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# Periphery, Gender, Language: An Introduction

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## 1. From Margin to Centre

Studying gender at the periphery could be viewed as working on minor and irrelevant phenomena: why look into the linguistic gender system of a language when gender should be conceptualized as a negotiation in daily discursive interactions? Why would vernaculars be worth our time when we know the linguistic system of the standard language they compete with? Thinking ‘periphery’ as irrelevant is what drives to exclusion of languages and/or phenomena which are at the core of the present volume. However as Joseph has already stipulated, what one sees as centre and periphery depends on one’s view of language. Moreover what appears marginal at first sight may turn out to be fundamental to science:

The temptation to ignore such phenomena, therefore, often is great, yet it is argued here that by doing so, we as linguists do our science a grave disservice and, worse, miss out on a source of information that is highly revealing about the nature of language in general. (...) the examination of many of these areas has led to just as many useful insights as the study of the core alone has yielded, and perhaps even more. (Joseph 1997, s.p.)

This volume aims to demonstrate that the centre/periphery tension allows for a theory of gender understood as a power relationship with implications for a political analysis of language structures (periphery of grammar), language uses (periphery of linguistic practices) and linguistic resistances (periphery as a political tool). For instance ethnographies of gay and lesbian experiences illuminate ways in which identities emerge from social constructionist intersections of language and semiotic practice (Butler 2004) as well as power: participants collaboratively (re)construct gender differences and the institutionalized ‘gender orders’ (Connell 1987; Holmes 2007), even though these orders will be different according to the context. Associated speech acts, while immediately empowering speakers, may ultimately disempower individuals, grounded by systems of stratified sociocultural reproduction and power relations, and thus validate patriarchal governance.

It is not at all a coincidence that such a focus on the dynamics of centres and peripheries has echoes in feminism. Indeed, if gender is primarily a power relationship, these dynamics are thus vantage points to identify and qualify power relationships. Numerous feminist theories in the last decades originated from the shift provided by an approach from the margins, from the peripheries, such as standpoint theory (Haraway 1988), intersectionality (Crenshaw 1993), transnational feminist theory (Shohat 2001), or queer theory (Butler 1990, 2004; Endsjø 2008), to mention only a few of them. Inherited from the socio-economics, political and geopolitical sciences (Wallerstein, Hopkins *et al.* 1982), the notion of periphery received the metaphorical fate of travelling concepts: to be applied to new realms. Over the last thirty

years, the notion of periphery fruitfully developed within the field of gender studies as a means to explore its articulation with non-western feminisms (Broomans and van der Waal 2002), sexualities (Symanski 1981), black feminism (bell hooks 1984), and more generally women studies (see for example Munson 2002).

In linguistics, though, the journey was quite different as Skrebtsova (2014)'s detailed review of the notion's uses in different linguistic traditions.

In semantics, Trier (1973) made use of the centre/periphery metaphor to bring to the fore an understanding of structural relations as changing through time, and thus challenging Saussure's dichotomy between diachronic and synchronic approaches. Through the definition of a lexical / semantic field in terms of centre, periphery and borderline zones Trier opened a path for a definition of semantic borders as uncertain and blurred, The Prague linguistic circle worked towards a conception of language as dynamic integrating then the notion of periphery. Indeed, linguistic items were defined on a continuum in terms of more or less integrated to the system, or *more central* or *more peripheral*, with centres understood as well as not static since their gravitation fields interact with one another: "The co-existence of the central and peripheral elements in the system of language (...) constitutes another hardly unimportant universal feature of language" (Vachek 1966, 32-33).<sup>1</sup>

Last, periphery is at stake within the cognitive linguistic realm, mainly with Rosch's prototype theory (1975). In this frame, the centre is the category's best example while *periphery* qualifies its non-typical members. Centre and periphery constitutes the status of a lexical unit vis-à-vis its semantic category.

What these theoretical frameworks have in common is therefore a will to understand language as a dynamic, a non-static process, as well as the use of the centre/periphery tension "to account of asymmetries in language" (Skrebtsova 2014, 144)

Although we definitely subscribe to this claim for including asymmetries in language analysis and we acknowledge the contribution of these frames for an articulated understanding of speech/discourse and language, we still express a reservation.

Indeed, the underlying presumption of such theories especially the prototype theory, is the *unicity* of a linguistic system, within which what is central and what is peripheral is commonly shared by the members of a given linguistic community. Although diachronic changes are taken into account, the semiotic heterogeneity of language uses as well as the balances of power in the meaning making within a society cannot be addressed by such theories. This constitutes somehow a restricted definition of polysemy, venting power and domination relationships out of language analysis. We assume here, on the opposite, that the meaning making, from grammar to semantics, is also fostered by social negotiations. The coexistence of different meanings, or different units, is not always a vertical scheme, but could be scattered through time, spaces, and societies.

