of common knowledge, but also takes a stance. For example, in the early grammars (late 16th and early 17th centuries), there is no consensus as to the number of genders; later on, different grammarians take different approaches to the shared syntactic rule of agreement between pronouns and their antecedents; today, Huddleston & Pullum (2002) adopt a unique position among grammars when they reject the idea that nouns carry gender. These are not strictly individual positions in that they are informed by linguistic research and contemporary debate; but including such positions in a grammar, giving them the status of authority, is an individual initiative.

Finally, and most importantly perhaps, this overview of grammars shows that the category of gender in English is in fact not unproblematic at all. Today, some questions remain. For instance, should indefinite compounds be included among gender-marking items? The question holds for other words as well: interrogative pronouns (Cotte 2012: 26), but also *they*. Sklar (1988: 411) posits that in sex-indefinite references to humans, *they* marks gender agreement rather than agreement in number, as evidenced by the contrast between (13a) and (13b) below: although both antecedents mark plural notional number, *they* is acceptable only for human reference. In this use, *they* indicates gender-indefiniteness, which could be regarded as a form of gender marking.

13a. Everyone looks dirty, don't they?

13b. Everything looks dirty, *don't they? (→ doesn't it?)

This issue more generally poses the question of the exact boundary between gender, a grammatical category characterized by agreement between a pronoun and its antecedent, and the ways in which the language expresses the contrast between humans and non-humans, and between sex (males vs. females) and absence of sex. Aikhenvald (2000: 21), working in general linguistics, rejects the existence of gender for English, in favour of what she calls *animacy-based distinctions*. The concept is used for instance to describe the fact that *da* + *preposition* (e.g. *damit*, *darauf*) is used only for inanimates in German, or that *ça* is not used in direct reference to a person in French. To me, there *is* gender in English, because there is agreement, though English gender is an uncommon pronominal system with a relatively loose kind of agreement (as described by Corbett 1991 and Huddleston & Pullum 2002). I would include personal *he*, *she*, *it* and relative pronouns *who* and *which*, but not interrogative *who* / *what*, *one* or *-body* and *-thing* compounds, because they differ from the others in one respect: they do not have prototype organisation. They denote a

person or a thing, rather than have these as their prototypical representatives and be used for other referents as well. This could be an indication that they mark *person-based distinctions*, to paraphrase Aikhenvald, rather than gender proper; that they have not undergone the same degree of grammaticisation. Unlike these, *he*, for instance, is used mainly for human males, but is also found with other extended values (e.g. to express familiarity with an object); similarly, in relative pronouns, there is variation between *which* and *who* for animals depending on the speaker's point of view on the referent. The validity of this position, however, will need to be assessed by further research.

ⁱ Bullokar (1586), "generally regarded as the first extant grammar of the English language" (Gwosdek 2013: viii, preface to Lily's grammar).

ⁱⁱ In general linguistics, some researchers (e.g. Creissels 2006, Aikhenvald 2002) reject the existence of a gender category in English, because it exhibits characteristics that set it apart from mainstream gender systems. But Corbett (1991: 169), for instance, ranks it among 'pronominal gender systems'.

ⁱⁱⁱ see also Murray 1834, Walker 1839, Brown 1851, Sweet 1898, Nesfield 1924 for England; Lynde 1821, Ingersoll 1832, Hamlin 1833, Covell 1853, Curme 1933 for the US; Greenleaf 1823 for Canada.

^{iv} In the first grammars, 'nouns' are a broad category which groups together substantives and adjectives. Later on, 'nouns' takes the narrower sense it has today.

^v In addition, Bullokar has a sixth gender class, *common of three genders*, for adjectives – see below.

^{vi} For instance, Jonson (1640) describes 6 genders, Poole (1646) 7, Howell (1661) 5, Miège (1688) 4, Wallis (1688) 3, Ash (1760) 2. In the 20th century, while 3 is the norm, some grammarians deviate: Nesfield (1924) establishes 4 genders, Biber et al. (1999) 4, while Quirk et al. (1985) define 9 'gender classes'.

^{vii} (Walker 1839, Brown 1851, Lowres 1863 for England; Morgan 1814, Lynde 1821, Ingersoll 1832, Hamlin 1833, Covell 1853, Quackenbos 1869 for the US; Greenleaf 1823 for Canada)

^{viii} For Quackenbos (1869: 55), as mentioned above, *it* is "destitute of gender", as English has two genders, corresponding to the two sexes.

^{ix} Hamlin, like all grammarians who define 4 genders for English, considers the common gender to be that of nouns which allow *he* or *she* depending on the context (e.g. *servant*).

^x In Brown's declension tables (1851 : 286), *I* is said to be of "any of the genders"; *they* is part of the declension of "HE, of the THIRD PERSON, masculine gender", similarly of "SHE, of the THIRD PERSON, feminine gender", and of "IT, of the THIRD PERSON, neuter gender".

^{xi} On the same grounds, Brown (1851 : 245) regards *they* as carrying gender. He also appeals to the rule of precedence, according to which the masculine is more worthy than the feminine, and the feminine is more worthy than the neuter. Hence the following analysis: "If one say, 'Joseph took the young child and his mother by night, and fled with them to Egypt', the pronoun *them* will be masculine; but let 'his' be changed to 'its', and the plural pronoun that follows will be feminine. For the feminine gender takes precedence of the neuter, but not of the masculine, and it is not improper to speak of a young child without designating the sex."

^{xii} Brown (1851: 295) criticises this inconsistency: "OBS. 3 – Many English grammarians, and Murray at their head, deny the first person of nouns, and the gender of pronouns of the first and second persons; and at the same time teach, that, 'Pronouns must always agree with their antecedents, and the nouns for which they stand, in gender, number, and person' (Murray's *Grammar* 2d Ed. p. 111; Rev. T. Smith's, p. 60)."

^{xiii} E.g. Quackenbos 1869: 62, Curme 1931: 229 for the US; Cobbett 1819 [1984]: 80, Walker 1839: 13, Brown 1851: 297, Bain 1873: 24, Mason 1873: 37, Poutsma 1914-1917: 966 for England.

^{xiv} This approach might also be that of Ingersoll (1832: 60 [US]), who states an agreement rule but provides no examples: "RULE XI: *Relative pronouns agree with their antecedents in person, number, and gender.*"

^{xv} After a proclamation by Henry 8 in 1542, Lily's grammar became the only authorised one in schools. It dominated the teaching of Latin down to the 19th century (Gwosdek 2013: vii, preface to Lily's *Grammar*).

^{xvi} For nouns, Doherty (1841: 32) acknowledges three genders in the grammatical tradition, but states that there "should be" a fourth, indefinite gender as well, for "things of which the gender is unknown, or of which it may be necessary to speak in an indefinite manner, without regard to sex." This innovation is based on ways of distinguishing sex, i.e. on referents.

^{xvii} In Huddleston & Pullum (2002), mention of these indefinites is not referenced under "personal gender" in the subject index. Biber et al. (1999 : 312) simply state that the personal v. neuter distinction "extends to other pronoun groups" than personal pronouns, namely relative, interrogative and indefinite pronouns.

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