Gender in Kurdish
Structural and socio-cultural dimensions

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1. Introduction

Kurdish is a cover term for a group of Northwest Iranian languages and dialects spoken by between 20 and 30 million speakers in a contiguous area of west Iran, north Iraq, eastern Turkey and eastern Syria. There are also scattered enclaves of Kurdish speakers in Central Anatolia, the Caucasus, northeastern Iran (Khorasan) and Central Asia, as well as a large European diaspora population. The three most important varieties of Kurdish are: (i) Southern Kurdish, spoken under various names near the city of Kermanshah in Iran and across the border into Iraq; (ii) Central Kurdish (also known as Sorani), one of the offical languages of the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq, also spoken by a large population in west Iran along the Iraqi border; (iii) Northern Kurdish (also known as Kurmanji, which we use interchangeably in this chapter), spoken by the Kurds of Turkey, Syria, the northwest perimeter of North Iraq, and in pockets of Armenia and around lake Urmiye in Iran. Of these three, the largest group in terms of numbers of speakers is Northern Kurdish.

Central Kurdish and Northern Kurdish have, each in a distinct sociopolitical setting, developed independent "standard" varieties over the last century. Central Kurdish, in its standard Sorani variety, is now the principal language used in education and mass media in the autonomous region of Kurdistan in Iraq (see Hassanpour 2012; Haig 2013), where it is written in the Arabic script. Northern (Kurmanji) Kurdish, on the other hand, developed written standards using the Cyrillic script in the ex-Soviet Union (particularly in Armenia), while the Kurds of Turkey adopted an adapted version of the Roman alphabet, which has become the dominant medium for Kurmanji in Turkey, Syria and the diaspora. Central and Northern Kurdish differ not only in terms of the scripts used; there are also considerable differences in morphology, leading to very restricted levels of mutual intelligibility, particularly among speakers lacking regular exposure to the other dialect (cf. Haig & Öpengin, forthcoming, on differences between Central and Northern Kurdish).

The earliest attested Iranian languages exhibited the three-way grammatical gender typical of ancient Indo-European, but grammatical gender has largely been lost in Central and Southern Kurdish, where now even pronouns have no grammatical gender. In Northern Kurdish, on the other hand, grammatical gender is retained on nouns and pronouns, with a two-way distinction between masculine (m) and feminine (f). We therefore concentrate on Nothern Kurdish, though for the discussion of social and referential gender we will also make reference to Central Kurdish at some points. With the exception of a brief synopsis in Haig

(2004), a historical treatment of gender in MacKenzie (1954), and some notes on gender-loss in one dialect in Akin (2001), there is no previous published research on most of the issues tackled in this chapter. Our treatment is thus not just a summary of available research, but presents novel analyses based on original material. The main source for the contemporary Kurmanji written language is the corpus of texts from the newspaper *Azadiya Welat*, outlined in Haig (2001), and numbers accompanying examples refer to the numbering in that corpus. We have also conducted structured interviews and elicitations with native speakers to obtain a more balanced cross-section of judgements, in particular for the sections on occupation words (section 4). In order to simplify the description, we provide examples based on the most widely-accepted written standard variety of Kurmanji Kurdish. Given the lack of previous research, it is inevitable that some of our analyses remain tentative, but we consider a detailed and accessible discussion of gender-related issues in Kurdish to be long-overdue, and we trust it will contribute to generating increased research in the field.

The chapter is organized along the following lines: Section 2.1 lays the foundation for analysing gender as a grammatical category in Kurmanji, while section 2.2 covers lexical gender, with a focus on kinship terminology. Section 2.3 explores the principles and regularities in the grammar and lexicon that together effect reference to male and female persons. Section 2.4 looks at the linguistic means for achieving generic reference to persons, and the default use of masculine forms in such contexts. Section 3 investigates gender issues in word-formation, and the resolution of gender conflicts in coordinated structures. Section 4 examines the use of gender in words with person reference, looking particularly at terms of address, occupation nouns, and idiomatic expressions. Section 5 discusses recent initiatives in public discourse on Kurdish to counteract the perceived gender assymentry in the language, while Section 6 summarizes the main findings of this chapter, and points to further avenues for research.

2. Categories of gender

In Kurmanji, nouns can be assigned to one of two grammatical genders, traditionally labeled masculine and feminine. While such a two-gender system appears at first sight to be reminiscent of the better known Romance languages, grammatical gender in Kurdish works somewhat differently. First, Kurdish has no productive derivational morphology for deriving person terms with a particular referential gender, comparable to *-a* in Spanish *profesor-a* ‘female professor, teacher’, or *-in* in German *Fahrer-in* ‘female driver’. Instead, nouns that may refer to male or female persons are simply directly inflected with masculine or feminine inflections, according to the intended reference in the particular context; we discuss these issues in sections 2.3 and 4.2 below. Second, grammatical gender in pronouns is only visible in the third person singular, and only in the oblique case of these pronouns. The linguistic expression of social and referential gender is of course manifested in other ways, which are discussed in sections 2.3 and 4.

2.1 Grammatical gender

Grammatical gender manifests itself in two types of inflectional morphology: the forms of case markers on nouns and pronouns, and on linking elements within the noun phrase, discussed in section 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 respectively. Grammatical gender is only relevant in the singular; in the plural, grammatical gender distinctions are completely neutralized, and all nouns take the same set of plural inflections.

2.1.1 Grammatical gender in the case system

Kurmanji Kurdish has a two-way case opposition on nouns and pronouns, between an unmarked case, generally referred to as the “Direct” in Kurdish linguistics, and a marked

"Oblique" case. In its case marking of subjects and direct objects, Kurdish has split alignment (sometimes called split ergativity): In present tenses, the subjects of transitive verbs are in the direct case, but in past tenses, they are in the oblique case. Objects of transitive verbs, on the other hand, show the reverse pattern, being oblique in the present, and direct in the past. These issues are not at stake here, but it nevertheless needs to be borne in mind that the terms 'direct' and 'oblique' cannot simply be equated with 'nominative' and 'accusative' (cf. Haig 2008, Ch. 5–6 and references therein).

In the case system, grammatical gender is manifested solely in the form of the oblique case suffix. This suffix has two forms, depending on the grammatical gender of the noun: *-ê* for feminine and *-î* for masculine. This is illustrated in (1), where both the nouns and their qualifying demonstratives are in the oblique case:[1]

(1)	a.	*Vê*	*jin-**ê***	*di-bîn-î*
		this.OBL.F	woman-OBL.SG.F	IND-see.PRS-2SG
		'Do you see this woman(f)?'		
	b.	*Wî*	*mêrik-**î***	*di-bîn-î*
		that.OBL.M	man-OBL.SG.M	IND-see.PRS-2SG
		'Do you see that man(m)?'		

Exactly the same applies to pronouns of the third person (which are basically identical to the distal demonstratives): in the oblique case, there is a differentiation between a masculine singular *wî* '3SG.OBL.M' and a feminine singular *wê* '3SG.OBL.F'. There are no gender distinctions on first or second person pronouns, and none in the plural. Nouns may also carry the indefiniteness suffix *-ek*, to which the same oblique case markers can be added: *li mal-ek-**ê*** 'at a house (in house-INDEF-OBL.F)' and *li gund-ek-**î*** 'in a village (in village-INDEF-OBL.M)'.

Finally, when Kurdish nouns are used as terms of address, they may take what is termed the vocative case, which distinguishes gender of the addressee: in the singular: *-(y)ê* is used for feminine singular, as in *da-**yê*** 'oh mother!**',** while *-o* is for masculine singular, as in *bav-**o*** 'oh father!'.

