



„A girl reading Dali“ by Oleg Shupliak

# A Typology of Gender

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The term *gender* (genus 'kind' or 'sort') was first used in the 5<sup>th</sup> c BC by the Greek philosopher Protagoras who divided Greek nouns into three different classes: 'feminine', 'masculine', and 'inanimate'.

The term *gender* is used interchangeably with *noun class*.



## Question 1: What is gender (noun class) from a linguistic point of view?

- The gender of nouns is determined on the basis of agreement with other words, e.g., pronouns, adjectives, verbs, etc., as in (1). These words change their form in accordance with gender of the noun.

(1) *Russian (Slavic language)*

a. Eht-a      strann-aya      **knig-a**                      porazil-a      nas.

this-FEM strange-FEM    book-FEM.NOM.SG    impressed-FEM we.ACC

“This strange book impressed us.”



b. Eht-ot                      strann-yj                      **roman**                      porazil                      nas.  
this-MASC.NOM.SG strange-MASC novel.MASC.NOM.SG impressed.MASC we.ACC  
“This strange novel impressed us.”

c. Eht-o                      strann-oe                      **proizveden-ie**                      porazil-o                      nas.  
this-NEUT.NOM.SG strange-NEUT work-NEUT                      impressed-NEUT we.ACC  
“This strange work impressed us.”                      (from Matushansky 2013, p. 272)



- Some languages have overt gender markings (e.g., suffixes, prefixes) that indicate gender or a noun class. In such cases, the gender of a noun can be inferred from its form (2), (3).

(2) *Maale (African language)*

a. **dárz-átsi**

elephant-MASC.DEFINITE

'the male elephant'

b. **dárz-éll-ó**

elephant-FEM.DEFINITE

'the female elephant' (Amha 2001: 44)



(3) *German (Germanic language)*

a. **Stud-ent**

student-MASC.NOM.SG

‘a male student’

b. **Stud-ent-in**

student-MASC-FEM.NOM.SG

‘a female student’



- There are languages that do not have overt gender markings (they have covert gender), as in (4), (5).

(4) *Walman (Papuan language)*

**Ngolu**      pa    n-o                      lapo-n.

cassowary    that    3SG.MASC-be    large-3SG.MASC

‘That male cassowary is large.’ (Brown & Dryer, unpublished data)



(5) *Manambu* (Papuan language)

a. numa-də      **bal**  
big-MASC.SG   pig  
‘big pig’

b. kwasa-ø      **bal**  
small-FEM.SG   pig  
‘small pig’

(Aikhenvald 2012: 44)





## Question 2: Why is gender fascinating?

- Why a certain noun is assigned a certain gender? For example, the word for 'house' is feminine in French, masculine in Russian, and neuter in German (6a-c).

(6) a. *French*

la                    maison  
ART.FEM.SG    house.FEM.SG  
'house'

b. *Russian*

дом  
house.MASC.SG  
'house'

c. *German*

das                    Haus  
ART.NEUT.SG    house.NEUT.SG  
'house'



- Gender is invariable in some languages, while in others, the same noun can have different genders depending on various factors (size and shape of the referent, emotions of the speaker towards the referent, ect.).



(7) *Manambu*

- |    |                        |     |    |                             |                 |                       |
|----|------------------------|-----|----|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| a. | numa- <b>∅</b>         | du  | b. | kə- <b>də</b>               | numa- <b>də</b> | ta:kw                 |
|    | big-FEM.SG             | man |    | this-MASC.SG                | big-MASC.SG     | woman                 |
|    | ‘big man (woman-like)’ |     |    | ‘this big woman (man-like)’ |                 | (Aikhenvald 2012: 53) |

# 1. Gender systems across languages

- (i) Strict semantic gender system; (ii) formal gender system (morphological and phonological); (iii) referential (discourse) gender system (Steriopolo and Wiltschko 2010).

## 1.1.Semantic gender system

- The gender of a noun can be inferred from its meaning.
- Tamil and other Dravidian languages (e.g., Kannada, Telugu, Kolami, Ollari, Parji) use three genders based on the meaning of a noun (Corbett 1991: 9-10).
- Rational is a term almost equivalent to ‘human’ but often includes gods and often excludes infants (Corbett 2007, p. 259).

