John Benjamins Publishing Company

KURDISH

Gender in Kurdish: Structural and socio-cultural dimensions

Geoffrey Haig
University of Bamberg, Germany

Ergin Öpengin
University of Bamberg, Germany

1.   Introduction

Kurdish is a cover term for a group of Northwest Iranian languages and dialects spoken by 20 to 30 million speakers in a contiguous area of West Iran, North Iraq, Eastern Turkey and Eastern Syria. There are also scattered enclaves of Kurdish speakers in Central Anatolia, the Caucasus, North-Eastern Iran (Khorasan) and Central Asia, besides a large European diaspora population. The three most important varieties of Kurdish are: (i) Southern Kurdish, spoken under various names near the city of Kermanshah in Iran and across the border in Iraq; (ii) Central Kurdish (also known as Sorani), one of the official languages of the Kurdish Autonomous Region in Iraq, also spoken by a large population in West Iran along the Iraqi border; (iii) Northern Kurdish (also known as *Kurmanji*, which we use interchangeably in this article), spoken by the Kurds of Turkey, Syria and the northwest perimeter of North Iraq, in pockets of Armenia and around lake Urmiye in Iran (cf. Öpengin & Haig 2014 for a detailed discussion on defining "Kurdish"). Of these three, the largest group in terms of speaker numbers is Northern Kurdish.

Central Kurdish and Northern Kurdish have, each in a distinct sociopolitical setting, developed independent "standard" varieties over the last century. Central Kurdish in its standard Sorani variety is now the principal language used in education and the mass media in the autonomous region of Kurdistan in Iraq (see Haig 2013; Hassanpour 2012), where it is written in the Arabic script. Northern (Kurmanji) Kurdish, on the other hand, developed written standards using the Cyrillic script in the ex-Soviet Union (particularly in Armenia), while the Kurds of Turkey adopted an adapted version of the Roman alphabet, which has become the dominant medium for Kurmanji in Turkey, Syria and the diaspora. Central and Northern Kurdish differ not only in terms of the scripts used. There are also considerable differences in morphology, leading to restricted levels of mutual intelligibility, particularly among speakers lacking regular exposure to the other dialects (cf. Haig & Öpengin, forthcoming, on differences between Central and Northern Kurdish, and Öpengin & Haig 2014 on dialectal differences within Kurmanji).

The earliest attested Iranian languages exhibited three grammatical gender classes as is typical of ancient Indo-European, but grammatical gender has largely been lost in Central and Southern Kurdish, where now even pronouns do not show any gender distinctions. In Northern Kurdish, on the other hand, grammatical gender is retained on nouns and pronouns, which show a two-way distinction between masculine and feminine. We therefore concentrate on Northern Kurdish, though for the discussion of social and referential gender we will also make reference to Central Kurdish at some points. With the exception of a brief synopsis in Haig (2004), a historical treatment of gender in MacKenzie (1954),

and some notes on the loss of grammatical gender in one dialect in Akin (2001), there is no previous published research on most of the issues tackled in this article. Our treatment is thus not just a summary of available research, but presents novel analyses based on original material. The main source used here for contemporary Kurmanji written language is a corpus of texts from the newspaper *Azadiya Welat*, outlined in Haig (2001), and the codes accompanying the examples below refer to the numbering in that corpus. We have also conducted structured interviews and consulted native speakers to obtain a more balanced cross-section of judgements, in particular for the section on occupational titles (Section 4.2). In order to simplify the description, we provide examples based on the most widely accepted written standard variety of Kurmanji Kurdish. Given the lack of previous research, it is inevitable that some of our analyses remain tentative, but we consider a detailed and accessible discussion of gender-related issues in Kurdish to be long overdue, and we trust it will contribute to generating increased research in the field.

2.   Categories of gender

In Kurmanji, nouns can be assigned to one of two grammatical genders, traditionally labelled masculine and feminine. While such a two-gender system appears at first sight to be reminiscent of the well-known gender systems of the Romance languages, grammatical gender in Kurdish works somewhat differently. First, Kurdish has no productive derivational morphology for deriving personal nouns to specify referential gender (such as *-a* in Spanish *profesor-a* 'female professor/ teacher' or *-in* in German *Fahrer-in* 'female driver'). Instead, nouns that contextually refer to male or female persons are inflected like masculine or feminine nouns respectively. We discuss these issues in Sections 2.3 and 4.2 below. Second, gender distinctions in pronouns are only visible in the third person singular, and only in the oblique case of these pronouns. The linguistic expression of social and referential gender of course manifests itself in other ways, which are discussed in Sections 2.3 and 2.4.

2.1   Grammatical gender

Grammatical gender manifests itself in two types of inflectional morphology: the forms of case markers on nouns and pronouns, and on linking elements within the noun phrase, discussed in Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 respectively. Grammatical gender is only relevant in the singular. In the plural, grammatical gender distinctions are completely neutralized, and all nouns take the same set of plural inflections.

2.1.1 Grammatical gender in the case system

Kurmanji Kurdish has a two-way case opposition in nouns and pronouns, between an unmarked case, generally referred to as the "direct" case in Kurdish linguistics, and a marked "oblique" case. In its case marking of subjects and direct objects, Kurdish has split alignment (sometimes called "split ergativity"): In the present tenses, the subjects of transitive verbs are in the direct case, but in the past tenses, they are in the oblique case. Objects of transitive verbs, on the other hand, show the reverse pattern, being oblique in the present, and direct in the past. These issues are not at stake here, but it nevertheless needs to be borne in mind that the terms 'direct' and 'oblique' cannot simply be equated with 'nominative' and 'accusative' (cf. Haig 2008: ch. 5–6 and references therein).

In the case system, grammatical gender is manifest solely in the form of the oblique case suffix. This suffix has two forms, depending on the grammatical gender of the noun: *-ê* for feminine and *-î* for masculine. This is illustrated in (1), where both the nouns and their qualifying demonstratives are in the oblique case:

(1) a. *Vê*   *jin-ê*   *di-bîn-î?*
         this.OBL.FEM[1] woman-OBL.SG.FEM IND-see.PRES-2SG
         'Do you see this woman?'

     b. *Wî*   *mêrik-î*   *di-bîn-î?*
         that.OBL.MASC man-OBL.SG.MASC IND-see.PRES-2SG
         'Do you see that man?'

Exactly the same applies to pronouns of the third person (which are basically identical with the distal demonstratives): in the oblique case, there is a differentiation between a masculine singular *wî* (3SG.OBL.MASC) and a feminine singular *wê* (3SG.OBL.FEM). There are no gender distinctions on first or second person pronouns, and none in the plural. Nouns may also carry the indefinite suffix *-ek*, to which the same oblique case markers can be added: *li jin-ek-ê* 'at a woman-INDEF-OBL.FEM' and *li kur-ek-î* 'at a boy-INDEF-OBL.MASC'.

Finally, when Kurdish nouns are used as terms of address, they may take what is termed the vocative case, which distinguishes the gender of the addressee: *-(y)ê* is used for feminine singular (as in *da-yê* 'oh mother!'), while *-o* is used for masculine singular (as in *bav-o* 'oh father!').

2.1.2 Grammatical gender in linking elements

In Kurdish, constituents of the noun phrase that follow the head noun are linked to it via a particle, traditionally termed "ezafe" in Iranian linguistics (cf. Haig 2011 for a recent discussion). We use the neutral term 'linker' here, and gloss it as LNK. Depending on the gender and the definiteness of the modified noun, the linker either has the feminine form *-a* (definite) or *-e* (indefinite), or the masculine form *-ê*

(definite) or *-î* (indefinite). Example (2) illustrates feminine and masculine forms of the linker, each with an indefinite head noun.[2]

(2) a. *kebanî-yek-e*   *baş*
         woman-INDEF-LNK.SG.FEM   good
         'a competent housewife'
     b. *şivan-ek-î*   *baş*
         shepherd-INDEF-LNK.SG.MASC good
         'a competent shepherd'

The syntactic status of the linker is a matter of some controversy. It could be considered as a form of gender/number agreement between the head noun and its satellite, for example, the adjective *baş* 'good' in (2). However, unlike more prototypical examples of gender agreement, the linker is prosodically associated with its controller (the head noun) rather than its target. For the largely descriptive purposes of this section, the term "agreement" is nevertheless adequate, and we defer a more critical discussion of these issues to Section 2.3 below.[3]

When a head noun has multiple modifiers, a linking element may occur separated from the head, between the dependent elements. However, it still exhibits agreement in grammatical gender with the head noun, as illustrated in (3):

(3) a. *keç-a*   *min a*   *mezin*
         girl-LNK.SG.FEM   my   LNK.SG.FEM   big
         'my elder daughter'
     b. *kur-ê*   *min ê*   *mezin*
         boy-LNK.SG.MASC   my   LNK.SG.MASC   big
         'my elder son'

With plural nouns, invariable forms of the linker are used, *-ên* (definite) and *-ine* (indefinite), regardless of the grammatical gender of the head noun. Note that in Central Kurdish, where grammatical gender has been lost (with the exception of relic forms in certain dialects), the linker has a single invariable form *-î*, used with all nouns, regardless of gender, number or definiteness.

