

## Metaphorization in Grammatical Gender

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Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor; Grammatical Gender; Categorization Pattern; Highlightedness; Linguistic Relativity

The present paper seeks to argue for the involvement of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) in the formation of grammatical gender. It is proposed that in assigning a gender to the nouns which are inanimate, transference of the characteristic of 'animacy' takes place, i.e. the ascription of gender to inanimate objects is metaphorical. Following the terminology of conceptual metaphor literature, in case of gender ascription to inanimate objects, the source domain then is 'animate objects', and the target domain is 'inanimate object' and the 'animacy' feature is mapped onto the target domain. The form of the higher level metaphor would be INANIMATE OBJECT IS AN ANIMATE OBJECT.

Grammatical gender is defined as a system whereby the class to which a noun is assigned is reflected in the form assumed by other elements (verbs etc.) that are syntactically related to it (Matthews 1997). In the present context, I examine three languages: English, Bangla and Hindi. The first two do not have grammatical gender marking while Hindi is a grammatically gendered language. A couple of examples from Hindi would show this feature:

1. *gʰər bən rəha hɛ*  
house.NOM.MAS make be.PROG.MAS be.PRS.3.SG  
'The house is in the making.'
2. *gəri chəl rahi hɛ*  
car.NOM.FEM move be.PROG.FEM be.PRS.3.SG  
'The car is moving.'

The gender ascription can be seen as phonologically marked on the verbs of the sentences (*rəha* vs *rahi*). Sentence (1) would then involve a lower level metaphor like INANIMATE OBJECT IS A MALE and along the same line it would be INANIMATE OBJECT IS A FEMALE for sentence (2). The speakers of languages with grammatical gender make use of the gender metaphor more frequently than those without gender. In this context, it should be noted that languages without grammatical gender (e.g. English, Bangla) also make use of this metaphor. An example from English would show such use:

3. My computer is sick today.

The idea of interpreting grammatical gender is important in explaining grammatical phenomena in natural languages. The usage of metaphorization could be underlying a large number of grammatical phenomena, and grammatical gender is one such which involves metaphorization. A cross-linguistic study of the effects of grammatical gender (Mukherjee, 2018) reveals that Hindi and Bangla speakers differ in their object categorization which is influenced by the presence vs absence of grammatical gender in their languages. Hindi speakers make use of the gender metaphor more than Bangla speakers as a result of their language structure. The proposed idea is that it is the frequency in the use of the metaphor INANIMATE OBJECT IS AN ANIMATE OBJECT that gets entrenched and thus becomes highlighted in the conceptual system and affects cognitive processes like categorization. This substantiates the conceptual nature of the metaphor. This also enables us to compare it to other spatial metaphors used in languages (Boroditsky et al. 2000) which by their frequency of usage affect cognitive processes of the speakers. Similar studies in the domains of other grammatical phenomena could eventually lead us to a unitary conceptual process which can explain the grammatical processes of natural languages.

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