

Preface

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.11.02pre>

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Gender Across Languages. Volume 3 : The linguistic representation of women and men

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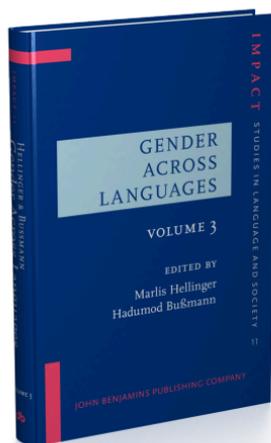
[IMPACT: Studies in Language, Culture and Society, 11]

2003. xiv, 391 pp.

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Preface

The series *Gender across languages* is an ongoing project with potential follow-up publications. Our main goal has been to provide a comprehensive collection of in-depth descriptions of gender-related issues in languages with very diverse structural foundations and socio-cultural backgrounds. The project is designed to have an explicit contrastive orientation in that basically the same issues are discussed for each language within the same terminological and methodological framework. This framework, whose central notion is, of course, the multidimensional concept of “gender”, is discussed in the introductory chapter of “Gender across languages – The linguistic representation of women and men”. Care has been taken not to impose a narrow western perspective on other languages.

This is the third of three volumes which comprise a total of thirty languages: (Moroccan) Arabic, Belizean Creole, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Eastern Maroon Creole, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hindi, Icelandic, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Oriya, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Swahili, Swedish, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Welsh. All contributions were specifically written for this project, in close collaboration with the editors over a period of four years. Unfortunately, a few languages (Bulgarian, Hungarian, Korean, Portuguese, and one Native American language) dropped out of the project for various reasons. These languages should be included in a potential future volume.

The basis on which particular languages should be brought together in one volume has been a problematic one to define. Rather than categorizing languages according to language family (areal, typological or historical), or according to whether the language has or does not have grammatical gender, or using an overall alphabetical ordering, we decided – in agreement with the publisher – that each volume should contain a balanced selection of languages, so that each volume will provide readers with sufficient material to illustrate the diversity and complexity of linguistic representations of gender across languages. Thus, each volume will contain both, languages with grammatical gender as well as “genderless” languages, and languages with different areal, typological and historical affiliations.

“Gender across languages” is, of course, a selection, and no claims can be made that the three volumes will cover all language groups adequately. Critics will find it easy to identify those language areas or families that are under-represented in the project. In particular, future work should consider the immense number of African, Asian and Austronesian languages which have so far received little or no attention from a gender perspective.

Though we are aware of the fact that most languages of the project have developed a number of regional and social varieties, with different implications for the representation and communication of “gender”, we supported authors in their unanimous decision to concentrate on standard varieties (where these exist). This decision is particularly well-founded for those languages for which gender-related issues are being described here for the very first time. Only in the case of English, which has developed major regional standards with considerable differences in usage, did we decide to make explicit reference to four different varieties (British English, American English, New Zealand English and Australian English). Of course, important varieties of languages such as Chinese, French and Spanish would require individual attention in the future.

We took care that each chapter did address most of the questions we had formulated as original guidelines which, however, were not intended (nor interpreted by authors) to impose our own expectations of how “gender” is represented in a particular culture. Thus, chapters basically have the same overall structure, with variation due to language-specific properties as well as to the state of research on language and gender in the respective country. In some cases, we encouraged authors to include some of their own empirical research where this has implications for the analysis of “gender” in the respective language.

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