2.1.2 Grammatical gender in linking elements (Ezafe)

In Kurdish, constituents of the NP that follow the head noun are linked to it via an unstressed vocalic particle, traditionally termed "ezafe" in Iranian linguistics. We use the neutral term 'linker' here, and gloss LNK. Depending on the gender and the definiteness/indefiniteness of the modified noun, the linker has either the feminine form *-a* (definite) or *-e* (indefinite), or the masculine form *-ê* (definite) or *-î* (indefinite). Example (2) illustrates the masculine and feminine forms of the linker respectively, each with an indefinite head noun.[2]

(2)	a.	*kebanî-yek-e*	*baş*
		woman-INDEF-LNK.SG.F	good
		'a competent housewife (f)'	
	b.	*şivan-ek-î*	*baş*
		shepherd-INDEF-LNK.SG.M	good
		'a competent shepherd (m)'	

The syntactic status of the linker is a matter of some controversy. It can be considered a kind of 'gender/number agreement' between the head noun and its dependent, e.g. the adjective *baş* 'good' in (2). However, unlike more prototypical examples of gender agreement, the linker is prosodically associated with its controller (the head noun), rather than its target. For the largely descriptive purposes of this section, the term "agreement" is innocuous enough, and we defer a more criticial appraisal to section 2.3 below.[3]

When a head noun has multiple modifiers, a linking element may occur separated from the head, between the dependent elements. However, it still exhibits agreement in grammatical gender with the head noun, illustrated in (3), where the linker has the form it takes for agreement with definite head nouns:

(3) a. *mal-**a*** *mezin* ***a*** *li nav bajêr*
house-LNK.SG.F big LNK.SG.F in inside town
'the big house(m) in the town'

b. *gund-**ê*** *mezin* ***ê*** *li pişt çiya*
village-LNK.SG.M big LNK.SG.M in behind mountain
'the large village(m) behind the mountain'

With plural nouns, an invariable form of the linker is used, *-ên* (definite) and *-ine* (indefinite), regardless of the grammatical gender of the head noun. Note that in Central Kurdish, where grammatical gender is lost (with the exception of relic forms in certain dialects), the linker has a single invariable form, *-î*, used with all nouns, regardless of gender, number, or definiteness.

2.1.3 Summary of grammatical gender

Grammatical gender is manifested in the singular forms of the oblique case marker, and the linker. Nouns that are not in the oblique case, or do not have any post-nominal modifiers, therefore do not show any overt sign of grammatical gender. Grammatical gender thus only actually surfaces in certain morphosyntactic configurations. For example, in (4a) and (4b), the two nouns are in the direct (unmarked) case, and have no post-nominal modifiers. In contexts like this, the different grammatical genders of the two nouns are not overtly distinguished in the morphosyntax in any way:

(4) a. *ew* *keçik* *na-ç-e* *mekteb-ê*
that girl(f) NEG-go.PRS-3SG school-OBL
'that girl does not go to school'

b. *ew* *kurik* *na-çe* *mekteb-ê*
that boy(m) NEG-go.PRS-3SG school-OBL
'that boy does not go to school'

Table 1 provides the paradigms for marking grammatical gender in Kurmanji Kurdish that have been discussed so far.

Table 1. Inflectional marking of grammatical gender in Kurmanji

	Singular				**Plural**	
	Feminine		Masculine			
	Def.	Indef.	Def.	Indef.	Def.	Indef.
Linker element (ezafe)	*-a*	*-e*	*-ê*	*-î*	*-ên*	*-ine*
Oblique case	*-ê*		*-î*		*-an*	
Vocative	*-ê*		*-o*		*-în/-ino*	

2.1.4 The assignment of grammatical gender to nouns

Given that all nouns are assigned to either the masculine or feminine grammatical gender, the question arises as to the basis for assigning a particular noun to a particular gender. For nouns denoting inanimate referents, the principles of gender assignment are fairly opaque. There are no obvious phonological cues triggering gender assignment, so their gender is not predictable from the phonological form alone, cf. *sîr* 'garlic' (f), but *şîr* 'milk' (m). There are, however,

some reliable morphological criteria. For example, nouns derived with *-î* or *-tî* are invariably feminine, e.g. *bedew-î* 'beauty', *kurd-î* 'Kurdish (language)', *cîran-tî* 'neighbourliness', as are the infinitives of verb stems derived with *-in*, e.g. *hat-in* 'coming, arrival', *mir-in* 'death'. A number of semantic principles underlying gender assignment have also been proposed, though most admit many exceptions. Given the focus of this chapter on terms referring to persons, we only note two of the more reliable semantic criteria in connection with inanimates (see Bedir-Khan and Lescot (1991:66-70) for more detailed discussion): Toponyms are generally feminine, e.g. *Kurdistan*, *Dicle* 'Tigris', or *Mezopotamya*. Food products derived from domestic animals are generally masculine, as in *şîr* 'milk', *penîr* 'cheese', *mast* 'yoghurt', *nivîşk* 'unmelted butter', *dew* 'ayran', *sertû* or *to* 'cream', and *goşt* 'meat'.

The assignment of grammatical gender to nouns denoting animate beings is transparently semantically motivated: grammatical gender generally corresponds to referential gender. Thus nouns such as *xal* 'uncle, mother's side', *bav* 'father', *bra* 'brother', *kur* 'son, boy', or *pismam* 'male cousin' are all grammatically masculine, while *met* 'aunt, father's side', *dê* 'mother', *xwîşk* 'sister', *keç* 'girl, daughter', *dotmam* 'female cousin' are all grammatically female. However, many person nouns may be used to refer to persons of either gender, for example *heval* 'friend, male or female', and a number of complications arise in this connection, to which we return in section 2.3 below.

2.2 Lexical gender

There are certain semantic fields in the lexicon which are structured according to differences in referential gender. Typically, we find pairs of lexical items that differ primarily in this feature (though of course semantic connotations of various kinds will generally accompany each member of the pair). The most obvious such field is that of kinship terminology. Kurdish kinship is organized along patrilinear lines. Although traditionally the household is the basic domestic unit, consisting of husband, wife, children, possibly father's parents, some villages also recognize groups of closely-related households known as *bavik* (from *bav* 'father'), cf. van Bruinessen (1989:68). Kinship terminology varies extensively from one region to another; Table 2 gives an overview of the most widespread terms:

Table 2. Kinship terms in Kurmanji

Female reference		**Male reference**	
jin/pîrek	'wife'	*mêr*	'husband'
xêzan	'wife'	*zelam*	'husband'
dayîk/dê	'mother'	*bab*	'father'
dapîr	'grandmother'	*bapîr*	'grandfather'
keç/qîz	'daughter'	*kur/law*	'son'
xwîşk	'sister'	*bira*	'brother'
met	'aunt' (father's side)	*ap/mam*	'uncle' (father's side')
xalet	'aunt' (mother's side)	*xal*	'uncle' (mother's side)
dotmam	'female cousin' (father's side)	*pismam*	'male cousin' (father's side')
keçxal	'female cousin' (mother's side)	*pisxal*	'male cousin' (mother's side)
jinxal	'uncle's (mother's side) wife'	--	--
jinmam	'uncle's (father's side) wife'	--	--
diş	'husband's sister'	*tî*	'husband's brother'
diş	'wife's sister'	*bûra*	'wife's brother'
bûk	'bride, newly-wed woman'	*zava*	'groom'
jintî	'wife of the husband's brother'	*hevling*	'husband of wife's sister'
hewî	'husband's (other) wife'	--	--

There is a fundamental assymetry in that kinship terms for male persons are often basic, i.e. mono-morphemic, while terms for female kin (beyond siblings and parents) are secondarily derived via compounding with the word *jin* 'wife, woman', e.g. *jinxal* 'wife of mother's brother', *jintî* 'wife of husband's brother'. There are no examples of the reverse compounding pattern, where a term for a male kin is secondarily derived by compounding with a basic term for a female kin. Accordingly, there are no terms for 'husband of mother's sister' or 'husband of father's sister', who would generally be adressed as 'uncle'.

