

Gender puzzles in Marind (South Papua)

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1 Introduction

- In this talk I will discuss grammatical gender in Marind, based on my own fieldwork (to date ca. 7 months) and building on previous work by the early Dutch missionaries (Kolk and Ver- tenten 1922, Geurtjens 1926, Geurtjens 1933) and most of all, Father Drabbe's detailed grammar (Drabbe 1955). Marind is spoken in the southern Papuan lowlands, on territory annexed by In- donesia in the 1960s. The language is part of the linguistically diverse **Trans-Fly area** (Evans 2012).
- Marind has recently been shown to belong to a family stretching across the Trans-Fly area on both sides of the Indonesian/PNG border. This grouping is called the **Anim languages**, after the word *anim* 'people' which is found throughout the family (Usher and Suter 2015).
 - Gender systems with 3 or 4 members seems to be found across the family, but with the exception of the Marind-Yaqay group there is very little documentation.
 - The pronominal forms of the Anim languages resemble those reconstructed for the pro- posed **Trans-New Guinean** phylum (Voorhoeve 1975, Ross 2005, Usher and Suter 2015: 120); Glottolog (Hammarström et al. 2015) adopts a more conservative approach and does not include Anim with in TNG.
- Structurally, Marind displays the relatively rare combination of verb-final constituent order and massively prefixing verb inflection. Based on co-occurrence, a prefixal template with ca. 18 slots can be set up, marking notions such as tense, various aspectual distinctions, applicatives, reciprocal, various adverbial meanings ('again', 'first', 'far away', 'in contact with surface') and indexation of (roughly) actor, recipient and affected possessor; undergoer indexation is in turn marked on the verb stem by complicated alternations including pre-, suff-, in-, and circumfixal morphology.
 - Nominal morphology is sparse: there is no case marking and **most nouns do not show overt gender/number marking**. The exception is a handful of nouns (mostly kinship terms) that alternate according to gender/number (more about this later on).
- In the rest of the talk, I will
 - Reiterate the arguments for establishing 4 genders in Marind
 - Review the tendencies behind gender assignment

- Take a closer look at the parallel behaviour of animate plurals and the fourth gender
- End with a pointer to issues in the syntax of agreement

2 Agreement classes

- The agreement behaviour triggered by nouns suggests 4 genders, see data in (1). The stem-final vowel (in boldface) of the modifier co-varies with the noun. The targets are (a) *agV* ‘whatchamacallit’;² (b) the question word *tV* ‘who, what’; the adjectives *samlaxVn* ‘mid-size’ and *papVs* ‘small’ (c, d).

(1) Exponents across 4 targets.

	I	II	III	IV
a.	<i>age, patul</i> whatchamacallit, a boy	<i>agu, kjasom</i> whatchamacallit, a girl	<i>ago, jahun</i> whatchamacallit, canoe(s)	<i>agi, mesin</i> whatchamacallit, machine(s)
b.	<i>ta patul?</i> what boy?	<i>tu kjasom?</i> what girl?	<i>ta jahun?</i> what canoe(s)?	<i>ti mesin?</i> what machine(s)?
c.	<i>samlaxen patul</i> mid-size boy	<i>samlaxun kjasom</i> mid-size girl	<i>samlaxan jahun</i> mid-size canoe(s)	<i>samlaxin mesin</i> mid-size machine(s)
d.	<i>papes patul</i> small boy	<i>papus kjasom</i> small girl	<i>papes jahun</i> small canoe	<i>papis mesin</i> small machine

- Observations:

- Exponents for gender I and III are not consistent across targets (e.g. exponents of gender III vary between *o*, *a* and *e*). Exponents for gender II and IV are consistently *u* and *i* respectively.
- The forms of gender I and II (animates) can only have singular reference, while the gender III and IV-forms on rows a—c are unspecified for number.
- With plural animates the exponent is invariable *i* (interestingly the same as gender IV):

(2) Plural of genders I & II.