It is then unsurprisingly that one can trace the notion of periphery when power issues are at stake within sociolinguistics, critical discourse analysis, rhetoric, or any kind of subfield focusing on social and human interrelations through the lens of language. In particular, the notion has developed in the field of sociolinguistics of multilingualism (Pietikainen and Kelly-Holmes 2013). Yet, linguistic codes and facts *per se* remained unquestioned by the critical framework of periphery.

To merge periphery as used in feminist or social theories and in linguistic theories requires therefore addressing together issues of asymmetries and dynamics within issues of power and domination, from the depth of grammar to the semiotic negotiation of gender categories.

Regarding gender and language studies, an interdisciplinary frame looks nowadays ready to undertake this fruitful encounter; indeed the notion of periphery reveals new spaces in the linguistic construction of gender, bringing a multidimensional perspective to the field. Margins and peripheries are at the edge, around, nearby, but also a zone. They offer a horizon

as well as a standpoint. Most studies have asserted that gender and language theories cannot avoid the matter of power; in the same way the tension between centre and periphery as well figures as a crucial and refreshing dynamic for linguistic analyses of gender. This dynamic spreads out in two main directions. On one hand, minorisation questions our definitions of both linguistic structures and gender structures. On the other hand, starting from the periphery invites us to renew our methods toward a de-colonial and de-territorialised linguistics.

## 2. Minor Phenomena and Minorisation: the Structure in Question

### 2.1. *Theorising the Minor*

From a conceptual point of view, the notion of periphery allows for the investigation of the ideological dimension of grammars and enhances our understanding of grammatical structures and their links with power relationships, whereas much work in gender and language studies has given precedence to the linguistic structure inherited from the gender system, or has focused on how gender variations influence speakers' productions, without considering the linguistic structuralisation of gender. Very few works open a path for an ideological reading of the linguistic gender structure itself (cf. Burr 2012 and Cameron 1992 as exceptions), allowing to question both language and gender as structuralising processes, questioning centres and peripheries.

Far from being understood, constructed and negotiated within a symmetrical relationship, gender – in language as well as in society – almost always allocates to the masculine and the feminine a central and a peripheral role/function/meaning, respectively. This symbolic marginalisation of women within the realm of humanity is one of the most powerful resorts of patriarchy, evidenced by linguistic investigations (Cameron 1998; Cameron and Kulick 2003 for an overview). The question that some linguistic works ask is how to identify the mechanisms of this centrifugal force relegating the feminine in the margins (cf. Michard analyses (1996, 2002) reminiscent of Beauvoir's text (1949)).

Further, if we think of the social tension between centrality and periphery we quickly move towards thinking about the normal, obvious *vs.* the not/ab-normal, hidden or “minored”. But a peripheral location not only indexes what is prohibited, tabooed or silenced, it also indexes what is to be denounced, or at least pointed out, what is monstrous (literally as ‘noticeable’, Latin *monstranum*): in grammar the feminine form is always a ‘problem’ to solve when the masculine form is taken for granted as the norm, by default (see Echeverria’s contribution in this volume, or Hadjidemetriou for alternative uses). Therefore, adopting a peripheral positioning may also be interpreted as endorsing the voice of the unseen, the hidden, and therefore silent or to be silenced for the sake of homogeneity, while a more dialectical reading will understand centrality as the high place, and periphery as the low place. There are thus different peripheries, according to different gender theories.

### 2.2. *Structure, Meaning and Power*

From a linguistic point of view, how to make periphery an object *and* a stance? Beyond the casual opposition between linguistic structures and discursive practices, are these dynamics renewing the well-known dynamics between norms and gaps? No, they are not because the notion of periphery stands not only as a place of repression, but also a place for experimentation. Indeed describing these peripheral practices requires an effort to not erase them under the centrifugal force of structures, and rather to pay attention to the ways ‘centres’

or ‘peripheries’ are constructed. This investigation can be summarized by two related questions: 1. How does gender *create* a linguistic system? and 2. How do linguistic features *index* semantic categorisations of gender?

The syntactical mechanisms involved in creating a periphery are well-known, hence the allocation of the feminine to the periphery through the claimed unmarkedness of the masculine (Jakobson 1971), the embedment of generic value in masculine forms (Holmes 1998; Michard 1999), or the assignment of specificity to the feminine (*cf.* studies on the linguistic policy of ‘feminisation’). In this volume, investigations in different languages pursue this issue, taking into account a gender studies perspective and stance to inform and shape the linguistic analyses.

The constructivist approach revealed that the realm of semantics (Scott 1986; Violi 1987) – the gender designation – is a prime place for gender construction or deconstruction (West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender proceeds to a categorisation of the world, and is therefore a proposition to understand the world; that is to say, gender conveys an ideological stance on the human world and language. These pioneer works opened avenues to explore the intertwined categorisation processes, language and gender, as structuralising our access to reality, making it intelligible. This is the point of the papers on morphological gender in the present volume (such as those of Muchnik or Guellouz in this volume) which show that gender understood as a grammatical category can hardly be thought as independent from the cultural context. This context provides meanings and values to the physiological differences between male and female beings according to a minor/major opposition. In Hall’s terms, semiotics is about understanding “the political nature of representation itself, about its complexity, about the effects of language, about textuality as a site of life and death” (1992, 285). If both language and gender are semiotic processes, working on the interface of language and gender calls for a semiotic approach aware of power relationships.