Criterion	Gender	Examples	Gloss
Male rational (god or male human)	masculine	aan, Civan	man, Shiva
Female rational (Goddess or female human)	feminine	pen, Kaali	woman, Kali
Other	neuter	maram, viitu	tree, house

Table 1: Gender in Tamil



Tamil girl

•Dizi (Maji) (Omotic language spoken by about 7, 000 people in the Kefa province of Ethiopia) uses two genders based on the meaning of a noun (Corbett 1991: 11).



Criterion	Gender	Examples	Gloss
Female or diminutive	feminine	dade, kieme, orce	girl, small pot, small broom
Other	masculine	dad, kiemu, orca	boy, pot, broom

Table 2: Gender in Dizi



•Halkomelem (Salish language spoken by a few speakers in British Columbia, Canada) uses feminine gender for all females (marked gender). Gender is unmarked for all others (Wiltschko 2008).



Criterion	Gender	Examples	Gloss
Female	feminine	the shhàlì, the álex,	the woman, the sister
Other	unmarked	te swíyeqe, te álex	the man, the sibling

Table 3: Gender in Halkomelem



• Archi (Northeast Caucasian language) uses Gender I for male rationals, Gender II for female rationals and Genders III and IV as follows, tables 4 and 5.

Criterion	Gender III	Examples	Gloss
domestic animals and birds		dogi, qaz	donkey, goose
larger wild animals and birds		pil, jam	elephant, wolf
all insects		hilku	fly
mythical beings		ilbis	devil
musical instruments		parx	drum
cereals		qoqol	wheat
trees		had	lime
astronomical phenomena		bac	moon

Table 4: Gender III in Archi



Criterion	Gender IV	Examples	Gloss
young animals and birds		biš	calf
smaller wild animals and birds		mejmanak	monkey
tools and cutting instruments		bel	spade
cloth, most clothing		at'ras	satin
metals		lacut	iron
liquids		čixir	wine
abstracts		mukul	beauty

Table 5: Gender IV in Archi





- The semantic parameters of gender across languages:
  - (i) Sex (natural gender): females are feminine and males are masculine (many Afro-Asiatic, East-Nilotic, and Central Khoisan languages);
  - (ii) Human vs. non-human (some Dravidian languages);
  - (iii) Rational (humans, gods, demons) vs. non-rational (Tamil and other Dravidian languages);
  - (iv) Animate vs. inanimate (Siouan).



## 1.2. Formal gender system

- Nouns are NOT assigned to gender according to their semantics. Instead, the gender is assigned arbitrary, as illustrated in Table 6.

Languages	House	Sun	Water	Moon
Russian	masculine	neuter	feminine	feminine
German	neuter	feminine	neuter	masculine
French	feminine	masculine	feminine	feminine

Table 6: Grammatical gender in Russian, German, and French

• Given the meaning of a noun, its gender can NOT be predicted, as in Table 7.

Languages	House	Building	School	University
Russian	dóm masculine	zdán'ije neuter	škóla feminine	un'ivers'it'ét masculine
German	Haus neuter	Gebäude neuter	Schule feminine	Universität feminine
French	maison feminine	édifice masculine	école feminine	université feminine

Table 7: Grammatical gender for nouns that denote buildings

- The gender of a noun can NOT be inferred from its meaning.
- The gender of a noun CAN be inferred from its form (morphological or phonological).

## 1.2.1. Morphological form

(8) *Spanish*

a. El                                      **perr-o**                      de    Juan    está    enferm-o.

ART.MASC.SG                      dog-MASC                      of    Juan    is            ill-MASC

‘Juan’s (male) dog is ill.’

b. La                                      **perr-a**                      de    Juan    está    enferm-a.

ART.FEM.SG                      dog-FEM                      of    Juan    is            ill-FEM

‘Juan’s (female) dog is ill’.





- It has been claimed in the literature (Corbett 1982, 1991; Fraser & Corbett 1995, Matushansky 2013, among others) that nouns denoting males usually have masculine gender and nouns denoting females have feminine gender (the semantic core). However, in morphological gender systems, we can observe “overriding” of gender.