The grammatical gender of these words is predictable, i.e. there is a systematic correspondence between the lexically-fixed gender of the term as referring to female or male persons, and the grammatical gender expressed through linker, case suffixes and anaphoric pronouns. The terms *xwarza* 'sister's child' and *braza* 'brother's child', on the other hand, do not in fact specify the gender of the referent, but of the referent's parent.

Lexical gender is often not formally marked (i.e. there are no gender-indicating suffixes as part of the lexeme), except for the few cases of compound kinship terms discussed above. There are, however, two gender-indicating adjectives that tend to form compounds with animal names to create gender-specific reference: *mê* 'female' in *mêkew* 'female partridge (*kew*)' and *nêr* 'male' in *nêreker* 'male donkey (*ker)*'. This pattern is not generally extended to deriving nouns for person reference (except for swear words); instead the word for 'woman' *jin* may be used to specify female reference (see section 4 below). In the realm of terms for occupations, the lexicon tends to reflect the traditional division of labour between men and women: certain occupations, e.g. *hedad* 'blacksmith' have traditionally belonged to the male domain, while others, e.g. *bêrîvan* 'milker' are traditionally the domain of female persons; there are no conventionalized corresponding items for members of the opposite gender in these occupations. These terms are discussed in section 4.2 below.

2.3 Referential gender

Above we have suggested that Kurdish is a language with grammatical gender, implying that the grammatical gender of each and every noun is rigidly fixed in the lexicon. However, there are a considerable number of nouns in Kurdish for which the concept of a lexically specified, inherent grammatical gender makes little sense. These nouns belong to a broad semantic category involving words that refer to human beings, but which in principle can refer to either males or females. A typical example is the word *heval* 'friend', which may be used to refer to either a male or a female person. Crucially, the inflection of this word (i.e. the choice of masculine or feminine forms of linkers or the oblique case) simply switches according to the intended reference of the particular context. For example, *heval-ê min* friend-LNK.M my 'my (male) friend' contrasts with *heval-a min* friend-LNK.F my 'my (female) friend'. The word *heval* itself undergoes no derivational or compounding process to effect female reference; rather, it simply combines directly with the feminine form of the linker.

Comparable phenomena in other languages are discussed in Corbett (1991:181–182) under the rubric of "double gender nouns". Notably, the examples given there come from essentially the same semantic group as the Kurdish ones, e.g. 'doctor' or 'poor person'. However, the Kurdish case is unusual in that basically all words that are semantically compatible with reference to both male and female persons can take the appropriate agreement forms for either grammatical gender. This is not therefore a matter of a few lexical oddities, but a basic principle of the gender system in the language. Accordingly, loan words or neologisms (some of the items in the second column below) that satisfy the semantic criteria are also treated like double gender nouns. A selection of double-gender nouns in Kurdish are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Double-gender nouns

feqîr	'poor person'	*mamoste*[4]	'teacher'
girtî	'prisoner'	*xwendekar*	'student'
mirov	'humanbeing'	*endam*	'member'
dost	'fellow'	*serok*	'head'
heval	'friend'	*memûr*	'state officer'
gundî	'villager'	*nivîskar*	'writer'
deyndar	'indebted person'	*duxtor*	'doctor'
cîran	'neighbor'	*gerok*	'traveler'
kes	'person'	*qude/qure*	'proud person'

There are clear statistical preferences in usage for one gender over another with these words. In part these reflect real-world assymetries, but in part they reflect the tendency for mixed or generic reference to be effected through a masculine form (see next section). Consider the figures for masculine and feminine forms of four words from the *Azadiya Welat* corpus (cf. Haig 2001); note that many tokens of these words show no overt gender inflection (e.g. plurals); the counts given below consider only those tokens which show an overt signal of grammatical gender:

	Masculine inflection	Feminine inflection
serok 'head; leader'	213	3
nûner 'representative'	15	2
kes 'person'	33	0
mirov 'human being'	21	0

The scarcity of feminine forms for *serok* 'head, leader' may actually reflect the under-representation of women in leadership, and the same may apply to *nûner* 'representative'. But the figures for *kes* and *mirov* can hardly be attributed to a lack of female persons in the real world. We return to this issue in the next section, and in the discussion on occupation terms in section 4.2.

We began our analysis of grammatical gender by reiterating the traditional view, according to which Kurmanji is a language where each noun belongs to one of two grammatical genders, masculine and feminine (cf. e.g. Bedir Khan and Lescot 1991), and that the genders are defined in terms of agreement classes (following the approach of Corbett 1991). However, the extent of double gender words in Kurdish suggests that the assumption of gender classes defined by agreement phenomena, and of lexically-specified membership to one (and only one) gender class, requires revision. First, the notion of agreement as a unilateral relationship between a "controller" and a "target" runs into difficulties for Kurdish, because the main exponents of grammatical gender are in fact located on the controller (the noun) itself. Second, we find that a significant part of the lexicon of words denoting persons is apparently compatible with both masculine and feminine inflections, with the choice determined by context and intended reference, rather than by fixed grammatical gender. In other words, with these words what appears to be "agreement morphology" is actually the sole bearer of semantic information relating to referential gender, a fact which is also problematic for the agreement analysis.

Our assumption is that double gender words are lexically underspecified for gender, and hence inherit a gender feature from context rather than from the lexicon. This is not the only possible analysis; one might also consider Kurdish to have some kind of rampant "zero conversion" of masculine nouns into feminine ones (or vice versa), but we find this approach

less appealing. While these theoretical issues of analysis go beyond the aims of this chapter, we articulate them here simply because understanding issues of gendered expressions in discourse, which we take up in later sections, is only possible when the system of morphological and lexical oppositions that actually transport gender messages in the language is understood.

2.4 Generic masculines

In a generic context, the masculine singular form is the default form for pronominal expressions, as illustrated in (5).

(5) a. ***yê*** *ku bawer na-ke*
LNK.M that belief NEG-do.PRS-3SG
'anyone(m) that does not believe' (lit. 'he that does not believe ...') (Zinar 1992:24)

b. ***yê*** *sîr-ê ne-xwe bêhn jê na-yê*
LNK.M garlic-OBL NEG-eat.PRS-3SG smell from.him/her NEG-come.PRS-3SG
'anyone(m) that does not eat garlic, will not stink' (i.e. 'There is no smoke without fire' (AW78D1)

As mentioned, there is a large number of double-gender personal and occupational nouns. When used in generic senses, i.e. when referring to the entire class of such persons, these words are usually treated grammatically as masculine. This is illustrated for the noun *nivîskar* 'author' in (6), the heading of a journalistic report, where the noun *nivîskar* is intended to refer generally to authors, including female authors. The feminine-inflected form of the noun is only used when reference to a specific female referent is intended.

(6) ***Nivîskar-ê*** *kurd ni-kar-e xwe ji*
author-LNK.SG.MASC kurdish NEG-be.able.PRS-3SG REFL from
kurdayeti-yê rizgar bi-k-e
kurdish.militantism emancipated SUBJ-do.PRS-3SG
'The Kurdish author (m) is not able to emancipate himself of Kurdishness.'[5]

The generic use of the masculine form can be seen also in the coordinated double-gender nouns (7a), while (7b) shows how the word *alîgir* 'supporter', when used as a predicate complement to *partiya me* 'our political party', takes the masculine form:

(7) a. *Em dost û dijmin-ê xwe di-nas-in.*
we friend and enemy-LNK.SG.M REFL IND-recognize.PRS-1PL
'We know our friend and enemy.' (AW79A4)

b. *parti-ya me alîgir-**ê** çareseri-ya kêseya Kurd e.*
party-SG.F our supporter-**SG.M** solution-of question-of Kurdish is
'Our party is a defendant(m) of the solution of the Kurdish question.'
(AW69A2)

An anaphoric pronoun with a generic antecedent is also generally third person singular masculine. In example (8), the masculine 3SG pronoun *wî* 'he' refers to a generic 'Kurdish child'. Surprisingly, the antecedent itself, *zarok* 'child',[6] carries feminine grammatical gender.