### 2.3. *Gender Structures and Linguistic Structures*

As soon as we speak of gender and language, periphery is to be understood in a double dimension: how to confront the structurality of gender and the structurality of language? If a structuralist vision of gender has been challenged (and is still under discussion), the structural dimension of language is more difficult to question. One finds an illustration of this dissymmetry when looking at Foucault’s work and its ambiguous relationship to structuralism. Although Foucault describes a society moulded by plurivocal power relationships, and discourses as fluid spaces of power, language as a structure remains unquestioned. Butler fills in the gap when she convokes language without defining it as a structure nor as a discourse (1990). For her, the linguistic code is a further dimension of discursive power, a result of language practices and their relationships to the norm. Language structure is then contextualised as social practices and norms. Consequently, the linguistic structure of gender is understood as a centre, inherently building power relationships and allocating peripheries. These power relationships can be questioned when looking at and looking from the periphery.

Another meaningful example of the negotiation of periphery’s place in the study of gender and power relationship is to be found in the controversy between the tenants of the theory of dominance and those of postmodern feminism. The story is well known: after *Gender Trouble*, Butler was attacked for the importance she gave to discourse practices to the detriment of body materiality. In the 1990s, one was expected to choose his or her side according to these different conceptions of power. Butler replied to these critics in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), where she reasserts her acknowledgement of body materiality and associates more narrowly semiotic processes of categorisation within their incorporated,

material anchorage. She develops the idea that, if power relationships define the material dimensions of sexes, bodies literally embody these relationships. This debate spread out around two discussions. On one hand, there was a view of gender as a *system* of domination vs. a view of gender as a *repertory* of performed actions. On the other hand, a debate focused on body, sex and gender materiality. In both cases, the status of periphery and minor phenomena was at the core of the matter.

It is difficult, though, to not hear in this controversy a parallel with the tumultuous relationship between language and discourse, between a structuralist approach to language and a semiotic approach to discourse, including in gender and language studies. The theory of dominance draws a parallel between gender structure and language structure based on masculine domination in society (cf. feminisation of trade names). If we translate this stance in ‘periphery/centre’ vocabulary, the feminine is at the periphery, while the genericity of the masculine makes its centrality. Postmodern approaches focus on discourse as the labelling activity of gender, and more generally of any system of norms. Regarding periphery, they take interest in the making of centres and peripheries as significant spaces defining our repertory of actions. Queer theory applied to the linguistic field thus provides analyses counter to the feminist materialist approach to language (Spender 1980; Ochs and Taylor 1995). For example, the analysis of the grammatical neuter (as merely grammatical or referring to the inanimate, as a common gender, as a third gender) implies different theoretical stances on both language and gender.

We believe that periphery is an illuminating crossroad to confront these stances, since the relationship between centrality and periphery might be analysed in terms of a dialectical understanding as well as in terms of a Foucauldian understanding of power (1972). Theorizing periphery in gender and language studies is therefore a way to reveal our epistemological views and provides an arena for new discussions. With the Butler from *Bodies That Matter* in mind, it seems we can also today go beyond this opposition to work at the intersection of contingency and structures – that is to understand periphery as a relegated space as well as dynamic place of gender making and negotiation.

If we define structure as the result of a (successful) categorising process, gender structure and language structure may have a lot in common: grammatical gender, like sex, is a place where masculine gender and virility associate, or where any value associates with feminine or masculine paradigms; syntactical rules (masculine taking over feminine, etc.) embed gender dynamics; heteronormativity is also found in the lexicographic or anaphoric detail. Such a definition of structure as a solidification of categories allows a vision of gender and language as two categorising processes related to power. These categories are always to be reiterated, negotiated, and above all, are multiple, because structure is the result of power relationships. That is, structure is the outcome of centralising forces. Periphery functions then as an ‘indraught’, a vantage point to observe the solidification from outside and eventually as an escape from the totalising power of the structure. Starting from the periphery is therefore the chance to understand linguistic structures, and a space from which to explore evolving gender categorisation. This is a proposition to overstep the language/discourse dichotomy for a poststructuralist linguistics, in the sense that structure is not a departure point but a theoretical construction to question. This stance follows Benveniste (1974): instead of analysing everything in terms of structure, it confronts the structural dimension of language with the heterogeneity of social dimensions. Those who want to catch sight of this heterogeneity needs to take distance from centralities and their prescriptive power to rationalize the world. In Angenot’s terms, we have to consider simultaneously “the formal [structural] point of view of the text and the socio-critical point of view of ideology” (1982, 11).