To sum up, grammatical gender is manifested in the singular forms of the oblique case marker and the linker. Nouns that are not in the oblique case, or do not have any post-nominal modifiers, therefore, do not show any overt sign of grammatical gender. Grammatical gender thus only surfaces in certain morphosyntactic configurations. In (4a) and (4b), for example, the two nouns are in the direct (unmarked) case and have no post-nominal modifiers. In contexts like this, the different grammatical genders of the two nouns are not morphosyntactically distinguished in any way:

(4) a. *Ew   keçik   na-ç-e   mekteb-ê.*
         that   girl   NEG-go.PRES-3SG school-OBL
         'That girl does not go to school.'

     b. *Ew   kurik   na-ç-e   mekteb-ê.*
         that   boy   NEG-go.PRES-3SG school-OBL
         'That boy does not go to school.'

Table 1 provides the paradigms for marking grammatical gender in Kurmanji Kurdish that have been discussed so far.

Table 1. Inflectional marking of grammatical gender in Kurmanji Kurdish

	Singular				Plural	
	Feminine		Masculine			
	Def.	Indef.	Def.	Indef.	Def.	Indef.
Linker (*ezafe*)	*-a*	*-e*	*-ê*	*-î*	*-ên*	*-ine*
Oblique case	*-ê*		*-î*		*-an*	
Vocative	*-ê*		*-o*		*-în/-ino*	

2.1.3   *The assignment of grammatical gender to nouns*

Given that all nouns are assigned to either the masculine or feminine grammatical gender, the question arises what the criteria for gender assignment are. For nouns denoting inanimate objects, the principles of gender assignment are fairly opaque. There are no obvious phonological gender cues, so the gender of these nouns is not predictable from the phonological form alone (cf. *sîr* 'garlic.FEM', but *şîr* 'milk.MASC'). There are, however, some reliable morphological criteria. For example, nouns derived with *-î* or *-tî* are invariably feminine (e.g. *bedew-î* 'beauty', *kurd-î* 'Kurdish (language)', *cîran-tî* 'neighborliness'), as are nominalized infinitives derived with *-in* (e.g. *hat-in* 'coming, arrival', *mir-in* 'death'). A number of semantic principles underlying gender assignment have also been proposed, though most admit many exceptions. Given the focus of this article on personal reference forms, we only note two of the more reliable semantic criteria in connection with inanimates here (see Bedir-Khan & Lescot (1991: 66–70) for a more detailed discussion): Toponyms are generally feminine (e.g. *Kurdistan* 'Kurdistan', *Dicle* 'Tigris', or *Mezopotamya* 'Mesopotamia'). Food products from domestic animals are generally masculine, as in *şîr* 'milk', *penîr* 'cheese', *mast* 'yoghurt', *nivîşk* 'unmelted butter', *dew* 'ayran', *sertû* or *to* 'cream', and *goşt* 'meat'.

The assignment of grammatical gender to nouns denoting animate beings is semantically motivated: Grammatical gender generally corresponds to lexical gender. Thus nouns such as *xal* 'maternal uncle', *bav* 'father', *bira* 'brother', *kur*

'son, boy', or *pismam* 'male cousin' are all grammatically masculine, while *met* 'paternal aunt', *dê* 'mother', *xwîşk* 'sister', *keç* 'girl, daughter', *dotmam* 'female cousin' are all grammatically feminine. However, many personal nouns do not have a fixed grammatical gender value and may be used to refer to persons of either gender (e.g. *heval* 'friend'). A number of complications arise in this connection, to which we return in Section 2.3 below.

2.2 Lexical gender

There are certain semantic fields within the nominal lexicon that commonly contain lexically gendered nouns. Typically, we find pairs of lexical items that differ primarily in this feature (though of course semantic connotations of various kinds will generally accompany each member of the pair). The most obvious such field is that of kinship terminology. Kurdish kinship is organized along patrilinear lines. Although traditionally the household is the basic domestic unit, consisting of husband, wife, children, and possibly the husband's parents, some villages also recognize groups of closely related households known as *bavik* (from *bav* 'father'; cf. van Bruinessen 1989:68). Kinship terminology varies extensively from one region to another. Table 2 gives an overview of the most widespread terms.

There is a fundamental asymmetry in that kinship terms for male persons are often basic, i.e. mono-morphemic, while terms for female kin (beyond siblings

Table 2. Kinship terms in Kurmanji Kurdish

Female nouns		Male nouns	
jin/pîrek	'wife'	*mêr*	'husband'
xêzan	'wife'	*zelam*	'husband'
dayîk/dê	'mother'	*bab*	'father'
dapîr	'grandmother'	*bapîr*	'grandfather'
keç/qîz	'daughter'	*kur/law*	'son'
xwîşk	'sister'	*bira*	'brother'
met	'paternal aunt'	*ap/mam*	'paternal uncle'
xalet	'maternal aunt'	*xal*	'maternal uncle'
dotmam	'paternal female cousin'	*pismam*	'paternal male cousin'
keçxal	'maternal female cousin'	*pisxal*	'maternal male cousin'
jinxal	'maternal uncle's wife'	–	–
jinmam	'paternal uncle's wife'	–	–
diş	'husband's sister'	*tî*	'husband's brother'
diş	'wife's sister'	*bûra*	'wife's brother'
bûk	'bride'	*zava*	'groom'
jintî	'wife of the husband's brother'	*hevling*	'husband of wife's sister'
hewî	'husband's (other) wife'	–	–

and parents) are formed via compounding with the word *jin* 'wife, woman' (e.g. *jinxal* 'wife of mother's brother', *jintî* 'wife of husband's brother'). There are no examples of the reverse pattern, i.e. that a male kinship term is formed through compounding with a basic female kinship term. Accordingly, there are no terms for the husband of the mother's sister or the husband of the father's sister, who would generally be addressed as 'uncle'.

The grammatical gender of these words is predictable, i.e. there is a systematic correspondence between the lexical gender of the term and the grammatical gender as expressed through linker, case suffixes and anaphoric pronouns. The terms *xwarza* 'sister's child' and *braza* 'brother's child', on the other hand, do not specify the gender of the referent (the child can be of either sex), but of the referent's parent.

Lexical gender is often not formally marked (i.e. there are no gender-indicating suffixes as part of the word), except for the few cases of compound kinship terms discussed above. There are, however, two gender-indicating adjectives that tend to form compounds with animal names to create gender-specific reference: *mê* 'female' (e.g. *kew* 'partridge' > *mêkew* 'female partridge') and *nêr* 'male' (e.g. *ker* 'donkey' > *nêreker* 'male donkey'). This pattern is generally not extended to personal nouns (except for swear words). Instead, the word for 'woman' *jin* may be used to specify gender (see Section 4 below). In the realm of occupational titles, the lexicon tends to reflect the traditional division of labor between men and women in the shape of social gender bias: Certain occupational terms, such as *hedad* 'blacksmith', are traditionally considered male, while others, such as *bêrîvan* 'milker', are traditionally female in their association. There are no conventionalized items for members of the opposite gender in these occupations. Such terms are discussed in Section 4.2 below.

2.3   Referential gender

Above we have suggested that Kurdish is a language with grammatical gender, implying that the grammatical gender of each and every noun is rigidly fixed in the lexicon. However, there are a considerable number of nouns in Kurdish for which the concept of a lexically specified, inherent grammatical gender makes little sense. These nouns belong to a broad semantic category involving words that refer to human beings, but which in principle can refer to either males or females. A typical example is the word *heval* 'friend', which may be used to refer to either a male or a female person. Crucially, the inflection of this word (i.e. the choice of masculine or feminine forms of linkers or the oblique case markers) switches according to the intended reference in a particular context. For example, *heval-ê*

min (friend-LNK.MASC my; hence 'my male friend') contrasts with *heval-a min* (friend-LNK.FEM my; hence 'my female friend'). The word *heval* itself undergoes no derivational or compounding process to effect female reference and is simply combined with the feminine form of the linker.

