



Grammatical Gender and Its Function



Falentine Wardatus Sholikhah ^a

Article history:

Received: 10 June 2014

Accepted: 15 November 2014

Published: 31 December 2014

Keywords:

English;

Function;

Grammatical gender;

Noun;

Romance languages;

Abstract

If you speak another language like Spanish or German, you are familiar with grammatical gender. In Romance languages (and many others), nouns have a gender. In French, a chair is a la chaise, a feminine noun, and a hat is le chapeau, a masculine noun. But did you know that English used to have gendered nouns too? Of course, gender did not disappear entirely. We still have gendered pronouns in English; he, she and it. Do you think English would be better with grammatical gender? Many people don't really know about gender in adjective or noun in English, they know that they exist. But if we want to improve yourself, we need to pay more attention to this small thing. It can make so much difference if we know about it. Grammatical gender also makes English will look better.

2395-7492© Copyright 2014. The Author.

This is an open-access article under the CC BY-SA license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

All rights reserved.

Author correspondence:

Falentine Wardatus Sholikhah,

Warmadewa University-Indonesia,

Email address: wfalentine@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Language has often been characterized as systematic correlation between certain types of gesture and meaning. For spoken languages the gesture is oral but for signed languages they are manual. It is not the case that every possible meaning that can be expressed is correlated with a unique, unanalyzable gesture, be it oral or manual. Rather each language has a stock of meaning-bearing elements and different ways of combining them to express different meaning, and these ways of combining them are themselves meaningful. Different combination falls into the realm of syntax. Syntax can thus be given following characterization, taken from Matthews (1982:1).

The term 'syntax' is from the Ancient Greek *syntaxis*, a verbal noun which literally means 'arrangement' or 'setting out together'. Traditionally, it refers to the branch of grammar dealing with the ways in which words, with or without appropriate inflection, are arranged to show the connection of meaning within the sentence.

If you speak another language like Spanish or German, you are familiar with grammatical gender. In Romance languages (and many others), nouns have a gender. In French, a chair is la chaise, a feminine noun, and a hat is le chapeau, a masculine noun. But did you know that English used to have gendered nouns too?

Until the 1200s, English had grammatical gender. Instead of using the articles "the" or "a", Old English had a masculine article "se" and a feminine article "seo". The sun, for instance, was feminine, so it would be written "sēo sunne". If you referred to the sun, you would even say "she".

^a Warmadewa University, Indonesia

However, DeKeyser, R. M. (2005), in northern England in the 1100s, grammatical gender disappeared. Historical linguists aren't entirely sure why this happened, but Professor Anne Curzan suggests that genders were lost because of the language mixing that went on in Northern England during that time. Between the 700s and the 1000s, there were Vikings invading northern England where peasants lived. The two groups spoke different languages: Old English and Old Norse. However, it is quite likely that many people were bilingual and fluent in both languages. Both Old English and Old Norse had gender, but sometimes their genders contradicted each other. In order to simplify communication, gendered nouns simply disappeared. Of course, gender did not disappear entirely. We still have gendered pronouns in English; he, she and it. Do you think English would be better with grammatical gender?

2. Research Methods

This research is descriptive qualitative research that refers to the method to formulate the conclusion by collecting, classifying, and interpreting the data of the research. The data for this research were taken from Percy Jackson & The Olympians: The Lightning Thief, The Clicking of Cuthbert, How To Get Away With Murder, and The Cuckoo's Calling. The data will be then carefully analyzed to see the difference between using the correct grammatical gender and the incorrect grammatical gender also to search its function.

3. Results and Analysis

This result and analysis section will analyze syntactically the differences between using the correct and incorrect grammatical gender.

Data (1)

The girl with curly *blond* hair hovered over me, smirking as she scraped drips off my chin with the spoon (Ibrahim, M. H., 2014).

Analysis of Data (1)

The sentence above might look normal and correct for some people. But that sentence is grammatically incorrect. It is because of the word 'blond' that the writer use. "Blond" or "blonde," on the other hand, is an indispensable adjective, since there's no better substitute. Since it is a girl who has yellow hair the word 'blond' which is a masculine form need to use its feminine form which is 'blonde'. In modern British usage, the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes, "the form *blonde* is now preferred in all senses." As we hinted above, these words came into English from French, but their earlier sources were not Gallic. The French *blond* (feminine *blonde*) can be traced to the medieval Latin *blondus* or *blundus* (yellow). Here is another example of grammatical gender which is correct:

A petite young *blonde* had appeared in their absence, wearing pink overalls, jeans and a T-shirt, and carrying a plastic bucket full of cleaning implements (Kuryłowicz, 1965).

In that sentence, without using any subject such as she or her name, we will know that the writer tries to tell us that the one with yellow hair is a woman by using the word *blonde*.

Data (2)

She's a *Murderer*. (How To Get Away with Murder, 2015)

Analysis of Data (2)

The sentence above is a title of a TV Show from the USA which is How To Get Away with Murder. Again, that sentence will look grammatically correct and normal for some people but actually, it is grammatically incorrect. Why? Because the word 'Murderer' is a masculine form. But since it uses 'she' that is a feminine form, the word 'Murderer' need to use its feminine form which is 'Murderess'.

Data (3)

"I'm still having no luck with Mr. Bestigui," Robin told Strike when he emerged from his inner office to find her performing searches related to an unidentified *brunette* posing with Lula on a beach. (The Cuckoo's Calling, 2015: 228)

Analysis of Data (3)

The sentence above is grammatically correct. It is because the word 'brunette' that the writer use is in feminine form which matches perfectly with the subject that uses the possessive form of she which is her. In that sentence, we know that there are many genders in the adjective. [Vigliocco, G., Antonini, T., & Garrett, M. F. \(1997\)](#), that gender will help us to differentiate between masculine, feminine, or neutral.

4. Conclusion

From the analysis above we know that even though many people don't really know about gender in adjective or noun in English, they know that they exist. But if we want to improve yourself, we need to pay more attention to this small thing. It can make so much difference if we know about it. Grammatical gender also makes English will look better.

Conflict of interest statement and funding sources

The author(s) declared that (s)he/they have no competing interest. The study was financed by personal funding.

Statement of authorship

The author(s) have a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author(s) have approved the final article.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by English Department Faculty of Letter of Warmadewa University. I sincerely thank my lecturer, I Wayan Suryasa, S.S., M.Hum. and my fellow colleagues from class A4 who provided me with insight and expertise that greatly assisted this research, although they may not agree with all of the analysis in this paper.

References

- DeKeyser, R. M. (2005). What makes learning second-language grammar difficult? A review of issues. *Language learning*, 55(S1), 1-25.
- Ibrahim, M. H. (2014). *Grammatical gender: Its origin and development* (Vol. 166). Walter de Gruyter.
- Kuryłowicz, J. (1965). The evolution of grammatical categories. *Diogenes*, 13(51), 55-71.
- Matthews, J. A. (1982). Soil dating and glacier variations: a reply to Wibjörn Karlén. *Geografiska Annaler: Series A, Physical Geography*, 64(1-2), 15-20.
- Vigliocco, G., Antonini, T., & Garrett, M. F. (1997). Grammatical gender is on the tip of Italian tongues. *Psychological science*, 8(4), 314-317.