New approaches to the typology of gender

Sebastian Fedden   Greville G. Corbett
University of Sydney   Surrey Morphology Group
s.fedden@sydney.edu.au   g.corbett@surrey.ac.uk

When gender is mentioned, linguists may think of the system of German or French. Yet while they come readily to mind, these are systems which are typologically strange. We need to pull apart the components of these and other gender systems, and use them as criteria to construct a large typological space. Doing this brings us to the notion of canonical gender (Corbett & Fedden 2017[2015]), which we compare and contrast with the other morphosyntactic features. This is part of the wider Canonical Typology approach which, while still found most widely for tackling morphological and syntactic issues (as in Brown, Chumakina and Corbett 2013), has been taken up in phonology (Hyman 2012), sign language (Cormier, Schembri & Woll 2013), and beyond.

Given the yardstick of the canonical gender system, we can appreciate more of the exotism of parts of the gender systems of languages like Miraña (Seifart 2005) and Dutch (Audring 2009). A specific motivation for this approach is to reach a better understanding of the varied phenomena often labeled 'classifiers', which share properties with gender, but differ from it to greater or lesser extents. Particularly interesting here are languages, like Mian (Fedden 2011), which have been claimed to have more than one system of classification. These require especially careful analysis, since the issue of whether complex phenomena justify an account requiring two systems/features (rather than a single more involved feature) has been little discussed. Here again, I argue, a canonical approach proves helpful (see Fedden & Corbett f.c.).

References
Audring, J. 2009. *Reinventing pronoun gender*. Utrecht: LOT.
Brown, D. P., M. Chumakina & G. G. Corbett. 2013. *Canonical morphology and syntax*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Corbett, Greville G. & S. Fedden. 2017 (2015 online). Canonical gender. *Journal of Linguistics* 53(1): 1-37. [doi:10.1017/S0022226715000195]
Cormier, K., A. Schembri & B. Woll. 2013. Pronouns and pointing in sign languages. *Lingua* 137: 230-247.
Fedden, S. 2011. *A grammar of Mian*. (Mouton Grammar Library 55.) Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
Fedden, S. & G. G. Corbett. f.c. Gender and classifiers as co-occurring systems: A first typology.
Hyman, L. M. 2012. In defense of prosodic typology: A response to Beckman & Venditti. *Linguistic Typology* 16: 341-385.
Seifart, F. 2005. The structure and use of shape-based noun classes in Miranã (north-west Amazon). PhD dissertation, Radboud University, Nijmegen.