Comparable phenomena in other languages are discussed in Corbett (1991: 181f.) under the rubric of "double gender nouns". Notably, the examples given there come from essentially the same semantic group as the Kurdish ones (for example, 'doctor' or 'poor person'). However, the Kurdish case is unusual in that basically all words that are semantically compatible with both female and male reference can take the appropriate agreement forms for either grammatical gender. Therefore, this is not a matter of a few lexical oddities, but a basic principle of the gender system in the language. Accordingly, loan words or neologisms (some of the items in the second column below) that satisfy the semantic criteria are also treated like double-gender nouns. A selection of such double-gender nouns in Kurdish is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Kurdish double-gender nouns

feqîr	'poor person'	*mamoste*[4]	'teacher'
girtî	'prisoner'	*xwendekar*	'student'
mirov	'human being'	*endam*	'member'
dost	'fellow'	*serok*	'head'
heval	'friend'	*memûr*	'state officer'
gundî	'villager'	*nivîskar*	'writer'
deyndar	'indebted person'	*duxtor*	'doctor'
cîran	'neighbor'	*gerok*	'traveler'
kes	'person'	*qude/qure*	'proud person'

There are clear usage preferences for one gender over the other with these words. In part these reflect real-world asymmetries, but in part they also reflect the tendency for mixed-sex or generic reference to be effected through a masculine form (see Section 2.4). This becomes evident when one considers the figures for masculine and feminine forms of four personal nouns in the *Azadiya Welat Corpus* (cf. Haig 2001). Note that many tokens of these lexemes show no overt gender inflection (e.g. plural forms). The figures in Table 4 are based on only those tokens which show an overt signal of grammatical gender.

The scarcity of feminine forms for *serok* 'head, leader' may actually reflect the under-representation of women in leadership, and the same may apply to the noun *nûner* 'representative'. But the figures for *kes* 'person' and *mirov* 'human being' can hardly be attributed to a lack of female persons in the real world. We return to this issue in the next section, and in the discussion of occupational

Table 4. Frequencies of gender-inflected double-gender nouns in the *Azadiya Welat Corpus*

	Masculine inflection	Feminine inflection
serok 'head, leader'	213	3
nûner 'representative'	15	2
kes 'person'	33	0
mirov 'human being'	21	0

terms in Section 4.2. We have not found a clear example of a feminine-dominated double-gender noun in our data, though we do not exclude this possibility.

We began our analysis of grammatical gender by reiterating the traditional view, according to which Kurmanji is a language in which each noun belongs to one of two grammatical genders, masculine and feminine (cf. Bedir Khan & Lescot 1991), and that the genders are defined in terms of agreement classes (following the approach of Corbett 1991). However, the extent of double-gender nouns in Kurdish suggests that the assumption of gender classes defined by agreement phenomena, and of the lexically specified membership to one (and only one) gender class, requires revision. First, the notion of agreement as a unilateral relationship between a controller and a target is problematic for Kurdish, because the main exponents of grammatical gender are in fact located on the controller (the noun) itself. Second, we find that a significant part of the personal lexicon is apparently compatible with both masculine and feminine inflections, with the choice determined by contextually intended reference rather than by a fixed grammatical gender. In other words, with these words what appears to be "agreement morphology" is actually the sole bearer of semantic information relating to referential gender, a fact which is problematic for an analysis in terms of agreement.

Our assumption is that double-gender nouns are lexically underspecified for gender, and hence receive a gender feature from the context rather than at the lexical level. This is, however, not the only possible analysis. One might also consider Kurdish to have a rampant form of "zero conversion" of masculine nouns into feminine ones (or vice versa), but we find this approach less convincing. While these theoretical issues of analysis go beyond the aims of this article, we articulate them here because an analysis of the use of gendered expressions (see Section 4) is only possible when the system of morphological and lexical oppositions that transport gender-related messages in the language is understood.

2.4   Generic masculines

In generic contexts, the masculine singular form is the default form for pronominal expressions. Note that there are special forms of the linkers that occur as free forms in the sense of 'the one which' (illustrated in 5), and that are here treated as pronominal:

(5)   a.   *yê   ku   bawer na-k-e*
          LNK.MASC that belief NEG-do.PRES-3SG
          'anyone (m) who does not believe' (Zinar 1992: 24)
      b.   *Yê   sîr-ê   ne-xw-e   bêhn jê*
          LNK.MASC garlic-OBL NEG-eat.PRES-3SG smell from.3SG
          na-y-ê.
          NEG-come.PRES-3SG
          'Anyone (m) who does not eat garlic will not stink.' (i.e. 'There is no smoke without fire') (AW78D1)

Similarly, when double-gender personal nouns are used generically, they are usually treated as masculine. This is illustrated with the noun *nivîskar* 'author' in (6), the heading of a journalistic report, in which the noun *nivîskar* is intended to refer to authors in general, including female authors. By contrast, the feminine-inflected form of the noun is only used for a specific female referent.

(6)   *Nivîskar-ê   kurd   ni-kar-e*
      author-LNK.SG.MASC Kurdish NEG-be.able.PRES-3SG
      xwe ji   kurdayeti-yê   rizgar   bi-k-e.
      REFL from Kurdishness-OBL emancipated SUBJ-do.PRES-3SG
      'A Kurdish author (m) is not able to emancipate himself of Kurdishness.'[5]

The generic use of the masculine form can also be seen in connection with coordinated double-gender nouns (as in 7a), while (7b) shows how the word *alîgir* 'supporter', when used as a predicate complement to *partiya me* 'our political party', takes the masculine form:

(7)   a.   *Em dost û   dijmin-ê   xwe di-nas-in.*
          we friend and enemy-LNK.SG.MASC REFL IND-recognize.PRES-1PL
          'We know our friend and enemy.' (AW79A4)
      b.   *Parti-ya   me alîgir-ê*
          party-LNK.SG.FEM our supporter-LNK.SG.MASC
          çareseri-ya   kêşe-ya   Kurd   e.
          solution-LNK.SG.FEM question-LNK.SG.FEM Kurdish is
          'Our party is a defendant of the solution of the Kurdish question.' (AW69A2)

An anaphoric pronoun with a generic antecedent is also generally third person singular masculine. In example (8), the masculine third person singular pronoun *wî* refers generically to a 'Kurdish child'. Surprisingly, the antecedent itself, *zarok* 'child', carries the feminine form of the linker.[6] This example shows that anaphoric pronouns with generic antecedents are masculine, even if the antecedent itself is grammatically feminine:

(8) *Zarok-a   kurd,   kurd   e. Diya   wî*
     child-LNK.SG.FEM Kurdish Kurdish is mother.of 3SG.MASC
     kurd   e, bapîr-ê   wî   kurd   e.
     Kurdish is grandfather-of 3SG.MASC Kurdish is
     'A Kurdish child is Kurdish. His mother is Kurdish, his grandfather is Kurdish.'[7]

As discussed above, the personal nouns *kes* 'person' and *mirov* 'human being, man' are double-gender nouns, with feminine or masculine satellite forms depending on context. They often serve as a kind of indefinite pronoun, meaning 'anyone, no one, whosoever, the person who'. In their generic uses, they may be plural and thus neutralized in terms of grammatical gender, but in the singular they are almost always in the masculine form. The sentences in (9) illustrate the generic use of such masculine forms:

(9) a. *Diltenik: kes-ê   hestiyar*
         soft-heart: person-LNK.SG.MASC sensitive
         'Soft-hearted: a sensitive person' (AW70C2)
     b. *Her kes-ê   kurdistanî (…) li hemberî*
         each person-LNK.SG.MASC Kurdistani   in regard
         qanûn-an hevmaf   e.
         law-OBL.PL equal.rights is
         'Every Kurdistani person possesses the same legal rights.' (AW74A1)
     c. *Mirov-ê   ku ni-zani-be   bi*
         human-LNK.SG.MASC that NEG-know.PRES-SUBJ with
         zimanê xwe yê   neteweyî bi-peyiv-e (…)
         language REFL LNK.SG.MASC national SUBJ-speak.PRES-3SG
         'The person who cannot speak his national language (…)' (AW79C4)

The use of feminine inflections to express generic senses is not attested in the sources available to us. However, there are some conscious efforts towards a more gender-inclusive language usage, involving avoidance of the masculine inflection in generic functions (see Section 5).

3. Gender-related structures

3.1 Word-formation

In this section, we investigate word-formation processes in Kurmanji as they relate to personal reference forms. Two main processes are available for this purpose, namely derivation via suffixation and compounding.