This common ground of the volume is akin to the emerging field of queer linguistics, not understood as LGBT identity, but as a process and as an epistemological proposal for

linguistics (Koch 2008; Leap 2008; Kulick 2010; Motschenbacher 2010; Greco 2013). Heterogeneity though is inherently constitutive of margins and peripheries since they challenge the definition of fixed, stable identities and linguistic categories (see for instance the contribution of Motschenbacher in this volume).

### 3. De-territorialising and Decolonising Linguistics

In the wake of the project Hellinger and Bussmann undertook ten years ago (2001, 2002, 2003), we aim to shed light on the variety of roles and the nature of gender, as far the linguistic encoding of gender is concerned. Focusing on languages across the world which could be described as ‘less or least studied’, the present volume contributes to a plurilithic description of linguistic gender (Pennycook 2008). Our aim is to move from our specific standpoint (as researchers) and explore, question and reframe the existing categories (at least linguistically) through a postmodern theoretical framework exploring the periphery. Speakers are categorized most of the time as women and men, even when they question this very categorisation and the fact of categorising. However non-western cultures (see Tshimanga, Guellouz or Nelson’s contribution) as well as postcolonial settings (cf. Hadzantonis’ chapter) throw new light on a vexed issue. Indeed many of the included chapters propose the first description of gender and its functioning in a given language (see Kashyap, Abbou and Tse or Weirich). Perhaps more importantly, all of them start from linguistic “marginalia” (Joseph 1997).

Therefore the chapters reflect the diversity of theoretical frameworks which can apprehend the fluidity of gender(-ed) language and identity. This diversity highlights the social constraints on daily discourse and identifies discourses that resist gender norms. Working from the margin decentres the stand point and destabilizes the notions and forms taken for granted; since as an external boundary, the periphery defines, shapes, and gives volume to the entity involved, and since in the present context the entity involved is gender, a positioning from the periphery then becomes, paradoxically, fundamental. Periphery offers new scientific, ideological, political and methodological perspectives. These perspectives open three different paths: a de-territorialisation of linguistics to work on understudied languages or genderless languages; a decolonisation of our analytical tools; and a methodology acknowledging a transversal approach of the linguistic levels concerned by gender.

#### 3.1. *De-territorialising Linguistics*

The sociolinguistic dimension of this volume includes the linguistic description of gender in minor, peripheral or under-studied languages or varieties of language, de-territorialising linguistics and its tools, and the linguistic description of languages where gender is grammatically peripheral (the so-called genderless languages). De-territorialisation is made possible by the different positioning. Indeed, by *concentrating* on mainstream theoretical spaces, margins and peripheries are made invisible, therefore insignificant. We argue that one cannot describe centres without taking into account the edges of these centres. This stance requires not only taking into account the margins but also thinking *from* the margins. Indeed we need to reverse the thinking mode that usually goes from centre to periphery and discover what vantage points are possible from the margins on the centres. The feminist bell hooks asserted this need for a simultaneous understanding of both centres and margins when she wrote: “living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin.” (1984). A linguistic translation of such a statement invites us

to explore shadowed linguistic realms. So-called genderless languages turn out to have various ways to signify gender, including grammatical ones. What are the consequences for the analysis of ‘gendered’ languages? The description of so far un-described or under-described languages makes us aware of new places where gender can squeeze in. To look at gender across languages provides a new view of the linguistic materiality of gender. It also provides an understanding of gender complexity in language by contrasting gendered and genderless languages, languages with or without formalised (or grammaticalised) gender, languages with no, two, three or more genders, etc., giving way to a broader analysis of linguistic potentialities.

### 3.2. *Decolonising Linguistics*

If the notion of periphery is a “counter-reading” (bell hooks) of the story, it is a space at the edge of the political scope, barely visible for understudied languages. This volume attempts to provide a space for non-western linguistic analyses and non-Indo-European languages.

Seeking to understand how gender is intertwined with language, we focus on its linguistic system in the most described languages. Putting forward the plurality of linguistic encodings of gender constitutes the first step for a decolonisation of linguistics. The description of peripheral languages, beyond its indisputable scientific contribution to new data and frames, also sheds an ideological light on the making of the discipline. Pennycook demonstrated brilliantly in *English and the Discourse of Colonialism* (1998) how a language (English) and a discourse (colonialism) shoulder each other. Giving prominence to central languages perpetuates an implicit discourse of colonialism. There is a crucial need for description of languages otherwise made invisible. Indeed more and more works focusing on ‘minor’ languages are being undertaken in gender and language studies: for the most recent see the ground-breaking work of Hellinger and Bussmann (2001, 2002, 2003), Atanga, Ellece, Litosseliti and Sunderland (2013) on Sub-Saharan Africa, the special issue of *Gender and Language* on endangered languages (Ahlers 2012) and individual works (Lazović 2009 for Serbian, Xiaoping 2008 for Chinese, among others).