(9) *German*    *masc* → *neuter*

a. ein    groß-er    Mann

ART    big-MASC    man.MASC.SG

‘a big man’

b. ein    klein-es    Männ-**chen**

ART    small-NEUT    man-DIM.NEUT.SG

‘a small man’

(10) *German*    *fem* → *neuter*

a. eine    groß-e    Frau

ART    big-FEM    woman.FEM.SG

‘a big woman’

b. ein    klein-es    Fräu-**lein**

ART    small-NEUT    woman-DIM.NEUT.SG

‘a small young woman’

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(11) Dutch *masc* → *neuter*

a. een mooi-e jongen      b. een mooi      jonge-tje

ART beautiful-MASC boy.MASC.SG      ART beautiful.NEUT boy-DIM.NEUT.SG

‘a beautiful boy’

‘a beautiful little boy’

(12) Dutch *fem* → *neuter*

a. een mooi-e meid      b. een mooi      meis-je

ART beautiful-FEM girl.FEM.SG      ART beautiful.NEUT girl-DIM.NEUT.SG

‘a beautiful girl’

‘a beautiful little girl’



## 1.2.2. Phonological form

- In Afar (Afro-Asiatic), the position of the accent is an indicator of gender, as in table 8.

Almost all nouns are can be assigned to the correct gender by the phonological rules.

Criterion	Gender	Examples	Gloss
end in an accented vowel	feminine	catò, karmà	help, autumn
end in a consonant	masculine	cedèr, gilàl	supper time, winter
end in a vowel, but not accented	masculine	tàmu, baànta	taste, trumpet

Table 8: Gender in Qafar (Afro-Asiatic)





### 1.3. Referential gender system

The gender is determined by certain properties of the referent, e.g., the “natural gender” (socio-cultural gender) of the referent, size and shape of the referent, and emotions of the speaker towards the referent (Steriopolo and Wiltschko 2010).

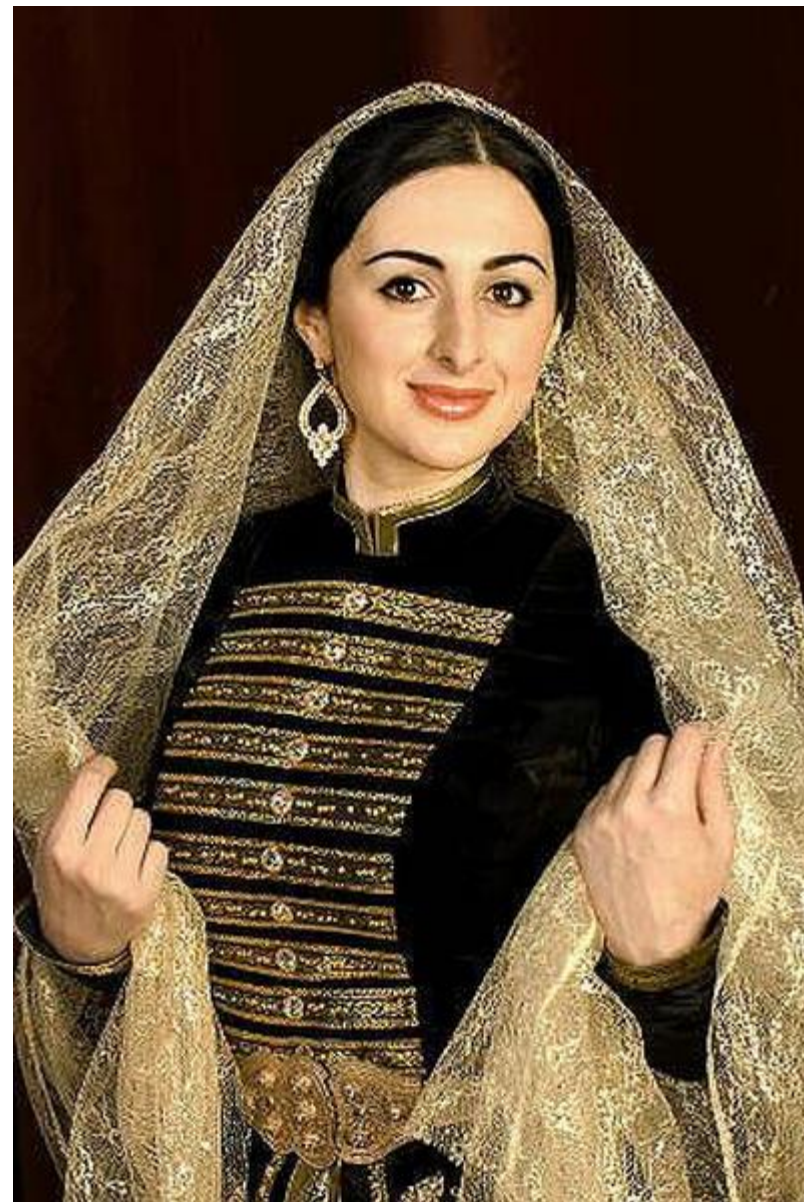
- *The socio-cultural gender of the referent*