One means of creating agent nouns, including many occupational terms, is compounding based on the present-tense stems of action verbs. For instance, the agent noun *nanpêj* 'baker' is formed by attaching the present-tense stem of the verb *patin* 'to bake, to cook' (*pêj-*) to the noun *nan* 'bread'. The resulting form is a double-gender noun, as bakers may be male or female.

Agent nouns may also be derived by a small number of suffixes. What is striking is that these derivational suffixes are not specified for a particular grammatical gender. Instead, if the output of a derivational process is a personal reference form, the latter complies with the same principles of gender assignment as simplex words: If a word can, by virtue of its meaning, be applied to both female and male persons, then it is treated as a double-gender noun. Thus, also in word-formation, gender assignment is a matter of semantics. Compounding and derivation are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Compounding and derivation of Kurdish agent nouns

Compounding	Morphological components	Agent noun	
Noun + present-tense verb stem	*nan* 'bread' + *pêj-* 'cook'	*nanpêj*	'baker'
	cigare 'cigarette' + *kêş-* 'smoke'	*cigarekêş*	'smoker'
	stran 'song' + *bêj-* 'say'	*stranbêj*	'singer'
	wêne 'photo' + *gir-* 'keep'	*wênegir*	'photographer'
	kitêb 'book' + *firoş-* 'sell'	*kitêbfiroş*	'book-seller'
Derivation			
Verb stem + *-er*	*xwîn-* 'read' + *-er*	*xwîner*	'reader'
	kuj- 'kill' + *-er*	*kujer*	'killer'
	parêz- 'defend' + *-er*	*parêzer*	'lawyer'
Noun + *-van*	*rojname* 'newspaper' + *-van*	*rojnamevan*	'journalist'
	bêrî 'milking' + *-van*	*bêrîvan*	'milker'
	ga 'ox' + *-van*	*gavan*	'cow-herd'
Noun + *-dar*	*pez* 'sheep' + *-dar*	*pezdar*	'stockbreeder'
	guh 'ear' + *-dar*	*guhdar*	'listener'
	dukan 'shop' + *-dar*	*dukandar*	'shopkeeper'

The derivational suffixes illustrated in Table 5 yield agentive nouns denoting persons engaged in a particular activity, or characterized by a particular occupation. The grammatical gender of these derived nouns, however, is not determined by the derivational suffix itself, but by the social gender that is associated with the respective activity or occupation. Milking, for example, is traditionally a female occupation, hence the word *berîvan* 'milker' is exclusively feminine. Herding cattle, on the other hand, is traditionally the occupation of males, hence *gavan* 'cow-herd' is invariably grammatically masculine. The other nouns in this group display gender biases of varying strengths in one direction or the other, and hence have a default reading (mostly masculine). But in a given context, these default gender assignments could be overridden, and the word could be treated as grammatically feminine. For example, shopkeepers are generally men and the word *dukandar* is inflected as masculine in most contexts. But if a specific female person was introduced as a shopkeeper, it would be possible to inflect the noun *dukandar* with feminine forms. We therefore consider the words in this group, with the exception of *berîvan* 'milker' and *gavan* 'cow-herd', to be double-gender nouns which may refer to both female and male persons. The interpretative issues here are quite complex, with variation from lexeme to lexeme and often from speaker to speaker. We return to them in connection with occupational titles in Section 4.2.

There are also other types of compounding that are used to form personal nouns and that are not illustrated in Table 5. For instance, the word *serokwezîr* 'prime minister' is composed of *serok* 'head' and *wezîr* 'minister'. This word is also a double-gender noun and can be inflected either as feminine (e.g. *serokwezîr-a Elmanyayê* 'the prime minister-LNK.SG.FEM of Germany') or masculine (e.g. *serokwezîr-ê Kurdistanê* 'the prime minister-LNK.SG.MASC of Kurdistan'), depending on the context.

3.2   Anaphora and pronominalization

The only form of gender agreement in Kurmanji Kurdish is the linker that occurs with post-head modifiers in the noun phrase. There is no gender agreement between a predicate and its arguments. However, as discussed in Section 2.1.2, the relationship between a noun and its linker is difficult to account for in terms of a target which agrees with a controller noun, because the linker itself is prosodically attached to the controller rather than to a target external to the noun. The second problem with applying the notion of agreement to the linker is the fact that linkers occur as independent anaphoric elements, in the sense of 'the one who, whoever'

(cf. example (5) above). In some contexts, such independent linkers have antecedents, and the linker will then reflect the gender of its antecedent. However, these cases are best described in terms of anaphora, which we discuss in this section.

Among the pronouns, the two-way gender distinction is available only in the third person singular of the oblique pronouns: *wê* for feminine and *wî* for masculine. Accordingly, a feminine noun such as *Tirkiye* 'Turkey' in (10) is pronominalized by the feminine pronoun *wê* (glossing slightly simplified here):

(10) *Tirkiye   van   gotinan ciddî   bigire*
      Turkey.FEM   these words   serious takes
      wê   ji bo faydeya   wê   be.
      FUT   for benefit of 3.SG.OBL.FEM be
      'If Turkey takes these words seriously, this will be for her own benefit.'
      (CTV23)

With inanimates such as the word *Tirkiye* 'Turkey', grammatical agreement with the antecedent is common. However, there is also a notable tendency to take the feminine form of the pronoun as the default for anaphoric reference to inanimates (in some dialects, such as those of the Şemdinli (Kurdish: Şemzînan) region of Turkish Kurdistan, this is in fact the rule). An example of this tendency in the written language is given in (11), where an inanimate noun with masculine gender (*cewher* 'essence') is pronominalized with a feminine form (*wê*).

(11) *Dagirker-an   ev   cewher   diziye*
      invader-PL.OBL this essence.MASC stolen
      naverok-a   wê   vala   kiriye.
      content-LNK.SG.FEM 3SG.FEM empty   made
      'The invaders have usurped this essence (of Kurdish conduct) and ripped it off its contents.' (AW79C3)

Although these issues have never been systematically investigated, the evidence available provides further support to the view that the gender system works quite differently with personal nouns when compared to inanimate nouns. With the latter, there is an over-generalization of the feminine form in some dialects, at least in anaphoric pronouns, while for the former, in generic contexts and indeed in all contexts which do not unambiguously involve reference to a specific female person, it is clearly the masculine forms which are preferred. Finally, we should mention that in some dialects, particularly the Serhed dialects of Central Anatolia, gender distinctions are lost entirely in the third person pronouns, leading to a situation comparable to the contact language Turkish (cf. Braun 2000).

3.3   Coordination

When two or more nouns of different grammatical gender are coordinated in a single noun phrase, the entire phrase is inflected according to the gender of the second (or last) conjunct. The gender conflict is thus resolved in terms of "vicinity" (Corbett 1991), that is, the gender of the closer conjunct determines the outcome. This is illustrated for personal nouns in (12a), where only the gender of the second conjunct is overtly marked, and for inanimate nouns in (12b), where, again, the gender specification of the first conjunct is not expressed in the coordination.

> (12) a. *Bapîr*   *û* *dapîr-a*   *wî*
>   grandfather.MASC and grandmother-LNK.SG.FEM 3SG.MASC
>   *li gund   dijîn.*
>   in village live
>   'His grandfather and grandmother live in the village.'
>   b. *Wê bi   erk*   *û*   *karîn-a*
>   will with responsibility.MASC and ability-LNK.SG.FEM
>   *kurdan pêk-were.*
>   Kurds   happen
>   'It will happen with the efforts and ability of the Kurds themselves.'
>   (AW79A5)

Another common way of resolving such gender conflicts is using the plural form of the linker, as in *dayik û bab-ên min* (lit. 'mother and father-LNK.PL my'). Although the individual conjuncts have divergent genders in the singular, treating the entire phrase as plural avoids the problem of opting for one gender over another.

4.   Usage of personal reference forms

4.1   Address terms

The only study on address terms in Kurdish to date has been conducted by Asadpour et al. (2012), who regrettably do not touch on gender issues. Our comments here are thus based on observation and therefore tentative. The most commonly used address forms in Kurdish are kinship terms (cf. Section 2.2). Other (non-kinship) address terms are *kek* for addressing elder males and *xatûn*, *stî* (more literary) and *xanim* for addressing married, particularly older women, though their use compared to the kinship terms is very restricted. Kinship terms

are also widely used as forms of address for non-kin. For example, young people may address male peers they are unacquainted with as *pismam* 'cousin' and female peers as *xwîşkê* 'sister.VOC'.