Therefore, describing understudied languages (in general or from a gender perspective) takes part in a process of decolonization of linguistics *itself*. As we know, the conceptual and analytical tools of global contemporary linguistics were shaped in Europe, the traditional tools used by linguists have been created for the description of western languages since Aristotelian times, influenced by the writing systems and linguistic features of these languages. Later, those same tools were used for grammars of non-western languages: Pan and Tham report for their part that, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, some Chinese intellectuals worked hard “to establish a Chinese linguistic system based on the Western model”, introducing analytical categories such as “word, sentence” or “gender” (2007, 4).

Anchimbe, in his book dedicated to linguistics and postcolonialism, wrote:

The linguistic approaches [of postcolonial settings] have paid attention to the emergence of hybrid languages, new varieties of European languages and the general patterns of speech peculiar to these areas. Their analytical frameworks have generally been European-based theories that were originally designed for Western situations. (2007, 2)

This statement has a methodological counterpart. Decolonizing grammar calls for contextualizing those linguistic tools and concepts in order to evaluate to what extent they are relevant for peripheral language analysis. This methodological need for decolonization is particularly important since Anglo-Saxon research dominates the academic landscape of gender and language. Linguistic analyses of gender could then be modelled on the specific

gender structures known in these Anglo-Saxon and Romance languages, constraining our knowledge and understanding of the linguistic gender phenomenon. A systematic precedence of grammar for instance has been noted: if gender was not grammaticalised, there was no need for linguistic analysis. We know today that this gendered/genderless language dichotomy, based on a syntactical criterion, is no longer valid. The grammaticalisation of gender is a matter of degree (Huddleston and Pullum 2008): in some languages, gender is “syntactically central”, while in others, gender is syntactically peripheral. Gender is a polysemic categorization and as a categorization relies necessarily on linguistic devices. Gender plays an important role in the ways we make the world significant. Conversely, since this gendered structuralisation of the world uses language to be expressed (among other means), we need to investigate the array of linguistic possibilities, including in the “ungendered” languages. On the other hand, these displacements and re-appropriations of western tools for non-western languages may produce a shift allowing new spaces for exploration.

### 3.3. *Toward a Transversal Methodology*

Lastly, and consequently, periphery also constitutes a *methodological* frame: a methodology of the shift. Similarly to borderlands for historians (Hämäläinen and Truett 2011), or queer theories for gender studies, the notion of ‘periphery’, by allowing a shift from central frames, draws new landscapes. *Shifts* and *borders* provide two directions of analysis.

As stated earlier, to take the peripheral stance is to stand against a totalizing view within the system (Haraway 1988; Foucault 1972). If structures are powerful tools to understand language, and sometimes societies, they cannot be taken alone, at the risk of erasing the agency of actors (Butler 1990). A peripheral epistemology does not mean defining the periphery as necessarily subordinated to a centre. Otherwise, this centre again will be under the scope, covertly. ‘Periphery’ should become a means to draw new topologies. Careful attention is needed to still acknowledge the power relationships that the centre maintains toward the periphery. Methodologically, this means understanding periphery simultaneously as a space of power and as a place a part, as a new space providing new maps.

In linguistics, such a peripheral stance is also a matter of discipline and indiscipline. Indeed, gender squeezes in all kinds of linguistic levels, making the borders of the linguistic subfields porous, permeable. Working on gender in language requires often working at different structural levels at the same time (morphological, syntactical, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and interactional). It requires working on linguistic interfaces rather than on linguistic levels (see Baider and Jacquey 2010). This specificity of gender in language invites us to visit the borderlands of the linguistic subfields, stretching their concepts and limits to interconnect them. This also requires a simultaneous capture of macro and micro language phenomena.

If centre has to do with homogeneity, periphery allies with heterogeneity. Departing from a universalist frame, working from the periphery 1) explores the scattering of gender anchorages in linguistic structures; 2) reveals tensions between different peripheries and calls for an intersectional approach to linguistic and socio-linguistic phenomena; and 3) requires being at the interface between different frames, objects and linguistic levels.

The following chapters all make this notion of periphery at work in different ways, sometimes in the same direction, sometimes conflicting, but always exploring peripheral spaces and minor phenomena through hybrid methodologies, original data or emerging approaches. In this way, the contributions reveal the heterogeneity of gender making in language, its places of structuration and solidification as well as its place of negotiation.

#### 4. Undoing Grammatical Gender

The first section of the book, entitled “**Undoing Grammatical Gender**”, gathers critical contributions about the anchorage of gender in language structure. The integration of a centre/periphery dynamics in the analysis of masculine and feminine linguistic representation leads to questioning structural phenomena as solidified, enacted categories shaped by power. Whereas the power conveyed in gender is often analysed in discourse, these papers propose to identify it at the interface between structure and discourse, understood as co-construction. In other terms, they form a proposition to analyse the gendering of linguistic structure through the plasticity of discursive practices, illustrated in what we might call ‘minor phenomena’. This section emphasises the ideological dimension of grammar. When studying the semiotics of morphosyntax, it becomes obvious that grammatical words enforce, construct and perpetuate gender ideology. This section therefore brings diachronic and contrastive perspectives to the forefront of the analysis to reveal the linguistic gender shifts.