In Lak, the noun *ñakin* ‘doctor’ can take the patterns associated with gender I, gender II or gender III, depending on whether the doctor is a man, an older woman or a younger woman (Corbett 1991: 181)



Criterion	Gender	Examples	Gloss
Male	Gender I	ħakin	doctor
Older female	Gender II	ħakin	doctor
Younger female	Gender III	ħakin	doctor

Table 9: Gender in Lak  
(Northeast Caucasian language)



In Archi, the nouns *lo* ‘child’ and *misgin* ‘poor person’ can take the patterns associated with gender I, gender II or gender IV in the singular, depending on whether the referent is a man, a woman or whether the gender of the referent is unknown/unimportant (Corbett 1991: 181)

Criterion	Gender, sg.	Examples	Gloss
Male	Gender I	lo, misgin	child, poor person
Female	Gender II	lo, misgin	child, poor person
Unknown/unimportant	Gender IV	lo, misgin	child, poor person

Table 10: Gender in Archi (Northeast Caucasian language)



- *Size and shape of the referent.*

In many Papuan languages, the same noun can have different genders depending on size and shape of the referent. Long and large referents are often used with masculine gender, while small and round ones are used with feminine gender, as in (13)-(15).

(13) *Alamblak (Papuan language)*

a. kuñ-**t**

house-FEM

‘house’

b. kuñ-**r**

house-MASC

‘(unusually) long house’

(Aikhenvald 2012: 57, 58)

(14) *Sare (Papuan language)*

a. seboxu-**r**

table-MASC

‘high table’

b. sebox-**u**

table-FEM

‘squat table’

(Sumbuk 1999: 115)



(15) *Manambu*

**ya:l** ata numa-ø møy ta:l

belly then big-FEM.SG very become.3FEM.SG

tə-lə-k

a numa-də **ya:l**

become-3FEM.SG.completive.different.subj then big-MASC.SG belly

adəka.

demonstrative.distal.reactivated.topic.MASC.SG

‘(Her) belly then became very big (feminine), having become (big), here is a very big (masculine) belly.’

(Aikhenvald 2008: 118)

- In many languages, feminine gender is associated with small size and masculine gender with large size. However, the opposite can also be found, as in Hadza (16).

(16) *Hadza (African language)*

a. ʔato

axe.MASC

‘axe’

b. ʔato-ko

axe-FEM

‘large axe’

(Edenmyr 2004: 16)



- ***Emotions of the speaker towards a referent***

For example, in Oromo, the speaker expresses negative emotions towards a dog (17b) and the gender of the noun 'dog' changes.





## 2. Various groups of nouns

### 2.1. Common gender nouns

Such nouns denote animate beings. They have only one form but can have more than one gender. Their gender depends on the referent (e.g., Spanish, Portuguese, Russian).

(19) *Spanish*

a. la            **patriota**   bonit-a  
ART.FEM.SG patriot   beautiful-FEM  
'a beautiful patriot (female referent)'

b. el            **patriota**   bonit-o  
ART.MASC.SG patriot   beautiful-MASC  
'a beautiful patriot (male referent)'

(20) a. la            **testigo**   bonit-a  
ART.FEM.SG witness   beautiful-FEM  
'a beautiful witness (female referent)'

b. el            **testigo**   bonit-o  
ART.MASC.SG witness   beautiful-MASC  
'a beautiful witness (male referent)'

(21) a. la            **estudiante**   bonit-a  
ART.FEM.SG student   beautiful-FEM  
'a beautiful student (female referent)'

b. el            **estudiante**   bonit-o  
ART.MASC.SG student   beautiful-MASC  
'a beautiful student (male referent)'

(Soledad Dominguez, personal communication)



## 2.2. Some members of species (epicines)

Such nouns denote animate beings (members of the species). They have only one form and only one gender. Their gender does NOT depend on the referent.