	I.pl	II.pl
a.	<i>agi, patul</i> whatchamacallit, boys	<i>agi, kjasom</i> whatchamacallit, girls
b.	<i>ti patul?</i> what boys?	<i>ti kjasom?</i> what girls?
c.	<i>samlaxin patul</i> mid-size boys	<i>samlaxin kjasom</i> mid-size girls

- This raises the possibility that “gender IV” is not a gender of its own but simply members of I or II that happen to appear with plural exponents because they are **pluralia tantum**. One problem with this view is that Marind has no number distinction among inanimates, i.e. the language conforms to the well-known trend of having a number distinction for nouns high on the animacy scale (corresponding to gender I and II), with nouns below this cut-off point lacking a number feature (gender III and IV). The absence of grammatical number among inanimate nouns makes it difficult to claim that some of them are nevertheless lexically plural.
 - One glaring counter-example is the plural of ‘small’, which is the only case in the language of an adjective distinguishing in number between gender III and IV (3).

(3) Unique plural lexemes for ‘small’

I	II	III	IV
<i>isahih patul</i>	<i>isahih kjasom</i>	<i>wasasux jahun</i>	<i>isahih mesin</i>
small boys	small girls	small canoes	small machines

- So is there a number distinction in III and IV after all? Not if one follows Durie’s dictum that “suppletive stems select for rather than agree with the number of their arguments” (Durie 1986: 362). Without a number distinction among inanimates there is no need (for the moment) to consider the possibility that IV are pluralia tantum rather than a gender.
- This situation can be represented diagrammatically for the target *samlaxVn* ‘mid-size’ as in Table 1.

	sg	pl
I	e	i
II	u	
III	a	
IV	i	

Table 1: Exponents of agreement on *samlaxVn* ‘mid-size’

- There is at least one lexical item that forms its own agreement class. When the word *jahun* ‘canoe’ is used with the meaning ‘outrigger canoe’ it behaves exceptionally in two ways: (1) it distinguishes singular and plural, (2) it takes III agreement in the singular, and IV agreement in the plural. Since an agreement class with only one member is insufficient to establish a fifth gender, I treat this as a lexical exception making up an **inquorate gender** (Corbett 1991: 170).
 - Inquorate genders is a widespread phenomenon, cf. the small class of Italian nouns behaving like *braccio* ‘arm’, which takes Masculine agreement in singular, but Feminine agreement in the plural.

Interim summary:

- Four genders (I–IV) can be posited on the basis of agreement behaviour across various targets.
- The possibility that gender IV is a group of lexical plurals belonging to gender I/II was rejected, since genders III and IV lack a number feature.

3 Assignment

- There is a **predominantly semantic** basis for gender assignment:³
 - Male humans go into gender I.
 - Female humans, and all animals, stars and skin moles, go into gender II.
 - Inanimates are split between gender III and gender IV; see Table 2.
- Members of gender II are ‘grammatically’ animate despite the exceptions: stars, stellar constellations and skin moles are either border-line animates or spill-over from the inanimates.
- There is no obvious rationale for the assignment to genders III and IV. More nouns belong to gender III than IV, and III is a **default** in the sense that agreeing targets take the exponents of III if they appear in non-agreeing environments, e.g. *agV* is *ago* when used as a Quotative particle; demonstrative *Vpe* is *epe* when used as a backchannel ‘uh-huh’ or marking certain subordinate clauses, etc.
- Since it was noticed above that IV has the same exponent as I/II plural, it is interesting to ask if these nouns belong to fields that tend to contain pluralia tantum cross-linguistically. There is not much typological research available, but Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Wälchli (2001: 630) identify a few typical domain where pluralia tantum and other lexical plurals seem to be frequent. Indeed, some IV-nouns belong to these domains: among **heterogenous substances** we find *ndalom* ‘foam’, *ndakindaki* ‘bioluminescence’, *alalin* ‘noodles’; among **internally complex artifacts** we find *lahwalah-jahun* ‘airplane’ (cf. *jahun*[III] ‘canoe’) and the borrowing *bolpen* ‘ballpoint pen’; **diseases** such as *kambi* ‘tinea imbricata’ (a fungal infection covering the skin in a maze-like pattern).
 - However, items from these domains are also found in gender III: a fishing net is both heterogenous and internally complex, yet *kipa* ‘net’ is III, etc. Also, the vast majority of IV nouns do not fit into any of the typical pluralia domains.
- Other tendencies:
 - Words for many modern items in gender IV are extensions of traditional words which retain gender III, e.g.:

Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV
Male human beings <i>patul</i> 'boy' <i>xasti</i> 'old man'	Female human beings <i>kjasom</i> 'girl' <i>mesiwag</i> 'old woman'	Some bodyparts <i>muk</i> 'elbow' <i>pe</i> 'intestines' <i>ombo</i> 'scrotum'	Some bodyparts <i>mig</i> 'knee' <i>halahil</i> 'lungs' <i>ko</i> 'wallaby's pouch'
	All animals <i>mbam</i> 'louse' <i>kaji</i> 'cassowary' <i>saxam</i> 'wallaby' <i>nggat</i> 'dog'	Some plants <i>balaw</i> 'breadfruit tree' <i>bus</i> 'eucalyptus' <i>onggat</i> 'coconut'	Some plants <i>pajum</i> 'candlenut tree' <i>salingga</i> 'pandan tree' <i>ngganggin</i> 'croton'
	<i>at</i> 'mole (on skin)'	Artifacts <i>mih</i> 'bow' <i>kandala</i> 'drum' <i>isala</i> 'platform'	Artifacts <i>emadeh</i> 'quiver' <i>ambata</i> 'trident'
	Stars, stellar constellations <i>ohom</i> 'star' <i>waj</i> 'shooting star'	Sun, moon <i>katane</i> 'sun' <i>mandaw</i> 'moon'	Body decorations <i>segos</i> 'pubic shell' <i>mbalal</i> 'arm band' <i>lakalik</i> 'bracer'
		Places <i>aha</i> 'house' <i>milah</i> 'village' <i>duh</i> 'beach'	All flowers ?Composites <i>bomi</i> 'termite mound' <i>anih</i> 'lightning' <i>ndalom</i> 'foam' <i>ndakindaki</i> 'bioluminescence'
			Skin diseases <i>kambi</i> 'tinea imbricata' <i>dapadap</i> 'tinea versicolor'

Table 2: Overview of the genders.

(4) III–IV doublets

	III	IV	
a.	<i>katal</i> 'stone'	<i>katal</i> 'money'	
b.	<i>jahun</i> 'canoe'	<i>jahun</i> 'motorboat, ship'	(cf. <i>jahun</i> [inquate III-IV] 'outrigger canoe')
c.	<i>ndon</i> 'rope'	<i>ndon</i> 'modern (plastic) rope'	

- Entities that are normally not manipulated by humans because they are large, intangible and/or abstract are always gender III. Examples: *pale* 'land ridge', *mamuj* 'savannah' and other landmasses; *matul* 'shade', *omom* 'cloud', *kiwal* 'wind', *usus* 'afternoon', *majan* 'language, speech, issue', *pula* 'taboo against planting or taking coconuts' etc.
- Nouns of two large semantic fields—bodyparts and flora—are split fairly evenly between gender III and IV, and I have not found any clear pattern behind the division to date.
- A score of nouns lack intrinsic gender, and instead receive gender according to the referent at hand, i.e. they show **referential gender** (Dahl 1999). Typical examples are *xunaxon* 'infant' and kinship terms such as *onos* 'cross-cousin'; the NP that they head display gender I or II depending on if the referent is male or female.
 - Several nouns with referential gender also show **overt gender** (5).
 - These differ in regularity and semantic predictability: the stem *namVk* (b) with the skeletal meaning 'sibling' has the expected meanings 'brother/sister/siblings' combined with I, II or plural exponents, whereas *naheb* and *nahub* (c) 'my grandson/granddaughter' has the irregular plural *nahe* with the additional dyadic meaning 'my ancestors'; *exVI* 'person whose name I'm not going to mention' (d) lacks a plural altogether.