A diachronic sociolinguistic perspective allows Malka Muchnik to investigate why it seems so difficult to change Modern Hebrew, a gender-marked language, and provides an outline of grammatical potentialities, language policies orientations and challenging discursive realisations. With an historical background about language change regarding gender, Muchnik bounds up syntactical categorisation with a political reading of linguistics, at the interface of diachrony, syntax and sociolinguistics. The chapter methodically confronts gender syntactical potentialities, linguistic changes, gender recommendations and gendered realisations. The analysis proves that grammatical gender has displayed a relative flexibility through time. Yet, the contemporary tendency is towards masculinisation instead of feminisation or neutralisation, a tendency proceeding from a regressive social orientation.

A few studies have explored gender and language in spoken Arabic especially in Morocco (Sadiqi 2003, Ruitert 2008). Most have focused on dialectal varieties. Mariem Guellouz contrasts classical Arabic with the dialectal Tunisian language as far as feminisation is concerned. Drawing from different sources such as poetry and literary commentators as well as grammarians and contemporary media discourses, her chapter reveals the syntactical rules for feminising words is not as obvious as it seems (i.e. just adding a feminine inflexion). As a matter of fact, trade names uses foster an asymmetric allocation of social spaces according to gender, within sexuality plays a decisive role.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a grammatical masculinisation occurs in the case of adjectives describing specific physiological and social female phenomena such as *hamel* ‘pregnant’ or *taliq* ‘repudiated’. Guellouz argues two reasons for this ‘unmarkedness’ or avoidance of the feminine marker: 1. the referential gender being enough to disambiguate a reference to a female, there would be no need to mark the feminine; 2. the feminine suffix has become grammaticalised into a marker of intensity.<sup>3</sup> Feminine is therefore either sexualised, masculinised or muted. As shown by this work, the motives for such a grammatical resistance to the feminine have to be found in linguistic and metalinguistic imaginary.

Structural gender linguistics has become marginalised in the field of language and gender and has been limited to a Saussurean structuralist analysis. Basing his argument on this statement Heiko Motschenbacher proposes a poststructuralist approach to gender language structures. This chapter offers a theoretical declension of the relationships between linguistic materiality (and its plasticity) and language structure (as a construction). To achieve such a theoretical turn, from structuralism to a poststructuralist perspective in linguistics, Motschenbacher invites us to consider a *desessentialised* understanding of linguistic structures that is, abandoning visions of language as a stable system to join the tradition of language as a discursive, and ever-changing, formation. This approach brings back power and normativity issues at the core of linguistic gender analyses. For this purpose, a double methodological

proposal is made, consisting in integrating both diachronic and contrastive perspectives in gender and language studies. Through a historicised and contrastive analysis of gender in English, German and Croatian, the author shows the heterogeneity of linguistic gender constructions, and the linguistic fluidity of gender, pointing out as the possible differences in perception and conceptualisation of gender in between languages derived from differences in language structures.<sup>4</sup>

The contrastive perspective is also at the core of Julie Abbou and Angela Tse's chapter. If semiotic gender is differently embedded in linguistic structure across languages, a comparison between languages where gender is grammaticalised in different degrees can reveal the linguistic anchorage of gender. The chapter provides a comparison of gender in English and Cantonese and shows, through a corpus-based analysis crossed with an analysis of grammar textbooks, that while gender is very lightly grammaticalised in Cantonese with regards to English, anaphoric and pronominal references are potentially "genderable". Speakers erase or disambiguate gender information through different strategies, revealing the primarily semantic dimension of gender in linguistic structures. This work on gender categorisation as a semantic cutting-off in reality is conducted on written Cantonese, which is understudied due to its emerging and therefore highly un-normalised features.

The genderless Bantu language Ciluba is the topic of Francis Crequi Ngoyi Tshimanga's paper. The chapter provides a systemic functional analysis of grammar, text and proverbs. Tshimanga argues that 'genderless' languages (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell and Laakso 2012) does not mean 'sexism-free' and demonstrates that, on the contrary, gender-based ideologies are pervasive – from morphosyntax to discourse. The author in particular shows that terms which have dual morphosyntactic genders will be interpreted as masculine only, a phenomenon reminiscent of the generic masculine tradition in many Indo-European languages. Semantically a duality of positive qualities (men: strong) and negative ones (women: weak) can also be seen as a pattern, in language structure and in phraseology. On the syntactical level, sexism is located in transitivity, i.e. when there is a possibility of the duality agent-patient, verbs will be constructed with men constructed more often as agents and women as patients. This overall sexist point of view is supported with conceptual metaphors such as 'the wife is husband's food' reminiscent of woman as dessert and other conceptual metaphors referring to women as food for men.