This example shows that anaphoric pronouns with generic antecedents are masculine, even if the antecedent itself is grammatically feminine:

(8) *Zarok-**a*** *kurd, kurd e. Diya **wî** kurd e,*
child-LNK.SG.F kurdish kurdish is mother-of **3SG.M** Kurdish is
*bapîr-ê **wî** kurd e.*
grandfather-of **3SG.M** Kurdish is
'A Kurdish child(**f**) is Kurdish. **His(m)** mother is Kurdish, **his(m)** grandfather is Kurdish'[7]

As discussed above, the person nouns *kes* 'person' and *mirov* 'human-being; man' are double-gender nouns, inflecting in feminine or masculine depending on their context. They often serve as a kind of indefinite pronouns, corresponding to 'anyone, no one, whomsoever, the person who ...'. In their generic uses, they may be plural, thus neutralizing grammatical gender distinctions, but in the singular they are almost always in the masculine form. The sentences in (9) illustrate the use of the generic use of such masculine forms:

(9) a. *Diltenik: kes-ê hestiyar*
soft-heart: person-**LNK.SG.M** sensitive
'Soft-hearted: a sensitive person(**m**)' (AW70C2)

b. *Her kes-**ê** kurdistanî … li hemberî qanûn-an hevmaf e.*
eachperson-**LNK.SG.M** Kurdistani … in regard law-OBL.PL equal.rights is
'Every Kurdistani person(**m**) possesses the same legal rights.' [AW74A1]

c. *Mirov-**ê** ku ni-zani-be bi zimanê*
humanbeing-**LNK.SG.M** that NEG-know.PRS-SUBJ with language
xwe yê neteweyî bipeyive (…)
REFL LNK.SG.M national SUBJ-speak. PRS-3SG
'The humanbeing(m) who cannot speak his national language (…)' [AW79C4]

The use of feminine inflections to express generic senses is not attested in the sources available to us. However there are some conscious efforts towards a more gender-inclusive language usage, involving an avoidance of the masculine inflection in generic senses; see Section 5.

3. Gender-related structures

3.1 Word-formation

In this section we investigate word-formation processes in Kurmanji as they relate to words for person-reference. Two main processes are available, namely derivation via suffixation, and compounding. What is striking is that the derivational suffixes used in these processes are not specified for a particular grammatical gender. Instead, if output of a derivational process is a word that refers to a person, then that word complies with the same principles of gender assignment as do simplex words: If a word can, by virtue of its meaning, apply to both male or female gender, then it is treated as a double-gender noun. Thus in word formation, as in the rest of the lexicon for person terms, gender assignment is a matter of semantics.

One means for creating agent nouns, including many occupational terms, is through compounding based on the present stems of action verbs. For instance, the word *nanpêj* 'baker' is derived by attaching the present stem of the verb *patin* 'to bake', which is *pêj-*, to the noun *nan* 'bread'. The resulting word for 'baker' is a double-gender word, as bakers may

be both male and female. Agent nouns are also derived by a small number of suffixes; again, the gender of the resultant words depends on the gender of the intended referent; the suffixes themselves are not specified for gender. Examples of compounding and derivations are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Derivation of agent nouns

Derivation	**Example**	**Agent noun**	
Noun + present stem of verb	*nan* 'bread' + *pêj-* 'cook.PRS'	*nanpêj*	'baker'
	cigare 'cigarette'+ *kêş-* 'smoke.PRS'	*cigarekêş*	'smoker'
	stran 'song' + *bêj-* 'say.PRS'	*stranbêj*	'singer'
	wêne 'photo' + *gir-* 'keep.PRS'	*wênegir*	'photographer'
	kitêb 'book' + *firoş-* 'sell.PRS'	*kitêbfiroş*	'book-seller'
Verb stem + *-er*	*xwîn-* 'read.PRS' + *-er*	*xwîner*	'reader'
	kuj- 'kill.PRS' + *-er*	*kujer*	'killer'
	parêz- 'defend.PRS' + *-er*	*parêzer*	'lawyer'
Noun + *-van*	*rojname* 'newspaper' + *-van*	*rojnamevan*	'journalist'
	bêrî 'milking' + *-van*	*bêrîvan*	'milker'
	ga 'ox' + *-van*	*gavan*	'ox-herder'
Noun +*-dar*	*pez* 'sheep' + *-dar*	*pezdar*	'stockbreeder'
	guh 'ear' + *-dar*	*guhdar*	'listener'
	dukan 'shop' + *-dar*	*dukandar*	'shop-keeper'

Most of the nouns in Table 4 are double gender nouns which may refer to both female and male persons. In the context of words for persons, then, there appears to be no word formation process that is specialized for deriving words with a particular gender. The available derivational suffixes yield words mostly indicating some kind of activity, or position. The grammatical gender of such complex lexemes, on the other hand, is not determined by the suffix, but is dictated by socio-cultural norms attached to the resultant concept. Milking, for example, is traditionally a female occupation, hence the word *berîvan* 'milker' is exclusively feminine. Herding cattle, on the other hand, is traditionally the occupation of males, hence *gavan* 'cow-herd' is grammatically masculine. We return to the gender semantics of occupational words in section 4.2.

Other kinds of compounding not dealt with in Table 4 also yield nouns with person reference. For instance, the word *serokwezîr* 'prime minister' is composed of *serok* 'head' and *wezîr* 'minister'. Again, this word is a double gender word, and can be inflected either as feminine (e.g. *serokwezîr-a Elmanyayê* 'the prime minister(**f**) of Germany') or masculine (e.g. *serokwezîr-ê Kurdistanê* 'the prime minister(**m**) of Kurdistan') noun, depending on the context. The word *mamoste* 'teacher' is especially interesting as a double-gender noun, since etymologically it is in fact a compound of the kin term *mam* 'uncle', lexically specialized for male persons, and *hosta* 'master'. Thus even though it contains the term for 'uncle', the word *mamoste* can still take feminine inflections if a female reference is intended.

3.2 Agreement with anaphoric elements

The only instance of gender 'agreement' in Kurmanji Kurdish is the linker that occurs with post-head modifiers in the noun phrase. There is no gender agreement between a predicate and its arguments. However, as discussed in section 2.1.2 above, the relationship between a noun and its linker is difficult to account for in terms of a "target" which agrees with a

"controller", because the linker itself is attached prosodically to its controller, rather than to a target external to the noun. The second issue with applying the notion of agreement to the linker is the fact that linkers occur as independent anaphoric elements, in the sense of English 'the one which ....', or 'whoever ...'; cf. example (5) above. Here the linker is sensitive to the gender of their antecedent, but the relationship is best described in terms of anaphor, which we discuss in the next section.

3.3 Anaphor and pronominalization

Among the pronouns, the two-way gender distinction is available only in the third person singular of the oblique pronouns: *wê* for feminine and *wî* for masculine. Accordingly, a feminine noun such as *Tirkiye* 'Turkey' in (10) is resumed by the feminine pronoun *wê* 'she':

(10) ***Tirkiye*** *van gotinan ciddî bigire wê ji_bo faydeya* ***wê*** *be*
Turkey(f) these Words serious takes FUT for benefit-of **her** be
'If Turkey takes these words seriously, this will be of **her** own benefit.' (CTV23)

With inanimates such as the word 'Turkey', consistent grammatical agreement with the antecedent is common. However, there is also a notable tendency to take the feminine form of the pronoun as the default for anaphoric reference to inanimates (in the dialect of the second author, from Şemzinan Turkish Kurdistan, this is in fact the rule). An example of this tendency in the written language is (11), where an inanimate with masculine gender is resumed with a feminine pronoun.

