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QUÉBEC, UNIVERSITÉ LAVAL  
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Les langues menacées



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*Endangered Languages*

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## GENDER RESOLUTION

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A typology of gender resolution is established, followed by a typology of gender assignment. It is then demonstrated that there is an implicational link between the two: the type of resolution system found in a given language is predictable in part from the assignment system.

Gender resolution rules determine the form of agreement targets whose controllers are conjoined noun phrases. For example, if a feminine and a neuter are conjoined in Slovene, it is the gender resolution rules which specify the use of masculine agreements (on the participle, for example):

- (1) ta streha in gnezdo na njej mi bosta  
 that roof.FEM and nest.NEUT on it me.DAT will  
 ostal-a v spominu  
 remain-MASC.DUAL in memory  
 'that roof and the nest on it will remain in my memory'

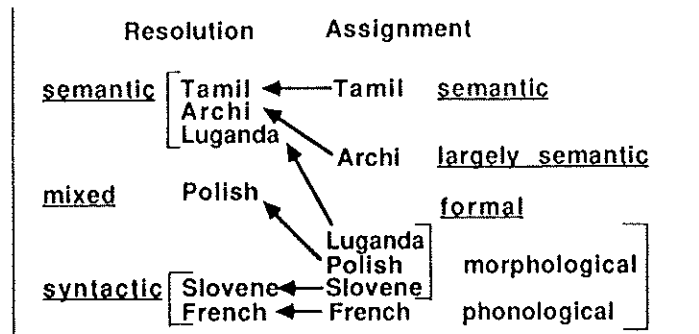
It is established that gender resolution can follow two principles:

1. in a *semantic* system (as found in languages like Tamil, Archi and Luganda), the agreement form is determined according to the meaning of the nouns heading the noun phrases, irrespective of their gender;
2. in languages with a *syntactic (formal)* system (like that of Slovene or French), the agreement form depends on the gender of the nouns heading the noun phrases, irrespective of their meanings.

There are also some mixed systems (such as Polish and Latin).

When we come to predict which type of resolution system a given language may have, such predictions depend on the way in which nouns are assigned to gender in a particular language. Gender assignment is always based on semantics to some degree (there are no purely formal systems). But languages may have pure semantic assignment, as in Tamil, predominantly semantic assignment, as in Archi, or assignment in which formal factors (morphological or phonological) play a large part, as in French. It is claimed

that languages with semantic or predominantly semantic gender assignment will always have semantic gender resolution; languages with formal gender assignment may have semantic or formal gender resolution. Thus, gender resolution may not be determined by semantic considerations to a lesser degree than is gender assignment. This is illustrated in the Figure:



The direction of the implication, that is, the fact that resolution depends on assignment, can be explained as follows. Assignment is central, since it is found in any language with a gender system and is invoked frequently. In contrast, resolution is peripheral, being absent from many gender languages and being invoked only for certain constructions.

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