In traditional Kurdish society, religious terms indicating position or lineage are also used as address forms. Terms such as *mamosta* 'teacher', *mela* 'mullah, imam', or *feqî* 'student of a religious school', are used only for males, either coupled with the first name of the addressee or alone. The inapplicability of these terms to women stems from the fact that the domains they denote are male-dominated, i.e. traditional religious education has been reserved for men. Often the wife of a *mela* is referred to in relation to her husband as *melajin* 'wife of the priest'. On the other hand, terms such as *hecî* 'person who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca' and *seyîd* 'sayyed' (a lineage term traditionally denoting a descendant of the prophet Mohammed, but also used in religious fraternities for senior members) can be used to address both females and males.

Terms reflecting the referent's social and political position or office show a clear male bias. Thus, terms such as *mîr* 'prince, emir', *axa* 'agha, lord, landowner', or *reîs* 'mayor' can only be used to address males, while *muxtar* 'the elected leader of a village' are also used for addressing females. Within modern Kurdish politics, however, a set of more gender-neutral address terms has been developed: *heval* 'comrade', *rêber* 'leader' and *serok* 'head' are used for both women and men.

There are also traditional self-deprecating address forms used by men only (e.g. *ez xulam*), by women only (e.g. *ez xudam*), or by both genders (e.g. *ez benî*; all three literally meaning 'to whom I am a servant'). They are generally used when addressing persons with political power, or by young people when addressing persons who are significantly older than themselves. However, our observation is that this type of address is used more frequently by women than men, though we lack empirical evidence for this issue. Moreover, endearment expressions such as *ez gorî* (lit. 'to whom I shall be sacrificed') or *ez heyran* (lit. 'to whom I am an admirer') are commonly considered to be restricted to female speakers.

4.2   Occupational terms

Kurdish has a rich lexicon of terms denoting persons characterized by a particular activity or occupational position. In most cases, such activities or occupations are conventionally associated with male or female persons, while some are performed by both males and females. The differences, however, are subtle and do not readily lend themselves to water-tight classification. We investigated a sub-set of such terms and tested their acceptability in different contexts.[8] First, we checked whether they could receive both masculine and feminine inflections, i.e. whether

they were treated as double-gender nouns, as described in Section 2.3 above. If they did not occur with the feminine form of the linker, we asked native speakers how one would refer to a female/male representative of that occupation. What emerged was that these nouns can provisionally be grouped into two classes.

First, some occupational terms can be characterized as double-gender nouns. They take either masculine or feminine forms of the linker and the oblique case marker, depending on referential gender. An example is the term *şivan* 'shepherd'. This occupation is traditionally associated with male persons, but it appears that it can occur with feminine forms of the linker (as in *şivan-a berxa* 'shepherd-LNK. FEM.SG of lambs'), if reference to a female shepherd is intended. Note, however, that the default interpretation is male and that these nouns would be inflected as grammatically masculine in a generic context. Nouns of this type may also be modified through the addition of the word *jin(ik)* 'woman', either as part of a compound or linked to the occupational term via the linker. For example, *memûr* 'civil servant' would generally be interpreted as referring to a male person. To refer to a female civil servant, one would say *jinika memûr* (lit. 'woman civil servant') or *memûra jin* (lit. 'civil servant woman'). Interestingly, both the word for 'woman' *jin(ik)* and the occupational term itself can be the head of such a construction. We are unable to discern an obvious tendency here, nor can we identify a clear semantic difference between the two options.

The second group includes terms denoting occupations for which the male or female association is apparently so deeply entrenched in the lexical semantics of the word that no form for a person of the opposite gender can be created. We conveniently refer to these as gender-exclusive terms. This is notably often the case for occupations with strong female connotations. For instance, traditionally, the term *kabanî* refers to a 'person who prepares the food at social events' (be it as a profession or as part of one's social responsibilities).[9] Traditionally, this term is strictly reserved for women, who are the people usually involved in this activity. But in recent decades, catering services are increasingly hired for social events such as weddings, and the persons entrusted with the cooking are often male. For these men, the term *kabanî* is not used, although they do essentially the same kind of work. Instead, they can be referred to as *risqçêker*, literally 'food-maker', by means of the Turkish borrowing *aşçı* 'cook', or by means of the neologism *aşpêj* 'cook'. Table 6 shows the occupational terms that we have studied, and the tentative classification obtained.

Ongoing changes in occupational patterns and social gender roles would be expected to impact on the way these terms are perceived, and consequently may, in the long run, impact on the grammatical expression of gender. For example, Kurdish women are increasingly politically active and have been elected to the office of mayor in some constituencies in Turkish Kurdistan. To refer to these

Table 6. The referential gender of Kurdish occupational terms

Double-gender nouns		Gender-exclusive terms			
		Female-exclusive		Male-exclusive	
xeyat	'tailor'	*bêrî*	'milker'	*hosta*	'mason'
tucar	'trader'	*kabanî*	'cook at events'	*rêncber*	'farmer'
mamosta	'teacher'	*pîrik*	'midwife'	*hedad*	'blacksmith'
şifêr	'driver'	*xudam*	'servant'	*sepan*	'laborer'[10]
memûr	'civil servant'	*nanpêj*	'domestic bread maker'	*qesab*	'butcher'
şuwan	'shepherd'			*tehmîrcî*	'mechanic'
lawjebêj	'singer'			*reyîs*	'mayor'
dukandar	'shopkeeper'			*mela*	'imam'
				feqî	'student of Islam'
				nêçîrvan	'hunter'

women, the neologism *şaredar* would be used, rather than the traditional term for 'mayor' *reyîs*, which up until now has been reserved for males. But it is quite possible that in the future new expressions based on *reyîs*, but marked for female reference, may be coined. Similarly, the word *nanpêj* 'baker' traditionally referred to a female person in a household who produced bread, but has now been extended to become a general term for people involved in bread-making as an occupation (usually males). When used in this latter sense, the noun may be inflected with masculine forms.

Few domains of the lexicon (if any) reflect the complex interplay of social conventions and role constructions with language structure more faithfully than the field of occupational terms. Given the variation and uncertainties which emerged in our discussions with native speakers on these issues, we stress the tentative nature of the analyses carried out here. There is obviously a need for closely monitored quantitative investigations of Kurdish personal nouns, such as those pioneered in Braun (2000) for occupational titles in Turkish.

4.3 Idioms and proverbs

Gender as a referential and social category is transported not only through grammatical formatives and individual lexemes, but is tightly enshrined into the semantics of idiomatic expressions and proverbs. This realm provides some access to the conventionalized gender-related social stereotypes and belief systems underlying the manifestations of gender in the Kurdish speech community. Two previous studies have dealt with related issues: Hassanpour (2001) traces male bias in Sorani Kurdish, as it is reflected in dictionary entries and oral literature,

while Alakom (1994) specifically investigates the representation of women in Kurmanji folklore.[11]

The words *jin* 'woman' and *pyaw* 'man' in Sorani (*mêr* 'man' in Kurmanji) are associated with a set of mostly opposing qualities, values, and emotional connotations, which are reconstructed and reinforced particularly in proverbs and popular sayings. The Sorani word *pyaw* is also used as a male generic in the sense of 'human being', as in (13).

(13) *xûşk-im   le   hemû pyaw-an be   namûs-tir-e.*
      sister-POSS.1SG from every man-PL with honour-more-COP.3SG
      'My sister is more endowed with honor than every person (lit. 'man').'
      (Öpengin 2013: 103)

Hassanpour (2001: 236) states that the word *pyaw* is often associated with qualities such as zeal and bravery. In a similar vein, Öpengin (2013: 102) points out that *pyaw* is also frequently used as an adjective meaning 'courageous, reliable', for example, in the fixed expression *pyawî zor pyaw* lit. 'a man (who is) very man(ly)', i.e. 'a very courageous and reliable man'. The adjectival meanings associated with the forms *jin* or *afret* (both 'woman') are diametrically opposed to those of *pyaw*, including 'weak, cowardly'. One of the meanings provided for *afret* in *Henbane Borine*, one of the most important Kurdish dictionaries, is 'weakling' (Hassanpour 2001: 236).

Words derived from *pyaw* and *jin* often express the same qualities. The abstract noun *pyaw-etî* means 'manliness, greatness, big favor'. The adjective and adverb *pyaw-ane* means 'manly or for men' (for example, of shoes), but it is extended to express the adverbial meaning 'bravely', whereas the form *jin-anî* 'womanly' is often used to express the negative characteristics of a man. The word *camêr* (from *ciwan* 'young, good' and *mêr* 'man') is used as a general expression of positive personal attributes (meaning 'fine, upright') and can be used for both men and women.