(22) *Russian*

- |    |                                     |                   |    |                |                   |
|----|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----|----------------|-------------------|
| a. | bol'sh-oj                           | <b>kit</b>        | b. | *bol'sh-aya    | <b>kit</b>        |
|    | big-MASC.NOM.SG                     | whale.MASC.NOM.SG |    | big-FEM.NOM.SG | whale.MASC.NOM.SG |
|    | 'big whale (member of the species)' |                   |    |                |                   |

(23) *Russian*

- |    |                                     |                  |    |                 |                   |
|----|-------------------------------------|------------------|----|-----------------|-------------------|
| a. | bol'sh-aya                          | mysh'            | b. | *bol'sh-oj      | <b>mysh'</b>      |
|    | big-FEM.NOM.SG                      | mouse.FEM.NOM.SG |    | big-MASC.NOM.SG | mouse.FEM.NOM.SG  |
|    | 'big mouse (member of the species)' |                  |    |                 | (Steriopolo 2008) |

### 2.3. Hybrid nouns

Usually there is a limited number of such nouns in a given language (in Russian, these are profession-denoting nouns). Such nouns can trigger mixed gender agreement, as in (24c) and (d).



(24) *Russian*

a. Nov-yj            **vrach**            prishyol.  
new-MASC.SG    doctor.NOM.SG    came.MASC.SG  
‘The new doctor came’

b. Nov-aya            **vrach**            prishl-a.  
new-FEM.SG    doctor.NOM.SG    came-FEM.SG  
‘The new doctor came (referring to a female)’

c. Nov-yj            **vrach**            prishl-a.  
new-MASC.SG    doctor.NOM.SG    came-FEM.SG  
‘The new doctor came (referring to a female)’

d. U menya – interesn-aya            nov-yj            **vrach**.  
at me    – interesting-FEM.SG    new-MASC.SG    doctor.NOM.SG  
‘I have an interesting new doctor (referring to a female)’



(Pesetsky 2013, p. 18)

### 3. Interaction of gender and number

- In many languages around the world, gender is restricted to the singular number. Nonsingular numbers—dual and plural—do not differentiate genders. For example, in Manambu, there is no gender distinction in the dual and plural (25).





(25) *Gender distinction in Manambu*

Singular feminine  $-\emptyset$  or  $-l$

Singular masculine  $-d(\emptyset)$

Dual  $-b\emptyset r$

Plural  $-di$

(26) a.  $k\emptyset-d\emptyset$              $t\emptyset p$   
 this-MASC.SG    village  
 ‘this (masc) village’

b.  $k\emptyset-di$              $t\emptyset p$   
 this-PL            village  
 ‘these villages’

c.  $k\emptyset-b\emptyset r$              $t\emptyset p$   
 this-DUAL    village  
 ‘these two villages’

(Aikhenvald 2012: 39)

- However, there are languages, where gender is found in both singular and plural numbers. For example, Icelandic has a masculine–feminine–neuter distinction in both singular and plural.





(27) *Icelandic*

- a. *velkominn* (masculine singular) – one male person
- b. *velkomin* (feminine singular) – one female person
- c. *velkomið* (neuter singular) – someone whose gender is unknown
- d. *velkomnir* (masculine plural) – a group of males
- e. *velkomnar* (feminine plural) – a group of females
- f. *velkomin* (neuter plural) – a mixed or indeterminate group

- In Cushitic languages, there is also a clear gender distinction in the plural form. For example, in Somali there are two distinct plural markers *-dii* and *-hii* for masculine and feminine genders, respectively (28).

(28) *Somali*

a. inammá-**dii**      baa    y-imid  
 boy-MASC.PL      focus   PL-came  
 ‘The boys came.’

b. ináma-**hii**      baa    y-imid  
 girl-FEM.PL      focus   PL-came  
 ‘The girls came.’      (Serzisko 1982:184)





- In many fusional languages, a single morpheme represents gender and number simultaneously, as in (29).