Abhishek Kumar Kashyap provides new data in his analysis of gender in Bajjika, an Eastern Indo-Aryan language, as well as a detailed review of the linguistic places of gender. As Tshimanga's, to conduct his analysis, Kashyap explores different linguistic levels and different linguistic scales, in the light of systemic functional linguistics. The nominal and verbal compositions are described with regard to the semantic distribution of categories in Bajjika; differences of gender marking are identified between spoken and written realisations. All these movements, from pronominal systems to textual settings, from morphology to semantics, reveal the *dispersal of gender in Bajjika* and echo the need for an 'inter-level' approach of gender in linguistics, that is, to work at the interface between different levels, but also to seize simultaneously grammar and discourse in the analysis. Kashyap concludes his work with hypotheses on potential future language changes in Bajjika regarding gender.

## 5. Intersectional Peripheries

In the second section of the book, the encounter between language, gender and periphery is at work to create a new conceptualization and a new positioning. "**Intersectional Peripheries**" is to be understood here in two –though not exclusive to each other– directions.

First, gender may hide other power relationships: a peripheral linguistic community may seek to conform to a norm as a strategy to gain power, while subverting or contradicting another norm as a power relationship. This tension encapsulates the discussion of the notion of empowerment, as well as confronts the power of doing something (ability) and the power on someone (authority, conduct of conducts). This tension also illustrates the multiplicity of power and norms, at the core of theories of intersectionality. The founding work of Crenshaw on intersectionality “Mapping the Margins” (1993) echoes in most of the works presented in the second section of this volume, which brings intersectional theories and norm issues in linguistic analysis of gender.<sup>5</sup> Some studies suggest indeed that resisting gender linguistic categorisation may create other spaces of domination through language, such as nationalistic, ethnical class, or identity urges.

Second, intersectionality also concerns the disciplines. The chapters gathered in this section all discuss thoroughly the interface between linguistics and other fields, such as gender studies, anthropology, sociology, pragmatics, semiotics or religious studies to make new methodological or theoretical propositions in linguistic gender analysis. Being at the crossroads of different theoretical and empirical realms offers compelling insights on what has been built as central and as peripheral in our disciplines.

Working on the social and linguistic minority of the Armenians in Cyprus, Chryso Hadjidimetriou tested the acquisition of grammatical gender by Armenians speaking Cypriot-Greek (CG) as L2. Two bilingual groups were under scrutiny: 1. Adult speakers who were born in or arrived to Cyprus as infants (Armenian Cypriots), and 2. Armenians who arrived in Cyprus as teenagers or young adults. The chapter conveys original data about gender for the acquisition field, since differences and commonalities in linguistic acquisition are established based on empirical and spontaneous conversational data (recording). It also takes into consideration sociolinguistic variables such as age, sex, generation, length of exposure to CG and intensity of contact. The analysis reveals a common uneasiness in the two groups as far as the use of grammatical gender is concerned, even though Armenians Cypriot were more successful in the tests. They both exhibited the same grammatical deviations, that is a preference for using the neuter gender. The process of assigning the neuter gender seems to indicate that the neuter gender is the default gender for the Armenians, which they can grammatically use with less semantic implications, making of it a peripheral gender category. Further investigation has to establish whether this is common to all non-native CG speakers or whether the Armenian language is the explanation of such a choice.

Revitalisation of language is considered from a gender point of view by Jessica Fae Nelson in her paper on Lakota (an American language). Taking up previous claims that a different use of gendered Lakota had allowed speakers to construct alternative social meanings (see Trechter 1995; Agha 2005), Nelson compares metapragmatic use at two different time periods and draws different conclusions. If indeed there is a language shift and revitalisation of the Lakota language, the use of a gendered speech not congruent with the referential gender (for instance the use by male speakers of a feminine-indexing) is in reality limited. On the grammatical point of view, the study shows that pronouns referring to female human beings became archaic and pronouns referring to male human beings are now used as gender neutral i.e. are being able to refer to both sexes. Moreover gender-neutral pronouns are now being gendered as feminine as if to fill in a necessarily social gap. Variation in the use of gendered words would be portrayed unfavourably, as incorrect, as lacking knowledge and as inauthentic. To be ‘gender creative’ does not only challenge gender identities but also, it would seem, Lakota identities.<sup>6</sup>

Anna-Christina Weirich takes up the notion of peripheral linguistic markets to investigate for linguistic practices in a non-dominant group of speakers, i.e. Romanian speakers in Moldova. Antisexist rules, challenges to the generic masculine, are not widespread: the conservative

linguistic practices can be understood partly as a conservative mentality as well as a result of the inflectional complexity of the language itself. Based on authentic data (discussions with participants in an experimental workshop), examples of feminisation and double gendering strategies are presented, discussed and evaluated. Even though speakers would not readily mark the feminine by adopting the usual ‘androgendering’ masculine, they would deploy creativity and a refreshing readiness to develop double gender forms when and where masculine and feminine forms were grammatically available according to standard rules. They do not go as far as inventing new feminine forms, whereas in other previous studies it was the case (Abbou 2011). The chapter outlines that the practice of gender linguistic disturbances may conflict with social and linguistics mastery.