A man is called *serjin* (*ser* 'head' + *jin* 'woman') 'lit. woman-headed' if he listens to what his wife says (which is interpreted as a sign of being dominated by the wife). The lexical expression of manly characteristics such as 'brave' when applied to a woman, on the other hand, requires the combination of lexically female with lexically male morphemes, such as in *nêrejin* (*nêr* 'male' + *jin* 'woman') or *keçebav* (*keç* 'girl' + *bav* 'father'; lit. 'girl of her father'), both meaning 'a brave and strong woman', with positive connotations.

The social construction of the man as outgoing and dominant versus the woman as submissive and shy is also represented in commonly used proverbs, as seen in the examples in (14a) from Kurmanji, and (14b) from Sorani:

(14) a. *Jina şermîn bi gundekê mêrê şermîn bi kundekê.*
      'The shy woman (is) worth a village, the shy man (is) worth an owl.'
   b. *Le segî dirr, le jinî dimşirr bitirse.*
      'Beware of ravenous dogs and abusive women.'

In traditional Kurmanji Kurdish households, direct reference to one's spouse with the terms *mêr* 'man, husband' and *jin* 'woman, wife' is considered a taboo. Thus, a husband will not refer to his wife as *jin-a min* 'my wife'. Instead, men often use terms like *xêzan* 'family' and *biçûk* 'children' in the Badini dialect, or *kulfet* lit. 'burden' and *zaro(k)* 'children' in the other areas of Kurmanji Kurdish. Women, on the other hand, use terms such as *malxwê* 'head of the family', *zelam* 'man', *babê biçûkan* 'father of the children', etc., to refer to their husbands. It is not clear to us at this point how these avoidance strategies are to be interpreted, and we are not aware of any research on these issues. However, restrictions on address terms and forms used to refer to spouses or in-laws are a very well attested phenomenon cross-linguistically (e.g. Salami 2004), and the Kurdish data are in line with many of the observed tendencies.

In the traditional Kurdish lineage system, it is the father's family and/or tribe to which the children automatically belong. Probably as a reflection of this well-established shared value, reference to one's heritage in various public domains (for example, poetry or politics) is established through the phrase *bav û kalên me* 'our ancestors' (lit. 'our father and grandfathers'), as in the phrases *zimanê bav û kalên me* 'the language of our ancestors' or *warê bav û kalên me* 'the land of our ancestors'.

Social gender asymmetries are also reflected in the traditional Kurdish marriage terminology. The verb *xwastin* (lit. 'to want, to request') is, in the context of match-making, the conventionalized expression for 'to send intermediaries to the parents of a girl to ask for her in marriage', with the woman passively undergoing the whole process. A gender-neutral native expression for 'to marry' is not available, even though the Arabic borrowing *zewicîn* 'to marry' is used in some parts of Kurdistan. In the native component of the Kurdish lexicon, for males 'to marry' is expressed by the phrase *jin înan* lit. 'to bring (a) woman', whereas for women marrying, it is *şû kirin* or *mêr kirin* lit. 'to do/make (a) husband/man'. The literal meanings of these phrases are interesting. For males, marriage is conceptualized as an act of 'obtaining' a woman, while for women, the conceptualization is 'to make a man', i.e. 'to make a man complete'. Two phrases which do not include the words for man and woman, *mare/mehr kirin* ('to officially espouse') and *dawet kirin* (lit. 'to do a wedding') in fact replicate the asymmetric view of marriage, since in both the subject of the verb can only be a man, and never a woman. In

the same vein, divorce is expressed in terms of male activity and female acquiescence: The verb *telaq dan* (lit. 'to give divorce') requires a male subject, while the corresponding expression for women is *telaq wergirtin* (lit. 'to receive divorce'). Thus the marriage-related terminology systematically reflects – and hence reinforces – a conceptualization of marriage in which men are the active instigators and controllers of this process, while women are the party affected by this process (but cf. Section 5 below for some recent attempts to counteract these tendencies in contemporary written Kurdish). The word *maldamayî* (lit. 'remained at home') describes a woman who has never married and evokes negative connotations as to the physical appearance of the woman. There is no such corresponding term for men.[12]

Another marriage-related dimension is the high esteem attributed to women as bearers of children and caretakers of family and home. Words such as *kabanî* (cf. Section 4.2 above), *bermalî* and *xanûman* all refer to the woman in the role of the person who takes charge of all domestic affairs. Again many proverbs and idiomatic expressions celebrate women in this role, as in (15), taken from Alakom (1994: 44).

(15)   a.   *Avaya malê destê jinan e.*
            'The flourishing of the home depends on the woman.'
       b.   *Jin kela mêra ye.*
            'The woman is the man's castle.'
       c.   *maka nodik nod canûyî*
            'the mother of ninety nine foals' (i.e. 'a woman who bears many children')

While we have drawn attention to role asymmetries as manifest in socially gendered nouns, we should also note the existence of a number of well-known proverbs which explicitly affirm male-female complementarity (cf. 16a), whereas a very popular proverb (16b) asserts and reinforces gender equality with respect to the attributes of courage and strength, represented here metaphorically through the concept 'lion'.

(16)   a.   *Jin û mêr weke tevr û bêr.*
            'Woman and man, like shovel and pickaxe.'
       b.   *Şêr şêr e çi jin e çi mêr e.*
            'A lion is a lion, whether it is male or female.'

In fixed expressions involving paired words, it is notable that the most frequent order is female-male, as in *xwîşk û bira* 'sister and brother' (the same order is preserved in addressing a larger mixed-sex group)*, keç û kur* 'daughter and son', *keç/qîz û xort* 'young girls and boys', *dê û bav* 'mother and father', *dapîr û bapîr* 'grandmother and grandfather', *jin û mêr* 'woman and man'.

To the extent that Kurdish idioms and proverbs reflect traditional belief systems which stem from a largely pre-industrial era, one may reasonably question the degree to which they reflect current attitudes and practices among contemporary urban Kurds. However, they are still part of the collective cultural memory, and it is undeniable that the values they transport continue to stabilize gender stereotypes in the community. More recently, with increasing political awareness particularly among urban Kurds in all regions of Kurdistan, important changes in gender perception can be observed. The following slogans have been extremely widespread in the public sphere among Kurds in Turkey, where gender issues have figured prominently on the agenda of the Kurdish political movements over the last two decades.

(17)   a.   *Jin jiyan azadî!*
             'Woman, life, freedom!' (i.e. the three are inseparable)
       b.   *Heta jin azad nebe civak azad nabe!*
             'Society will not be emancipated as long as women are not free!'

Over the past 30 years, left-wing elements have been very influential among the Kurds of Turkey, and gender-inclusive policies continue to be prominent within these movements.[13] The gender-equality components of left-wing ideologies have carried over into the recent political arena, most clearly in the agenda of the *Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* (BDP, 'Peace and Democracy Party'), Turkey's most important pro-Kurdish political party. The BDP is the only political party in Turkey to pursue a 40% quota for women, and the number of female mayors and parliament members in the BDP is higher than in any other political party in Turkey. There is little doubt that the early promotion of gender equality in Kurdish politics has had a lasting impact on the self-perception of Kurdish women in Turkey, and can be expected to have implications for policies on gendered language.[14]

5.   Language change: Public discourse on gender in language

As mentioned, Kurmanji Kurdish is not the official language of any nation state, and there are no institutions charged with formulating guidelines for language usage or executive bodies with the authority to implement such guidelines. Instead, various partially competing television, internet and print media platforms engage in an ongoing metalinguistic discourse, each pursuing its own agenda. Within the Kurdish context, the term "language reform" is thus not particularly appropriate, as the concept was developed primarily with reference to state-sanctioned and institutionalized measures. Nevertheless, quite recently some Kurdish writers and journalists of left-wing and progressive inclinations attempted to change the

structure and lexicon of the language with the aim of counteracting a perceived male bias. Many of these initiatives replicate current practices in a number of European languages, where strategies have been developed for avoiding, among other things, the use of generic masculines (see, for example, Braun et al. 2007).