(11) *Dagirkeran* *ev* ***cewher*** *diziye*
invader-PL.OBL this **essence(m)** stolen
naverok-a ***wê*** *vala* *kiriye*
content-SG.F **3SG.F** empty done
'The invaders have usurped this essence(m) (of Kurdish conduct) and ripped it(f) of its contents.' (AW79C3)

Although these issues have never been investigated systematically, the evidence available provides further support to the view that the gender system associated with words for person reference works quite differently to the system for inanimates. With the latter, there is some evidence for an over-generalization of the female form, at least in anaphoric pronouns, while for the former, in generic contexts and indeed in all contexts which do not unambiguously involve reference to a specific female person, it is clearly the masculine forms which are preferrred. Finally, we should mention that in some dialects, particularly the Serhed dialects of Central Anatolia, gender distinctions are lost entirely in the third person pronouns, leading to a situation comparable to the contact language Turkish (cf. Braun 2000).

3.4 Coordination

When two or more nouns from different grammatical genders are coordinated (i.e. gender conflict) in a single NP, the entire phrase is inflected according to the gender of the second (or last) conjunct. The gender conflict is thus resolved in terms of 'vicinity' (Corbett 1991), that is, the gender of the closer conjunct determines the outcome. This is illustrated for animate nouns in (12a), where only the gender of the second conjunct is overtly marked, and for inanimate nouns in (12b), where, again, the gender specification of the first conjunct is not expressed in the coordination.

(12) a. ***Bapîr*** ***û*** ***dapîr-a*** *wî* *li gund dijîn*
grandfather(**m**) and grandmother-LNK.SG.F his in village live
'His grandfather and grandmother live in the village.'[8]

b. *Wê* *bi* ***erk*** ***û*** ***karîn-a*** *kurdan* *pêk-were*
will with responsibility(**m**) and ability-LNK.SG.F Kurds Happen
'It will happen with the efforts and ability of the Kurds themselves.' (AW79A5)

Another common way of resolving such gender conflicts is using the plural form of the ezafe, as in *dayik û bab-**ên*** **(LNK.PL)** *min* 'my mother and father'. Although the individual conjuncts have opposite genders in the singular, treating the entire phrase as plural avoids the problem of opting for one gender over another.

4. Usage of personal reference forms

4.1 Address terms

The only research to date on forms of address in Kurdish is Asadpour et al (2012), who regrettably do not touch on the gender component. Our comments here are thus based on observation, and are correspondingly tentative. The most commonly used address forms in Kurdish are kinship terms (cf. 2.2), where the genders are mostly symmetrically distinguished. The non-kinship address forms are *kek* for addressing elder males and *xatûn*, *stî* (more literary) or *xanim* for women, though their use compared to the kinship terms are very restricted. Kinship terms are also widely used as forms of address for non-kin; for example, young people may address peers they do not know as pismam 'cousin'.

In traditional Kurdish society, religious terms indicating position or lineage are also important address forms. The terms such as *mamosta* or *mela* 'mullah, imam', *feqî* 'student of religious school/path', are used only with males, either coupled with the first name of the addressee or alone. The inapplicability of these terms to females stems from the fact that these domains are male dominated, i.e. traditional religious education has been reserved for men. Often the wife of a *mela* is referred to in relation to her husband as *melajin* 'wife of the priest'. On the other hand, the terms such as *hecî* 'person who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca' and the lineage term *seyîd* 'sayyed' can be used with both females and males.

Terms reflecting social and political position or office show a clear male bias. Thus, the terms such as *mîr* 'prince, emir', *axa* 'agha, lord, landowner', *reîs* 'the mayor' can only be used as forms for addressing males, while *muxtar* 'the elected leader of a village' could potentially be used also for addressing females. Within modern Kurdish politics, however, a set of more gender-neutral terms of address has been developed: *heval* 'comrade', *rêber* 'leader' and *serok* 'head' are used both for female and male.

There are also traditional self-deprecating address forms such as *ez xulam* 'lit. to whom I am a servant', used by males, and *ez xudam* (used by females) or the gender-neutral *ez benî*. They are used when addressing persons with politically power, or by young people addressing elders with a significant age difference. However, our observation is that that this type of address is used more frequently by women than men, though we lack systematic investigations of the issue. Moreover, the endearment expressions such as *ez gorî* 'lit. to whom I shall be sacrificed' or *ez heyran* 'lit. to whom I am an admirer' are commonly considered to be usage that is specific to females.

4.2 Occupational terms

Kurdish has a rich lexicon of terms for persons characterized by particular activity or occupational position. In most cases, such activities or occupations are conventionally associated with either male or female persons, while some are available for males and

females. The differences, however, are subtle and do not readily lend themselves to water-tight classification. We investigated a sub-set of such words, and tested their acceptability in different contexts.[9] First, we checked whether they could receive both masculine and feminine inflections directly, i.e. whether they were treated as double gender nouns, as described in section 2.3 above. If they could not be inflected for, e.g. feminine form of the ezafe, we then asked how one would refer to a female / male person of that occupation. What emerged is that these words can provisionally be grouped into two types.

First, some occupation term can be characterized as double-gender nouns, and can be directly inflected with either masculine or feminine forms of the linker and the case marker respectively, as discussed in section 2.3 above. An example is the term *şivan* 'shepherd'. This occupation is traditionally associated with male persons, but it appears that it can be directly inflected with feminine forms, as in *şivan-a berxa* 'the shepherd(f) of lambs', if a female shepherd is implied. Note, however, that the default interpretation is male, and these words would be inflected as masculine in a generic context. Words of this type may also be modified through the addition of the word *jin(ik)* 'woman', either as part of a compound, or linked to the occupation term via the linker. For example, 'civil servant' is *memûr*, and would generally be interpreted as referring to a male person. To refer to a female civil servant one would say *jinika memûr* or *memûra jin*. Interestingly, either the word for 'woman' *jin(ik)*, or the occupation term itself can be the head of the construction; we are unable to discern an obvious tendency here.

The second group includes occupations for which the male or female association is apparently so deeply entrenched in the lexical semantics that no form for a person of the opposite gender can be created based on that word. We conveniently refer to them as gender-exclusive terms. This is notably often the case for occupations with strong female connotations. For instance, traditionally, the term *kabanî*,[10] refers to 'the person who prepares the food at social events – whether as a profession or as part of their social responsibilities'. Traditionally, this term is strictly reserved for women, and they are the people traditionally involved in this activity. But in recent decades, catering services are increasingly hired for social events such as weddings, and the persons entrusted with the cooking are often male. For these men, the term *kabanî* is not applied, although they do essentially the same kind of work. Instead they can be referred to as *risqçêker*, literally 'food-maker', or via the Turkish borrowing *aşçı* 'cook'. Table 5 shows the occupational words that we have investigated, and the tentative classification obtained:

Table 5. Occupational terms

Double-gender terms		Gender-exclusive terms			
		Female-exclusive		Male-exclusive	
xeyat	'tailor'	*bêrî*	'milker'	*hosta*	'mason'
tucar	'trader'	*kabanî*	'cook at events'	*rêncber*	'farmer'
mamosta	'teacher'	*pîrik*	'midwife'	*hedad*	'blacksmith'
şifêr	'driver'	*xudam*	'servant'	*sepan*	'laborer'[11]
memûr	'civil cervant'	*nanpêj*	'domestic bread maker' (see comment below on this word)	*qesab*	'butcher'
şuwan	'shepherd'			*tehmîrcî*	'mechanic'
lawjebêj	'singer'			*reyîs*	'mayor'
dukandar	'shopkeeper'			*mela*	'imam'
				feqî	'student of Islam'
				nêçîrvan	'hunter'

Ongoing changes in occupational patterns and social gender roles would be expected to impact on the way these words are perceived, and consequently may impact on the grammatical expression of gender. For example, Kurdish women are increasingly politically active and have been, for example, elected to the office of mayor in some constituencies in Turkish Kurdistan. To refer to these women, the neologism *şaredar* would be used, rather than the traditional term for mayor *reyîs,*which up until now has been reserved for males. But it is quite possible that in the future, new expressions based on *reyîs*, but marked for female reference, may be coined. Similarly, the word *nanpêj* 'baker' traditionally referred to a female person in a household who prepared bread, but has now been extended to general use for people involved in bread-making as an occupation (generally males), and in this sense, it may be inflected with masculine forms.