In his comparative study of lesbian and gay discursive practices in Kuala Lumpur and Sorwool (Asian regions) Michael Dimitrios Hadzantonis concludes that patriarchy emerges as central, inspiring heteronormative practices, such as gender differentials. Regions such as Kuala Lumpur and Seoul have increasingly drawn on both transnational and (consequently) national forces to mediate projects of governance (Harvey 2005; Rofel 2007). Diversifying language facilitates the attempt to contest the homogenization and patriarchal constraints of colonialism. Language practices in gay communities appear to significantly subvert gender hierarchy and heteronormativity, representing a critical difference between the two regions Kuala Lumpur and Seoul. In Malaysia networks of male individuals favour male-inclusive languages whereas lesbian communities have limited social networks and the situation reaffirms that patriarchy. Seoul in contrast exhibits a matriarchal society hence diverse language practices in lesbian communities, which emerge from women’s strong social networks, although nationalism is suggested, because of strict code switching practices that highlight both nation and heteronormative gender hierarchy. Sexual identity politics can only be apprehended with the global and local context, local effects being as powerful as global effects, as is demonstrated in the paper, showing a clear difference between both regions as far as linguistic practices in gay communities are concerned.

Begoña Echeverria, in her work on the discursive construction of female sexuality in a Basque Old Testament (mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Old Testament), argues that the pronoun referring to female beings, *noka*, is the only way to indicate the female gender in the Basque language and is used in *familiar* circumstances. This pronoun had been connoted with intensity but a *devious* intensity. Indeed in the data studied the word underwent semantic derogation (Schulz 1975) and is associated with references to witches and a violent/sexual imagery. The translator of the testament only uses the term for negative interactional purposes whereas *noka* has also been used in positive contexts, even romantic ones in other texts. These lexical choices are ideologically meaningful since within this important religious text, women are portrayed in the most misogynist fashion, as harlots or whores, only. Another study and for another language (French), has also pointed at the possible influence of the Vulgate (Grisay *et al.* 1969) on the derogation of feminine paradigm and namely of the word MULIER “woman”. The question of the actual influence of such lexical choices in religious texts on the evolution of grammar as a whole stays open to investigation.

Maryia Turchynskaya focuses her work on the pragmatic characteristics of a less studied language, Belarusian. She describes the constituents of the lexical paradigm based on sex distinction in the Belarusian and the English language taking a comparatist perspective. The chapter uncovers that in both languages similar oppositions describe male and female animate beings (e.g. *big, strong, brave* etc. vs. *small, weak, fainthearted* etc.). Working from written data, Turchynskaya examines the spectrum of the gender-based features revealed in the meanings of the paradigms and concludes that the constituents of the lexical paradigm researched in English and Belarusian have a wide range of *common* gender-based pragmatic properties. Only a small number of cultural specific attributes are found and these attributes

are also confined to the behavioural and psychological features associated with males and females. Given this commonality of features, the author draws the conclusion that the core semantic feature describing male and female human beings (i.e. the semantic feature /sex/) which is biological will inevitably constraint the pragmatic properties which such words can have for a given linguistic community. Turchynskaya acknowledges that this hypothesis has to be verified with further linguistic data and psycholinguistic experiments.

## 6. Conclusion

In the 1980s, bell hooks, in *Feminist Theory, from Margin to Center*, advocated a new perspective on feminism, a perspective which would include other social margins, i.e. the non-white, non-middle class experience. This new standpoint allowed her to re-define the value of power, to tackle taboo issues such as gender-oriented violence, and to explore the boundaries of sexuality – in short to destabilize a universally acceptable definition of what feminism was at the time. She rethought “the relationship between the centre and the periphery as dynamic, fluid, and potentially contradictory” (Blackwood Pickrell 2013). With this volume are illustrated both the usefulness and the need for such destabilisation in language, echoed as well in Scott’s 1986 seminal article.

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<sup>1</sup> Some Chomskyan works also mentioning "core grammar" and "peripheral grammar" to refer to properties according to the model of Universal Grammar (see for example Hyams 1988).

<sup>2</sup> This asymmetry is also found in the way the feminine form is described as *derived* from the masculine in grammars. We could refer to the phenomenon of 'imitation' but not derivation. Indeed etymology does not prove that the masculine form is always the first to be invented. Moreover one could consider feminine words derived from verbs just as the masculine was (*waiter / waitress, governor/ governess*) or from nouns (*épicier/ épicière* (Baider 2010)).

<sup>3</sup> In contrast in French a typical morpheme to mark the feminine such as *-ette* has become a marker of diminutive

<sup>4</sup> This issue has also been shown relevant within the same language, as Silaški's study (2013) has revealed.

<sup>5</sup> See also McCall 2005; Rosenblum and Travis 2011.

<sup>6</sup> During our exchanges on the matter the author suggests that these shifts have to do with women's relative exclusion from formal speaking and a more recent shift away from formal speaking in general, making gender, and not speech context, the most salient distinction.