As discussed in Section 2.4, the generic personal nouns *mirov* 'human being' and *kes* 'person', as well as the indefinite pronoun *yek* 'one', are often inflected as masculine when used generically. But in the last two decades, more and more authors have started to add the feminine inflection by means of a slash, as in *mirovê/a ku nizanibe (…)* 'a person.LNK.MASC/LNK.FEM who does not know (…)'. The following example illustrates this practice with the word *yek* 'one' in the oblique case, which is repeated in both the masculine and feminine form:

(18) *Her gotin-ek-e   pêşî-ya   yekten ji   dev-ê*
      each word-INDEF-LNK front-OBL at.once from mouth-LNK
      yek-î/yek-ê   ji nişka ve derneketî-ye.
      one-OBL.MASC/one-OBL.FEM suddenly NEG.come.out-3SG
      'It is not the case that every proverb has been uttered by someone (m/f) all of a sudden.' (Alakom 1994)

The same strategy may be applied to double-gender nouns (cf. Section 2.3 and 4.2), as in *perspektîfa kedkarekî/e kurd* 'the perspective of a Kurdish laborer.LNK. MASC/LNK.FEM', where *kedkar* 'worker, labourer' is overtly marked for both masculine and feminine gender. Similar double-marking strategies may be applied to anaphoric pronouns, when their antecedents are double-gender nouns or generics. Consider (19), where the double-marking strategy is deployed within an idiom. The sentence is about people who cannot speak, and the pronoun in this example refers back to the noun *mirov* 'person' in the preceding text passages:

(19) *Tu dibêjî qey kuliyan   ziman-ê   wî/wê*
      as if   grasshopper tongue-LNK 3SG.OBL.MASC/FEM
      xwari-ye.
      eat.PAST.PART-3SG
      'It is as if the grasshoppers have eaten his/her tongue.' (AW79C4)

Some authors reverse the order of such form-pairs, writing the feminine form first, as in the examples in (20), taken from a recent Kurdish textbook; Dirêj 2011:226).

(20) a. *şagirt-ek-e/î   min*
          student-INDEF-LNK.FEM/MASC POSS.1SG
          'a student (f/m) of mine'

b. *gor-a*   *wê/wî*
   tomb-LNK   POSS.3SG.FEM/MASC
   'the tomb of her/him'

c. *kategori-ya*   *ku di berhem-ên   wê/wî*   *de (…)*
   category-LNK.FEM   that in work-LNK.PL POSS.3SG.FEM/MASC in
   'The category (of authors) in the work of whose (f/m) (…)' (AW69D3)

The double-marking strategy just illustrated is typographically cumbersome and scarcely practicable for the spoken language. For these reasons, Öpengin (2011:218) suggests "alternating masculine/feminine forms" as a more reader- and listener-friendly form of gender-inclusive language. For instance, when referring several times generically to a 'bilingual speaker' within the same text, one could alternate between the feminine phrase *axêver-a duzimanî* (lit. 'speaker-LNK. FEM bilingual') and the masculine phrase *axêver-ê duzimanî* (lit. 'speaker-LNK. MASC bilingual'). Another possible strategy for avoiding generic masculines would be the consistent use of gender-neutral plural forms in generic contexts, as in *axêver-ên duzimanî* (lit. 'speaker-LNK.PL bilingual'). However, this has to our knowledge never been explicitly proposed as a strategy of avoiding generic masculines.

Attempts have also been made to create new lexical items, or to shift the reference of existing ones, with the aim of counteracting what some perceive as a male bias in the language. We saw above (Section 4.3) that the terminology associated with marriage is infused with fundamental gender asymmetry. Recently, in some progressive publications (for example, the Kurmanji newspaper *Azadiya Welat* or the Sorani newspaper *Rûdaw*), the neologisms *hevser/hawser* (lit. 'co-head') and/ or *hevjîn* (lit. 'co-life') have gained widespread currency as gender-neutral terms for 'spouse', potentially applicable to both 'wife' and 'husband'. The verb *zewicîn* 'to marry', combinable with either a male or female subject, is promoted as a replacement for the traditional gender-specific verbs in contemporary written Kurmanji. In Sorani, a complex verb phrase *prosey hawsergîrî encam dan* 'to marry' (lit. 'to effectuate the spouse-getting process') is likewise promoted in the media, both in the conservative (for example, *Payam* newspaper[15]) and the progressive ones (such as *Radio Nawa*). In Sorani, the word *pyaw* (originally 'man'), which has traditionally been used as a (male) generic term in the sense of 'person', has mostly been replaced by Kurmanji *mirov* 'human being, person'. Other, more sporadic attempts to counteract the male bias in the lexicon include the following: The traditional adjective *mêrxas* 'brave', which consists of *mêr* 'man' and *xas* 'genuine', may be used to refer to both males and females, as in *keçeke jêhatî û mêrxas* 'a competent and brave girl' (Alakom 1994:50). The word was considered objectionable by the author of a recent book review (Bajar 2013), presumably on the

grounds that a woman should be able to be depicted as 'brave' without relying on a reference to maleness. The suggested replacement is an adjective *jinxas* 'courageous', which consists of *jin* 'woman' and *xas* 'genuine'. Similarly, a female version of the double-gender noun *camêr* 'fine, upright person' (which contains the noun *mêr* 'man') has been devised: *canîk* (the word *ciwan* 'young', reduced to *can*, to which the diminutive suffix *-ik* is added), which occurs, for example, in the fixed expression *canik û camêrên hêja* 'the fine men and women'.

In the emergent written standard(s) of contemporary Kurdish, there is thus a considerable degree of awareness of gendered language and related issues, much of it inspired by the relevant debates in European languages. However, as mentioned at the outset of this section, the metalinguistic discussion is conducted outside a nation-state framework, and it is currently not possible to identify which of the initiatives mentioned here will have a long-term impact on the course of the development of written Kurdish, which ones will remain isolated measures, characterizing the language of one media platform or political movement, and which ones will disappear entirely.

6. Conclusion

This article began with an outline of grammatical gender in Kurdish, drawing on the framework of Corbett (1991). In this view, grammatical gender is defined in terms of the existence of agreement phenomena reflecting the gender of nouns. Within Kurdish, the only variety that exhibits any form of gender-based agreement in its morphosyntax is Kurmanji, and we therefore focused on this variety of Kurdish. As a point of departure, we reiterated the traditional view, according to which Kurmanji is a language in which each noun belongs to one of two grammatical genders, masculine and feminine (cf. Bedir Khan & Lescot 1991), and the relevant morphology may be considered to exhibit gender agreement.

However, our investigation of the gender of personal nouns suggests that the assumption of gender classes defined formally by agreement phenomena, and of the lexically specified membership to one (and only one) gender class, requires revision. As we have been at pains to point out, the traditional approach to Kurdish as a language with "two grammatical genders" belies the subtleties of the system, and leads to the expectation of greater parallels with more familiar gender languages than is actually warranted. Thus from the perspective of the typology of gender systems, Kurdish appears to exhibit a hybrid system, with grammatical gender dominant in the lexicon for inanimates, while mainly referential gender determines the forms of words referring to human beings.

We noted, however, that in actual usage, Kurdish, like most of the other languages treated in this series, exhibits generic masculines. Likewise, we noted the prevalence for referential gender to override grammatical gender in anaphoric pronouns, a tendency well-known in the literature (cf. Braun & Haig 2010 for German). We also found a pervasive male bias in two areas of the lexicon, namely kinship terminology and proverbs and idiomatic expressions, where the traditional arrangement of gender roles is rather clearly reflected. The realm of occupational terms, which likewise reflect conventionalized social divisions of labor, nicely illustrates the flexible nature of gender associations. In the rapidly changing and increasingly urbanized Kurdish speech communities, traditional occupational titles are re-semanticized following extensions to novel contexts, or new terms are coined with shifted gender associations. Speakers' intuitions on such words are correspondingly variant, and elucidating the relevant facts requires a more representative and tightly controlled investigation than we can offer at this stage. This is surely one of the most urgent topics for future research.

Within the emergent written standard, we found an increasing awareness of gender issues as manifest in the metalinguistic discourse and pointed out a number of initiatives for counteracting the generic masculine, besides attempts to coin more gender-neutral lexical items in the realm of marriage terminology and evaluative terms. Within these currents, the effects of parallel developments in the major languages of Europe are clearly discernible, particularly given that many actors involved in Kurdish media stem from the large European diaspora community. However, we also note that changes within the social and political organization of Kurdistan itself are leaving their imprint on the language.

Notes

1.   Additional abbreviation used in the glosses that is not specified in the general list of abbreviations: LNK = linker.

2.   In some dialects (particularly northern Iraqi Badini), definiteness of the head noun plays no role and the linker is always -*a* or -*ê*, depending on gender.

3.   For a summary of different views on the *ezafe* in Iranian linguistics, see Haig (2011). Arguments in favor of the agreement analysis are put forward in Franco et al. (2013), while problematic aspects of the agreement analysis are discussed in Section 2.3 of this article.