Few domains of the lexicon reflect the complex interplay of social conventions and role constructions with language structure more faithfully than the field of occupational terms. Given the variation and uncertainties which emerged in our discussions with speakers on these issues, we stress the tentative nature of the current analysis. There is obviously considerable scope for the kind of closely-monitored quantitative investigations pioneered in Braun (2000) for occupation words in Turkish.

4.3 Idioms and proverbs

Gender as a referential and social category is transported not only through grammatical formatives and individual lexemes, but is tightly enshrined into the semantics of idiomatic expressions and proverbs. This realm provides some access to the conventionalized gender-related social stereotypes and belief systems underlying the arrangement of genders in the Kurdish speech community. Two previous studies have dealt with related issues: Hassanpour (2001) traces the male bias in Sorani Kurdish, as it is reflected in dictionary entries and oral literature, while Alakom (1994) specifically investigates the representation of women in Kurmanji folklore.[12]

The words *jin* 'woman' and *pyaw* 'man' in Sorani (*mêr* in Kurmanji) are respectively associated with a set of mostly opposing qualities, values, and emotional connotations, which are reconstructed and reinforced particularly in proverbs and popular sayings. The word *pyaw* in Sorani is also the generic term for 'man' and 'humanbeing', as in (13).

(13) *xūšk=im* *le* *hemū* ***pyāw-ān*** *be* *nāmūs-tir-e*
sister=POSS.1SG from all man-PL with honour-MORE-COP.3SG
'My sister is more endowed with honor than every person (lit. 'man')'.
(Öpengin 2013:103)

Hassanpour (2001:236) states that the word *pyaw* is often associated with qualities such as 'zeal' and 'bravery'. Öpengin (2013:102) points out that *pyaw* is also frequently extended to an adjectival use as 'courageous, reliable', in the fixed expression *pyawî zor pyaw* lit. 'a man (who is) very man(ly)', i.e. 'a very courageous and reliable man'. The meanings associated with the word *jin* or *afret* 'woman' are diametrically opposed to those of *pyaw*, and include 'weak, cowardly'. One of the meanings provided for *afret* in *Henbane Borine*, one of the most important of Kurdish dictionaries, is 'weakling' (Hassanpour 2001:236).

Often the words derived from *pyaw* and *jin* express the respective qualities associated with them. The abstract noun *pyawetî* (*pyaw-etî*) means 'manliness, greatness, big favour'. The adjective and adverb *pyawane* (*pyaw-ane*) means 'manly or for men (e.g. for shoes)', but it is extended to express the adverbial meaning 'bravely', whereas the word *jinanî* (*jin-anî*) 'womanly' is often used to express the negative characteristics of a man. The word *camêr*

(obtained from the combination of *ciwan* ‘young, good’ and *mêr* ‘man’) ‘fine, upright’, often just a general expression of positive personal attributes, on the other hand, can be used for both men and women.

A man is called *serjin* (*ser* ‘head’ + *jin*) ‘lit. woman-headed’ if he listens to his wife’s words (which is interpreted as being “dominated” by the wife). The lexical expression of the ‘manly’ characteristics such as ‘brave’ when applied to a woman, on the other hand, requires the incorporation of some morphemes overtly expressing male gender, such as *nêrejin* (*nêr* ‘male’+*jin* ‘woman’) or *keçebav* (lit. *keç* ‘girl’ of her *bav* ‘father’) ‘a brave and strong woman’, which evoke positive perceptions. The social constructions of the man as ‘outgoing’ and ‘dominant’ versus the woman as ‘submissive’ and ‘shy’ are represented also in commonly used proverbs, as seen in the examples in (14a) from Kurmanji, and (14b) from Sorani:

(14) a. *Jin-a* *şermîn* *bi* *gund-ek-ê*
woman-LNK.F shy by village-INDEF-OBL
mêrê *şermîn* *bi* *kund-ek-ê.*
man-LNK.M shy by owl-INDEF-OBL
‘The shy woman (is) worth a village, the shy man (is) worth an owl.’

b. *Le* *seg-î* *dirr,* *le* *jin-î* *dimşirr* *bi-tirs-e.*
of dog-LNK ravenous of woman-LNK abusive IMP-be.afraid-2SG
‘Beware of ravenous dogs and abusive women’

In traditional Kurmanji Kurdish households, direct reference to one’s spouse with the terms for ‘man, husband’ *mêr* and *jin* ‘woman, wife’ is considered a taboo. Thus a husband will not refer to his wife as *jin-a min* ‘my wife’. Instead, men often use terms like *xêzan* ‘family’ and *biçûk* (pl.) ‘children’ in the Badini dialect, and *kulfet* ‘lit. burden’ and *zaro(k)* (pl.) ‘children’ in the other areas of Kurmanji Kurdish. The women, on the other hand, use terms such as *malxwê* ‘the head of the family’, *zelam* ‘man’, *babê biçûkan* ‘the father of the children’, etc. to refer to their husband.

In traditional Kurdish lineage system it is the father’s family and/or tribe to which the children automatically belong. Probably as a reflection of this well-established shared value, reference to one’s heritage in all sorts of Kurdish discourses (e.g. poetry, politics) is established through the phrase *bav û kalên me* ‘our ancestors (lit. our father and grandfathers)’, as in *zimanê bav û kalên me* ‘the language of our ancestors’ or *warê bav û kalên me* ‘the land of our ancestors’.

Social gender assymetries are also reflected in traditional marriage terminology. The verb *xwastin* (lit. ‘to want, request’) is, in the context of match-making, the conventionalized expression for ‘to send intermediaries to parents of a girl to ask for her in marriage’, where the woman is the ‘undergoer’ of the whole process. A gender-neutral expression for ‘to marry’ is not available in the native part of the lexicon, though the Arabic borrowing *zewicîn* ‘marry’ is used in some parts of Kurdistan. In the native component of the Kurdish lexicon, for males ‘to marry’ is expressed by *jin înan* ‘lit. to bring woman’, whereas for woman it is *şû kirin* or *mêr kirin* ‘lit. to do/make husband/man’. The semantics are interesting here: for males, marriage is conceptualized as ‘obtaining’ a woman, while for women, the conceptualization is ‘to make a man’, i.e. ‘to be the completion of a man’. Two verbs which do not include the words for man and woman, *mare/mehr kirin* ‘officially espouse’ and *dawet kirin* ‘to do wedding’ in fact replicate the assymetric view of marriage, since in both, the subject of the verb can only be the man, and never a woman. In the same vein, the linguistic expression of divorce is expressed in terms of male activity, and female acquiescence: the

verb *telaq dan* ‘to give divorce’ requires a male subject, while the corresponding expression for women is *telaq wergirtin* ‘to receive divorce’. Thus the lexicon of marriage terminology systematically reflects – and hence reinforces – a conceptualizatoin of marriage in which males are the active instigators and controllers of the process, while females are undergoers (but cf. Section 5 below for some recent attempts to counteract these tendencies in contemporary written Kurdish). The word *maldamayî* ‘remained at home’ expresses a woman who has never married, and it evokes negative connotations as to the phsyical appearence of the woman. There is no such corresponding term for men.[13]

Another dimension of the marriage configuration is the high esteem which can be affforded to a woman as the bearer of children, and caretaker of the family and home. Words such as *kebanî* (cf. discussion of this word in section 4.2 above), *bermalî* and *xanûman* all refer to the woman in the role of the person who takes charge of all domestic affairs. Again many proverbs and expressions celebrate the woman in this perspective, as in (15), from Alakom (1994:44).

