Gender and its interaction with number and evaluative morphology:
A typological investigation of canonical and non-canonical properties of gender systems

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The analysis of patterns of interactions between gender and other nominal features is an area of investigation that can shed new light on the typology of gender systems and on the definition of canonical gender. This is a typological investigation of interactions between gender and number, and gender and evaluative morphology in a sample of 100 African languages, proposing an inventory of morphosyntactic and semantic interactions.

At the morphosyntactic level, languages are classified according to these interaction patterns: type of exponence of gender and number, patterns of gender syncretism in the context of number, competing gender and number indexation patterns, presence of dedicated diminutive and augmentative genders.

At the semantic level, languages are classified based on whether gender assignment is *rigid* (i.e., nouns are assigned to one gender only) or *manipulable* (i.e., nouns can be assigned to more than one gender). Manipulable gender assignment is found to be associated with the modification of the countability properties of noun phrases and/or with the encoding of size variation.

The results show that certain patterns of interaction – e.g., manipulation of gender assignment to encode size variation – are widely spread within Africa and cut across genealogical groupings. I call these patterns *canonical interaction patterns*. Conversely, the distribution of the rarer patterns of interactions – e.g., manipulation of gender assignment to encode countability variation – is genealogically skewed. I call the latter patterns *non-canonical interaction patterns*. In my sample, non-canonical interaction patterns are only found in languages with pervasive gender indexation and/or a high number of gender distinctions. Based on this evidence, I suggest that non-canonical interaction patterns may be viewed as potential indicators of high absolute complexity (for a definition of absolute complexity, see Dahl 2004).

References
Dahl, Ö. 2004. *The growth and maintenance of linguistic complexity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.