(5) Overt gender

	I	II	plural
a.	<i>anem</i> 'man'	<i>anum</i> 'woman'	<i>anim</i> 'people'
b.	<i>namek</i> 'brother'	<i>namuk</i> 'sister'	<i>namik</i> 'siblings'
c.	<i>naheb</i> 'my grandson'	<i>nahub</i> 'my granddaughter'	(<i>nahe</i>) 'my grandchildren; my ancestors'
d.	<i>exal</i> 'unnamed man'	<i>exul</i> 'unnamed woman'	—

- At least 3 nouns display a subtype of referential gender, namely **inherited gender** (Evans 1994), meaning that an associated referent provides the gender. The 3 nouns have meanings that concern identity in one way or another: *igih* 'name', *nanVh* 'face' and *abab* 'reflection, image, shadow'. Examples of *nanVh* with possible translations:

(6) *nanVh*: inherited gender

	I	II	III
a.	<i>nanih</i>	<i>nanuh</i>	<i>nanih</i>
	‘man’s face’	‘woman’s face’ ‘dog’s face’	‘front of house’ etc.

- Fedden (2011: 177) reports a similar case in Mian, where the culturally salient noun *smik* ‘soul, reflection’ triggers agreement according to the associated referent.

4 Gender and number

- The shared forms between I/II plural and IV were pointed out above. Looking at the verbal domain, we find further parallels.
- First we will ask whether IV nouns trigger singular or plural Actor indexing. Since we saw above that they behave like I/II plurals with adjectives, one might guess that they will trigger invariant plural agreement on the verb too. For language-particular reasons this is difficult to check,⁴ but at least one verb, *kahek* ‘climb’, suggests that this is indeed the case.

(7) Actor indexation with III and IV subjects⁵

- a. *harga mendab-Ø=kahek* ‘the price[III] has.3sg gone up’
- b. *dolar mendab-na=kahek* ‘the dollar[IV] has.3pl gone up’

- Undergoer indexing is more complex, but confirms this pattern. Transitive and patientive verbs index the person/number of the undergoer by means of stem changes. Ex (8) provides the paradigm for ‘hide’ with an animate undergoer, with the stem separated from the prefixes by an equal sign. Note the 2|3pl forms.

(8) 1st Future paradigm for ‘hide’

	sing	plur
1	<i>mano=saltanuk</i> ‘I will hide myself’	<i>make=saltanuk</i> ‘we will hide ourselves’
2	<i>mano=saltaxuk</i> ‘I will hide you.sg’	<i>mano=salituk</i> ‘I will hide you.pl’
3	<i>mano=saletok</i> ‘I will hide him/her’	<i>mano=salituk</i> ‘I will hide them’

- An inanimate undergoer of gender III occurs with a separate stem *salad*:

(9) *onggat mano=salad*
‘I will hide the coconut’

- However, an undergoer of gender IV triggers the same stem as animate 2|3pl, continuing the parallels between I/II plural and IV:

(10) *katal mano=salituk*
 ‘I will hide the money’

- The stem sharing between 2|3pl and IV affects all verbs that have inflecting stems; see more examples in (11)

(11) Stems with animate/inanimate undergoer indexing

	3sg	2 3pl	III	IV
‘rub s.t.’	<i>hwahwetok</i>	<i>hwahwituk</i>	<i>hwahwid</i>	<i>hwahwituk</i>
‘hang s.t. on shoulder’	<i>eleh</i>	<i>elah</i>	<i>elam</i>	<i>elah</i>
‘eat s.t.’	<i>aheb</i>	<i>hi</i>	<i>xi</i>	<i>hi</i>
‘throw s.t. down’	<i>kwegen</i>	<i>kugahin</i>	<i>kwagin</i>	<i>kugahin</i>

- Clearly the parallels between I/II plural and IV extends beyond mere homophony of exponents—the question is if we have to abandon the four-gender analysis and treat IV as I/II nouns that only have plural forms.
 - I propose to maintain the four-gender analysis, but with the caveat that gender IV probably developed historically from a grouping of lexical plurals.
- The following suggestion is a highly speculative schema for how an unattested three-gender system in proto-Anim could have evolved into the present four(-ish)-gender system:

Stage 1 An ideally regular three-gender system with masculine, feminine and neuter gender marked by **e*, **u* and **a*; plural is **i* for all nouns.