(15) a. *Ava-ya* *mal-ê* *dest-ê* *jin-an* *e.*
flourishing-LNK.F home-OBL hand-LNK.M woman-PL.OBL COP.3SG
‘The flourishing of the home depends on the woman’

b. *Jin* *kel-a* *mêr-a* *ye.*
woman castle-LNK.F man-PL.OBL COP.3SG
‘The woman is the man’s castle.’

c. *Mak-a* *nodik* *nod* *canû-yî*
mother(animal) ninety nine foal-OBL
‘The mother of ninety nine foals’ (for a woman who bears many children)

While we have drawn attention to linguistic reflections of role assymetries in social gender, we should also note the existence of a number of well-known proverbs which explicitly affirm male/female complementarity (16a), whereas a very popular proverb (16b) asserts and reinforces gender equality with respect to the attributes of courage and strength, represented here metaphorically through the concept ‘lion’.

(16) a. *Jin* *û* *mêr* *weke* *tevr* *û* *bêr.*
woman and man like shovel and pickaxe
‘Woman and man, like shovel and pickaxe.’

b. *Şêr* *şêr* *e* *çi* *jin* *e* *çi* *mêr* *e.*
lion lion COP.3SG what woman COP.3SG what man COP.3SG
‘(a) lion is (a) lion), whether it is male or female.’

In fixed expressions involving paired words, it is notable that the most frequent order is female-male, as in *xwîşk û bra* ‘sister and brother’ (the same order is also preserved in addressing a mixed group), *keç û kur* ‘daughter and son’, *keç/qîz û xort* ‘young girls and boys’, *dê û bav* ‘mother and father’, *dapîr û bapîr* ‘grandmother and grandfather’, *jin û mêr* ‘woman and man’.

To the extent that Kurdish idioms and proverbs reflect traditional belief systems and a largely pre-industrial production basis, one may reasonably question the degree to which they reflect current attitudes and practices among contemporary urban Kurds. However, they are still part of the collective cultural memory, and it is undeniable that the values thus transported continue to co-define gender stereotypes in the community. More recently, with increasing political awareness particularly among urban Kurds in all sections of Kurdistan, important changes in gender perceptions may be observed. The following slogans have been

extremely widespread in the public sphere among Kurds in Turkey, where gender issues have figured prominently in the agenda of Kurdish political movement over the last two decades.

(17) a. *Jin jiyan azadî!*
woman life freedom
'Woman, life, freedom!' (i.e. the three are inseparable)

b. *Heta jin azad ne-b-e civak azad na-b-e!*
until woman free NEG.SUBJ-be.PRS-3SG society free NEG-be.PRS-3SG
'Society will not be emancipated as long as women are not free!'

Over the past 30 years, left-wing elements have been very influential among the Kurds of Turkey, and gender-inclusive policies continue to be prominent in these movements.[14] The gender-equality components of left-wing ideologies have carried over into the recent political arena, most clearly in the agenda of the BDP, Turkey's most important pro-Kurdish political party. The BDP is the only political party in Turkey to pursue a 40% quota for women, and the number of women mayors and parliament members in the BDP is higher than any other political party in Turkey. There is little doubt that the early promotion of women's equality in Kurdish politics has had a lasting impact on the self-perception of Kurdish women in Turkey, and can be expected to have implications for policies on gendered language.[15]

5. Language change: public discourse on gender in language

As mentioned, Kurmanji Kurdish is not the official language of any nation state, and there are no institutions charged with formulating guidelines for language usage, and no executive bodies with the authority to implement such guidelines. Instead, various partially competing satellite television, internet and print media platforms engage in an ongoing meta-linguistic discourse, each pursuing their own partially opposing agendas. Within the Kurdish context, then, the term 'language reform' is not particularly appropriate, as the concept was developed primarily with reference to state-sanctioned and institutionalized measures. Nevertheless, quite recently some Kurdish writers and journalists of left-wing and progressive inclinations are attempting to intervene in the structure and lexicon of the language with the aim of counteracting a perceived male-bias. Many of these initiatives replicate current practices in a number of European languages, where strategies have been developed for avoiding, among the other things, the use of generic masculines (cf. Braun et al 2007, *inter alia*).

As we discussed in Section 2.4, the generic personal nouns *mirov* 'human-being', *kes* 'person' and *yek* 'one' are often inflected as masculine when used with a generic sense. But in the last two decades more and more authors have started to add the feminine inflection via a backslash, as in *mirovê/a ku nizanibe* ... 'a person (LNK.M/LNK.F) who does not know ...'. The following example illustrates this practice with the word *yek* 'one' in the oblique case, which is repeated in both the masculine and feminine forms:

(18) *her gotin-ek-e pêşî-ya yekten ji dev-ê* ***yek-î/yek-ê***
each word-INDEF-LNK front-OBL at.once from mouth-LNK one-OBL.M/one-OBL.F
ji nişka ve derneketîye.
suddenly NEG.come.out.3SG
'It is not the case that every proverb has been uttered by someone (m/f) all of a sudden.' (Alakom 1994)

The same strategy may be applied to double-gender nouns (cf. Section 2.3 and 4.2), as in *perspektîfa kedkarekî/e kurd* 'the perspective of a Kurdish labourer (LNK.M/LNK.F)', where *kedkar* 'worker' is overtly marked for both masculine and feminine gender. Similar double-marking strategies may be applied to anaphoric pronouns when their antecedents are double-gender nouns or generics. Consider (19), where the double-marking strategy is deployed inside an idiom.

(19) *Tu dibêjî qey kuliyan ziman-ê* ***wî/wê*** *xwariye.*
as_if grasshopper tongue-LNK 3SG.OBL.M/OBL.F eat.PST.PTCP.3SG
'It is as if the grasshoppers have eaten **his/her** tongue.' [AW79C4]

Some authors reverse the order of such form-pairs, writing the female form first, as in the examples in (20a-b)[16] and (20c).

(20) a. *şagirt-ek-e/î min*
student-INDEF-LNK.F/LNK.M POSS.1SG 'a student (f/m) of mine'

b. *gor-a wê/wî*
tomb-LNK POSS.3SG.F/POSS.3SG.M 'tomb of her/him'

c. *kategori-ya ku di berhem-ên wê/wî de …*
category-LNK.F that in work-LNK.PL POSS.3SG.F/POSS.3SG.M in
'The category (of the authors) in the work of whose (f/m) (…)' (AW69D3)

The double-marking strategy just illustrated is typographically cumbersome, and is scarcely practicable for the spoken language. For these reasons, Öpengin (2011:218) suggests "alternating masculine / feminine forms" as a more reader- and listener-friendly form of gender-inclusive language. In this pattern, feminine and masculine forms alternate within one and the same context. For instance, the word *axêver* 'speaker', used with generic reference, could be inflected as feminine, as in *axêver-a* (-LNK.F) *duzimanî* 'bilingual speaker(f)', and as masculine *axêver-ê* (-LNK.M) *duzimanî* 'bilingual speaker(m)' within the same text. Another possible strategy for avoiding generic masculines would be the consistent use of plural forms when generic reference is implied, as in *axêver-ên duzimanî* 'bilingual speakers', as the plural in Kurdish is gender neutral (at least in form, if not interpretation). However, this has to our knowledge never been explicitly proposed as a strategy for avoidance of generic masculines.