(29) *Walman*

a. pelen **n**-aykiri

dog 3SG.MASC-bark

‘The male dog is barking.’

b. pelen **w**-aykiri

dog 3SG.FEM-bark

‘The female dog is barking.’

c. pelen **y**-aykiri

dog 3PL-bark

‘The dogs are barking.’

(Brown & Dryer, in prep: 2)





#### 4. Interaction of gender and declension (inflectional) class

- According to Aronoff (1994), declension is a set of words whose members each select the same set of inflectional morphemes.
- For example, most Russian nouns are in one of four declension classes, except for indeclinable nouns (*kofe* ‘coffee’, *pal'to* ‘coat’), as shown in table 11.
- There is often no 1:1 correspondence between declension classes and gender, as nouns of different genders can belong to the same declension class.



	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV
	masculine/hybrids end in -∅ in Nom.SG	feminine/ masculine/ common gender end in -a in Nom.SG	feminine end in in soft [- back] consonant in Nom.SG	neuter end in -o/e in Nom.SG
<b>Singular</b>				
<b>Nominative</b>	zakon 'law'	shkol-a 'school'	kost' 'bone'	vin-o 'wine'
<b>Accusative</b>	zakon	shkol-u	kost'	vin-o
<b>Genitive</b>	zakon-a	shkol-y	kost-i	vin-a
<b>Dative</b>	zakon-u	shkol-e	kost-i	vin-u
<b>Instrumental</b>	zakon-om	shkol-oj	kost'-yu	vin-om
<b>Locative</b>	zakon-e	shkol-e	kost-i	vin-e
<b>Plural</b>				
<b>Nominative</b>	zakon-y 'laws'	shkol-y 'schools'	kost-i 'bones'	vin-a 'wines'
<b>Accusative</b>	zakon-y	shkol-y	kost-i	vin-a
<b>Genitive</b>	zakon-ov	shkol	kost-ej	vin
<b>Dative</b>	zakon-am	shkol-am	kost-yam	vin-am
<b>Instrumental</b>	zakon-ami	shkol-ami	kost-yami	vin-ami
<b>Locative</b>	zakon-ax	shkol-ax	kost-yax	vin-ax

Table 11: Declension classes in Russian (Corbett 1982)

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**Thank you!**

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# A List of Terms

1. Agreement (slide 3)
2. Overt gender (slide 5)
3. Covert gender (slide 7)
4. Rational (slide 11)
5. Semantic parameters of gender (slide 17)
6. Arbitrary assignment of gender (slide 18)
7. Semantic core (slide 21)
8. Overriding of gender (slide 21)
9. Mixed gender agreement (slide 34)
10. Fusional languages (slide 41)
11. Declension (slide 42)



**What are gender systems in these five languages:  
semantic or formal (morphological or phonological)?**





Table 1: Gender in Zande (Niger-Congo)

Criterion	Gender	Examples	Gloss
male human	masculine	kumba	man
female human	feminine	dia	wife
other animate	animal	nya	beast
residue	neuter	bambu	house



Table 2: Gender in Russian (Slavic)

Criterion	Gender	Examples	Gloss
male	masculine	chelovek, papa, muzhchina	person, dad, man
female	feminine	mama, zhená	mother, wife
other	masculine	zver'	animal
other	feminine	ovca, stena	sheep, wall
other	neuter	okno, steklo	window, glass



Table 3: Gender in Lak (Caucasian)

Criterion	Gender	Examples	Gloss
male rational	I	las	husband
female rational	II	ninu	mother
other animate	III	nic	bull
residue	IV	nex	river



Table 4: Gender in Spanish (Romance)

Criterion	Gender	Examples	Gloss
male	masculine	homber, padre, chico	man, father, boy
female	feminine	mujer, madre, chica	woman, mother, girl
other	masculine	libro, vestido	book, dress
other	feminine	revista, corbata	magazine, necktie



Table 5: Gender in Qafar (Afro-Asiatic)

Criterion	Gender	Examples	Gloss
male	masculine	bàxa, toobokòyta	son, brother
female	feminine	baxà, toobokoytà	daughter, sister
other	masculine	gilàl, tàmu	winter, taste
other	feminine	karmà, catò,	autumn, help

