

## **Gender in Nalca and enlarging the canon of synchronic (and diachronic) canonical gender properties**

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Nalca, a Mek language of Tanah Papua (Svärd 2013), has a highly unusual gender system, which is quite non-canonical according to well-known traditional criteria for canonical agreement (see, e.g., Corbett 2006). A major feature of the Nalca gender system is that gender can be switched on and off, causing a syntactic alternation between the gender which nouns trigger and the non-noun gender. Nalca displays the following non-canonical properties: (i) gender is predominantly assigned by default, (ii) all non-default genders are inanimate, (iii) gender targets are predominantly immediately adjacent to their controllers, (iv) if gender switches, the switch is conditioned by NP-internal syntax, and (v) if coordination triggers a particular gender this gender is used only in coordination.

We will argue that the unusual properties of the Nalca gender system can be largely accounted for by its recent genesis. The closely related languages Una, Eipo, and Yale all lack gender. Many synchronically non-canonical properties of Nalca gender can be either accounted for by the fact that it is a non-mature gender system or by the fact that it has an unusual diachronic origin. The diachronic perspective is also important since some of the non-canonical properties of Nalca recur in other Mek languages although they lack gender.

### **References**

- Corbett, G. G. 2006. *Agreement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Svärd, E. 2013. Selected Topics in the grammar of Nalca. Stockholm: Stockholm University.  
<http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:631006/FULLTEXT02.pdf>