Attempts have also been made to create new lexical items, or to shift the reference of existing ones, with the aim of counteracting what some perceive as the male bias in the language. We saw above (cf. Section 4.3) that terminology associated with marriage is infused with a fundamental gender assymetry. Recently in some progressive publications (e.g. the Kurmanji newspaper *Azadiya Welat* or the Sorani newspaper *Rûdaw*) the neologisms *hevser/hawser* (lit. 'co-head') and/or *hevjîn* (lit. 'co-life') have gained widespread currency as gender-neutral terms for 'spouse', potentially applicable to both 'wife' and 'husband'. The verb *zewicîn* 'to marry', combinable with either a male or female subject, is promoted in

contemporary written Kurmanji as a replacement for the traditional gender-specific verbs. In Sorani a complex verb *prosey hawsergîrî encam dan* 'to marry (lit. effectuating the spouse-getting process)' is likewise promoted in the media, both in the conservative (e.g. Payam newspaper)[17] and the progressive ones such as Radio Nawa. In Sorani, the word *pyaw*, originally 'adult male', which has traditionally been used as a generic term for 'person', has been mostly replaced by Kurmanji *mirov* in the sense of 'humanbeing' and 'person'. Other, more sporadic attempts to counteract the male bias in the lexicon include the following: the traditional adjective *mêrxas* 'brave', derived from *mêr* 'man' and *xas* 'genuine', may be us used to refer to both males and females, as in *keçeke jêhatî û mêrxas* 'a competent and brave girl' (Alakom 1994:50). The word was considered objectionable by the author of a recent book review,[18] presumably on the grounds that a woman should be able to be depicted as 'brave' without relying on a reference to maleness; the suggested replacement is an adjective *jinxas* 'courageous', derived from *jin* 'woman'+*xas* 'genuine'. Similarly, the female version of the double-gender noun *camêr* 'fine, upright person' (which contains the word *mêr* 'man') has been devised as *canîk*, perhaps based on the word for 'fowl' *canî*, giving a fixed referential term *camêr û canîk* 'the fine men and women'.

In the emergent written standard(s) of contemporary Kurdish, there is thus a considerable degree of awareness of gendered language and related issues, much of it inspired by the relevant discourse in European languages. However, as mentioned at the outset of this section, the meta-linguistic discussion is conducted outside a nation-state framework, and it is currently not possible to identify which of the initiatives mentioned here will have long-term impacts on the course of the development of written Kurdish, and which will remain isolated fragments, characterizing the language of one media platform or political movement, or will disappear entirely.

6. Conclusions

This chapter began with an outline of grammatical gender in Kurdish, drawing on the framework of Corbett (1991). On this view, grammatical gender is defined in terms of the existence of agreement phenomena reflecting the gender of nouns. Within Kurdish, the only variety that exhibits any form of gender-based agreement in its morphosyntax is Kurmanji, and we therefore focused on this variety of Kurdish. As a point of departure, we reiterate the traditional view, according to which Kurmanji is a language where each noun belongs to one of two grammatical genders, masculine and feminine (cf. e.g. Bedir Khan and Lescot 1991), and the relevant morphology may be considered to exhibit gender agreement.

However, our investigation of the gender of words for person reference suggests that the assumption of gender classes defined formally by agreement phenomena, and of lexically-specified membership to one (and only one) gender class, requires revision. As we have been at pains to point out, the traditional approach to Kurdish as a language with "two grammatical genders" belies the subtleties of the system, and leads to the expectation of greater parallels with more familiar gender languages than is actually warranted. Thus from the perspective of typologies of gender systems, Kurdish appears to exhibit a hybrid system, with grammatical gender dominant in the lexicon for inanimates, while referential gender exclusively determines the forms of words referring to human beings.

We do note, however, that in actual usage Kurdish, like most of the other languages treated in this volume, exhibits generic masculines. Likewise, we noted the prevalence for referential gender to override grammatical gender in anaphoric pronouns, a tendency well-known in the literature (cf. Braun and Haig 2010 for German). We also note a pervasive male bias in two areas of the lexicon, kinship terminology and in proverbs and idiomatic expressions, where the traditional arrangement of gender roles is rather clearly reflected. The realm of occupation words, which likewise reflect conventionalized social divisions of labour, nicely illustrate the

flexible nature of gender associations. In the rapidly changing and increasingly urbanized Kurdish speech communities, traditional occupation words are re-semanticized following extensions to novel contexts, or new terms are coined with shifted gender associations. Speakers' intuitions on such words are correspondingly variant, and elucidating the relevant facts requires a more representative and tightly-controlled investigation than we can offer at this stage; this is surely one of the most urgent topics for future research.

Within the emergent written standard, we discussed increasing awareness of gender issues in the meta-linguistic discourse, pointing out a number of initiatives for counteracting the generic masculine, and attempts to coin more gender-neutral lexical items in the realm of marriage terminology and evaluative terms. Within these currents, the effects of parallel developments in the major languages of Europe are clearly discernible, particularly given that many actors involved in Kurdish media stem from the large European diaspora community. However, we also note changes within the social and political organisation of Kurdistan itself are leaving their imprint on gendered language.

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Notes

[1] Abbreviations used in the glosses: DEM=demonstrative; DIR=direct case; LNK=linker; OBL=oblique case; IND=indicative mood; INDEF=indefinite; IMPF=imperfective aspect; PRS=present tense; PST=past tense; PVB: preverbal component of a compound verb; F: feminine grammatical gender; M: masculine grammatical gender.

[2] In some dialects (particularly northern Iraqi Badini), definiteness of the head noun plays no role and the linker is always *–a* and *–ê*, depending on gender.

[3] For a summary of different views on the ezafe in Iranian linguistics, see Haig (2011). Arguments in favour of the agreement analysis are put forward in Franco et al. (2013), while problematic aspects of the agreement analysis are discussed in section 6 of this chapter.

[4] This term is particularly interesting due to the etymology of one of its components, *mam-*, meaning 'uncle'.

[5] From the transcription of a radio report available on:
http://www.dengeamerika.com/content/article/1705731.html

[6] The word *zarok* actually patterns like *bebik/pitik* 'baby' in taking feminine grammatical gender. In the emergent written standard, however, it can be found with masculine inflections, particularly when referring to an older child.

[7] From *Zimanê kurdî dîsa sêwî ma* [The Kurdish language is again an orphan], a column by Abdulkadir Bîngol, published on the news outlet www.nefel.org on 23.09.2013 (acessed October 9, 2013).

[8] From an article published in the weekly *Rûdaw* (n° 217, p. 12).

[9] This section was initially based on hypotheses and intuitions of one of the authors, a native speaker of Kurmanji. These intuitions were progressively modified in discussions with other native speakers, and the resulting set of occupation terms was tested in an an interview conducted with a native speaker of Kurmanji from Şemdinli, southeast Turkey. The speaker is a 55-year old woman with no formal education and only passive competence in Turkish. Given the high levels of regional variation in

Kurmanji, the lack of binding norms, and the absence of any previous research on the topic, we emphasize the tentative nature of our analysis at this stage.

[10] Etymologically it is probably related to Persian *key* 'house' and *banû* 'girl'.

[11] Someone who works someone else's land and takes care of their animals and receives as remuneration a part of the annual profit from the land and stockbreeding (often half of the harvest and/or profit).

[12] The only work in the "gendered use" of Kurdish is Hêdî (1999) on the speech of women in the Mukriyan region (Iranian Kurdistan).

[13] There is also a rarely-used word *qeyre* to express either a middle-aged man or a middle-aged woman who have not married.

[14] Wolf (2004) notes that the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan* 'The Workers Party of Kurdistan') was probably the only major actor among the Kurdish political movements that overtly pursued such a policy.

[15] Very recently a news agency JINHA has been established, entirely managed by politically active women in the Kurdish movement. One of their mottos is "we will change the [male-dominant] language of the press"; cf. http://www.jinha.com.tr/ku/.

[16] From a recent Kurdish textbook *Dirêj, Evdila.* 2011. *Kurdî Kurmancî II*. Berlin: Dilop, p. 226.

[17] Publication of Union of Kurdish Religious Personalities. Cf. widespread use in an interview with a religious authority: http://zanayan.org/to_print.php?id=1956&section=1

[18] Bajar, Kejo. 2013. "Meryema" Sebrî Silêvanî. *Le Monde Diplomatique Kurdî*, n° 46.