	sg	pl
M	<i>e</i>	<i>i</i>
F	<i>u</i>	<i>i</i>
N	<i>a</i>	<i>i</i>

Stage 2 Some neuter nouns lose their singular forms and become pluralia tantum. There are still three clear genders.

	sg	pl	
M	<i>e</i>	<i>i</i>	
F	<i>u</i>	<i>i</i>	
N	<i>a</i>	<i>i</i>	(regular inanimates)
	(–)	<i>i</i>	(pluralia tantum)

Stage 3 The singular/plural distinction was lost among inanimates so the regular neuter nouns lose their **i* forms. However, the pluralia tantum can not ‘return’ to their lost singular **a* forms, so they are now morphologically distinct from the regular neuters.

	sg	pl	
M	e	i	
F	u	i	
?	a	(-)	(gender III)
	(-)	i	(gender IV, or still pluralia tantum?)

- Obviously, any attempt at a diachronic account would need to be backed up by comparative data. Fortunately, all the Anim languages seem to have gender systems waiting to be explored by linguists, so there is a good chance more clues will be added through future work in the Trans-Fly area.

5 Further issues

- Finally, I will offer a glimpse of the complexities involved in the syntac of agreement in Marind. Gender agreement occurs across a wide range of targets, including postpositions. Although agreeing adpositions are relatively common across the world, Marind is unusual in that the controller is **not** the complement/object of the adposition, but the noun of the wider NP:

(12) NP-internal agreement on *IVk* ‘from’

- a. *duh luk awe* ‘a fish[II] from.II:sg sea’
b. *duh lik awe* ‘fishes from.II,pl sea’

- Agreement of adverbially used PostPs is controlled non-locally, by the subject of the sentence (13). This is cross-linguistically rare (but see Evans 2000: 129 on Iwaidjan, Brown and Chumakina 2014 on Archi, Brown and Chumakina forthcoming).

(13) *Ima ta ndaham huwa rumah sakit luk?*
(name)[II] when.will.she.return hospital(III) from.II
‘When will Ima return from the hospital?’

- Even NP-internal modifiers can agree with the higher subject in certain cases. Ex (14) shows both *Vn* ‘which’ and *IVk* agreeing with the subject.

(14) a. *en milah lek kohob ox?*
which.I village from.I are.2sg 2sg
which village are you.sg from?
b. *in milah lik keheb jox?*
which.I/IIpl village from.I/IIpl are.2pl 2pl
which village are you.pl from?

- These phenomena are a topic of ongoing research, along with e.g. the complex conditions on inflectional gender agreement on verbs (interacting with e.g. tense), an area that was not covered in today’s talk.

Notes

¹A previous version of this talk was given at the Australian National University in March 2015. I thank that audience for comments, and especially Nick Evans and Sebastian Fedden for some suggestions. All remaining errors have been left as an exercise for the reader.

²Reid (1997:170) gives another example of gender agreement on ‘whatchamacallit’ in the Australian language Ngan’gityemmerri.

³Unfortunately, the literature contains some inaccurate statements on Marind gender assignment. Foley seems to have misread Drabbe, as he claims that gender III consists “mainly of plants and trees” (1986: 82) (repeated by Corbett (1991: 116) and Aikhenvald (2000: 60)). Also, Drabbe (1955: 17) claims that stars are in gender II because they are female in the mythology, which is incorrect (see van Baal 1966: 284, 295, 442 and elsewhere).

⁴Drabbe (1955) claims that Actor marking on the verb remains unaffected by the gender of an inanimate controller. This seems to be wrong; rather, inanimates triggering Actor agreement are extremely rare because inanimate subjects mostly occur with either Patientive verbs (‘fall’, ‘break’) or so called Middle verbs (e.g. position verbs) which have defective Actor agreement, showing invariant 3sg Actor marking regardless of animacy. Similarly, inanimate agents, e.g. *the key opened the door* are seemingly treated as adjuncts rather than true subjects and fail to provide evidence.

⁵Ex (7b) was a pre-request directed at me, before I was asked to bring dollars next time I come to the village; (7a) was elicited from the same speaker later. Both sentences were checked and confirmed by another speaker at a separate occasion.

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