4.   This term is particularly interesting due to the etymology of one of its components, *mam-*, meaning 'uncle'.

5.   From the transcription of a radio report available on: http://www.dengeamerika.com/content/article/1705731.html [15 October 2013].

6. The noun *zarok* 'child' patterns like *bebik/pitik* 'baby' in taking feminine grammatical gender. In the emergent written standard, however, it can be found with masculine inflections as well, particularly when referring to an older child.

7. From *Zimanê kurdî dîsa sêwî ma* ['The Kurdish language is again an orphan'], a column by Abdulkadir Bîngol, published on the news outlet www.nefel.org on 23.09.2013 [9 October 2013].

8. This section was initially based on the intuitive insights of one of the authors, a native speaker of Kurmanji. These intuitions were continuously modified in discussions with other native speakers, and the resulting set of occupational terms was tested in an interview conducted with a native speaker of Kurmanji from Şemdinli, Southeast Turkey. The speaker is a 55-year old woman with no formal education and only passive competence in Turkish. Given the high levels of regional variation in Kurmanji, the lack of binding norms, and the absence of any previous research on the topic, we emphasize the tentative nature of our analysis at this stage.

9. Etymologically, the term *kabanî* is probably related to *key* 'house' (found in several Northwest Iranian languages) and *banû* 'girl'.

10. The term *sepan* 'laborer' denotes a person who works on someone else's land, takes care of the animals and receives as remuneration a part of the annual profit from the land and stockbreeding (often half of the harvest and/or profit).

11. The only work on the gendered use of Kurdish to date is Hêdî Housainpoor (1999), a study of women's speech behaviour in the Mukriyan region (Iranian Kurdistan).

12. There is also the term *qeyre* to denote a middle-aged person (man or woman) who has not married. It may occur in a pejorative sense in the form of *qeyre-kiç* 'old girl' (cf. Alina 2013: 39).

13. Wolf (2004) notes that the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* 'The Workers' Party of Kurdistan') was probably the only major actor among the Kurdish political movements that overtly pursued such a policy.

14. Very recently, the news agency *JINHA* was established, entirely managed by politically active women in the Kurdish movement. One of their mottos is "we will change the [male-dominant] language of the press" (cf. http://www.jinha.com.tr/ku/ [9 December 2013]).

15. A publication of the Union of Kurdish Religious Personalities. Compare the widespread use in an interview with a religious authority: http://zanayan.org/to_print.php?id=1956&section=1 [12 December 2013].

References

Akin, Salih. 2001. "Motivations phonologiques de la neutralisation d'une catégorie grammaticale dans un parler du kurde." *Linx* 451: 47–154.

Alakom, Rohat. 1994. *Di folklora Kurdî da serdestiyeke jinan*. Stockholm: Nûdem.

Alina, Minoo. 2013. *Honor and violence against the women in Iraqui Kurdistan*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Asadpour, Hiva & Jahanbakhs Louragi-Pour & Mehdi Safaie Qalati. 2012. "Sorani Kurdish address forms: Case of Northwest Iran." *International Journal of Linguistics* 4(4): 421–449. DOI: 10.5296/ijl.v4i4.2252

Bajar, Kejo. 2013. "'Meryema' Sebrî Silêvanî." *Le Monde Diplomatique Kurdî* 46: 23.

Bedir Khan, Emir Djeladet & Roger Lescot. 1991. *Grammaire Kurde (Dialecte kurmandji)*. Paris: Jean Maisonneuve.

Braun, Friederike. 2000. *Geschlecht im Türkischen: Untersuchungen zum sprachlichen Umgang mit einer sozialen Kategorie*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Braun, Friederike & Susanne Oelkers & Karin Rogalski & Janine Bosak & Sabine Sczesny. 2007. "'Aus Gründen der Verständlichkeit …': Der Einfluss generisch maskuliner und alternativer Personenbezeichnungen auf die kognitive Verarbeitung von Texten." *Psychologische Rundschau* 58(3): 183–189. DOI: 10.1026/0033-3042.58.3.183

Braun, Friederike & Geoffrey Haig. 2010. "When are German 'girls' feminine? How the semantics of age influences the grammar of gender agreement." In *Language in its socio-cultural context: New explorations in gendered, global and media uses*, eds. Markus Bieswanger & Heiko Motschenbacher & Susanne Mühleisen. Tübingen: Narr, 69–84.

Corbett, Greville. 1991. *Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9781139166119

Dirêj, Evdila. 2011. *Kurdî Kurmancî II*. Berlin: Dilop.

Franco, Ludovico & Rita Manzini & Leonarda Savoia. 2013. "Some call it article, some ezafe: 'Linkers' as 'agreement'." http://www.academia.edu/4393956/Some_call_it_article_some_ezafe_Linkers_as_agreement [14 October 2013].

Haig, Geoffrey. 2001. "The Corpus of Contemporary Kurdish Newspaper Texts (CCKNT) – a pilot project in corpus linguistics for Kurdish." *Kurdische Studien* 1(2): 109–122.

Haig, Geoffrey. 2004. "Das Genussystem in der kurdischen Sprache: Strukturelle und soziolinguistische Aspekte." In *Gender in Kurdistan und der Diaspora*, eds. Siamend Hajo & Carsten Borck & Eva Savelsberg & Şukriye Doğan. Münster: Unrast Verlag, 33–58.

Haig, Geoffrey. 2008. *Alignment change in Iranian languages: A construction grammar approach*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. DOI: 10.1515/9783110198614

Haig, Geoffrey. 2011. "Linker, relativizer, nominalizer, tense-particle: On the Ezafe in West Iranian." In *Nominalization in Asian languages: Diachronic and typological perspectives*, vol. 1, eds. Foong Ha Yap & Karen Grunow-Hårsta & Janick Wrona. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 363–390. DOI: 10.1075/tsl.96.13hai

Haig, Geoffrey. 2013. "Quelques remarques sur la politique linguistique au Kurdistan d'Irak et ses répercussions l'unité culturelle des Kurdes." *Études Kurdes* 11: 123–127.

Haig, Geoffrey & Ergin Öpengin. 2014. Kurdish: A critical research overview. *Journal of Kurdish Studies* 3: 99–122.

Haig, Geoffrey & Ergin Öpengin. forthcoming. "Kurmanji Kurdish in Turkey: Structure, varieties and status." In *The minority languages in Turkey*, ed. Christiane Bulut. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Hassanpour, Amir. 2001. "The (re)production of patriarchy in Kurdish language." In *The women of a non-state country: The Kurds*, ed. Sherzad Mojab. Costa Mesa: Mazda, 227–263.

Hassanpour, Amir. 2012. "The indivisibility of the nation and its linguistic divisions." *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 217: 49–73.

Hêdî Hosainpoor, Jafar. 1999. *Destebuxçe: Zarawey jinanî Mukriyan* [Destebuxçe: The idioms of the women of Mukriyan]. Jönköping: Kitab-i Arzan.

MacKenzie, David N. 1954. "Gender in Kurdish." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 16(3): 528–541. DOI: 10.1017/S0041977X00086833

Öpengin, Ergin. 2011. *Rewşa kurdî ya sosyolenguîstîk li Tirkiyeyê* [The sociolinguistic situation of Kurdish in Turkey]. Istanbul: Avesta.

Öpengin, Ergin. 2013. *Clitic/affix interactions: A corpus-based study of the person marking in the Mukri variety of Central Kurdish*. PhD thesis. Université Sorbonne Nouvelle & Universität Bamberg.

Öpengin, Ergin & Geoffrey Haig. 2014. "Regional variation in Kurmanji Kurdish: A preliminary classification of dialects. *Journal of Kurdish Studies* 3: 143–176.

Salami, L. Oladipo. 2004. "Deference and subordination: Gender roles and other variables in addressing and referring to husbands by Yoruba women." *Linguistik Online* 21(4): 65–80.

van Bruinessen, Martin. 1989. *Agha, Scheich und Staat: Politik und Gesellschaft Kurdistans.* Berlin: Edition Parabolis.

Wolf, Judith. 2004. "Aspekte des Geschlechterverhältnisses in der Guerilla der PKK/KADEK unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Ehrbegriffs." In *Gender in Kurdistan und der Diaspora*, eds. Siamend Hajo & Carsten Borck & Eva Savelsberg & Şukriye Doğan. Münster: Unrast Verlag, 183–216.

Zinar, Zeynelabidîn. 1992. *Siyabend û Xecê* [Siyabend and Xecê]. Stockholm: Pencînar.