Are genderlects a (South) American feature?

SSILA, January 21-23, 2022

Françoise Rose  
CNRS/U. de Lyon

Marine Vuillermet  
DCLS, Zürich U.
Introduction to genderlects
Genderlects

Rose (2015:531): “[Genderlects refer] to a formal distinction depending on the gender of the speech-act participants and [are] distinct from grammatical gender, which indicates the gender of a referent.”

♀ speaker / ♂ speaker

(1) KARAJÁ (Nuclear Macro Je; Brazil) ‘tree’ kɔwɔrʊ / ɔwɔrʊ phonology

(2) MOJEÑO TRINITARIO (Arawakan; Bolivia) 3HUM.SG.MASC ķi- / ma- morphology

(3) BOLIVIAN GUARANI (Tupian; Bolivia) ‘yes’ éé / tà lexicon

Previous works: an emerging feature

Originally supposed to be rare:
- Aikhenvald (2012): 2 languages in her volume on Amazonian languages
- Fleming (2012): 20 languages worldwide
- Dunn (2013): 14 languages worldwide

But recent studies with more cases:
- Rose (2015): 41 South American languages belonging to 14 different stocks
- Rose & Bakker (2016): 102 languages worldwide

Previous works: geographic distribution

Most cases seem to be in the Americas

- Fleming (2012): 11 in North America, 6 in South America, 3 elsewhere
- Dunn (2013): 3 in North America, 5 in South America, 5 elsewhere
- Rose & Bakker (2016): 50 in South America, 52 elsewhere

Areal hypotheses

- Fleming (2012:297): phenomenon mostly limited to the Americas
- Dunn (2013:46): frequent instances in the Americas, maybe an areal feature of Amazonia?
- Rose (2015:504): phenomenon particularly present in Amazonia (especially lowland Bolivia and Upper Xingu) and the Chaco
Previous works: a preliminary typology

- **Type I** (Haas 1944: 147): *Speaker based* is more frequent (Dunn 2013: 42)
- **Loci of gender indexicality** (Rose 2015: 524-525):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CROSS-LINGUISTICALLY</th>
<th>WITHIN A LANGUAGE</th>
<th>e.g.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHONETICS-</strong></td>
<td>rare</td>
<td>few items but pervasive in speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHONOLOGY</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>~ every 3 words (Fortune &amp; Fortune 1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MORPHOLOGY</strong></td>
<td>not frequent</td>
<td>few items but pervasive in speech e.g. gender/person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>~ once per sentence (Rose 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LEXICON</strong></td>
<td>frequent</td>
<td>few items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>but Garifuna (~50; de Pury 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DISCOURSE MARKERS</strong></td>
<td>most frequent</td>
<td>moderate number of items but can be pervasive or salient in speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology: Previous studies

Convenience sample

- ad hoc dataset
- grammar harvesting, questionnaire addressed to specialists and linguistic mailing lists
- no negative data included (no statistics possible)

Bias

- longer descriptive tradition in the Americas (cf. Adam 1879; Haas 1944; Pottier 1972; Kroskrity 1983...)

→ Representativeness of the data?

Today: reassessment of previous observations

The aim of our paper is to reassess

- the worldwide frequency of the phenomenon
- (South) American areality
- the preliminary typological observations and the relative frequency of the types
Methodology
Our methodology: sample

Out of Asia (SNSF, U. of Zürich): multidisciplinary project aiming at the exploration of the linguistic diversity and the population history in the Americas → Mapping Linguistic Areas in the Americas

- 20 feature sets -- among which genderlect
- Sample of 319 languages (215 families) genealogically independent, geographically maximally distributed, regardless of typological profile
  - 1/3 in North America
  - 1/3 in South America
  - 1/3 in the rest of the world (4 other macro areas, Hammarström & al. 2014)

Our methodology: our coding

- Only categorical genderlect considered
- Haas types
  - speaker based
  - addressee based
  - speaker-addressee based (both)
  - mixed

Tupinamba (South America; Barbosa 1956:374-375)
- men speakers only: \textit{reá} ♂ 'yes'
- women speakers only: \textit{rei} ♀ 'yes'
- men to men only: \textit{hē} ♂>♂ 'ola, oh!' (no corresponding women word)

Our methodology: our coding

- **3 strictly-defined loci**, not 4 → discourse / illocutionary markers corresponding to 3 linguistic domains

  - **phonology** vs. **morphology** (inter)subjectivity
  - **lexicon**
  - discourse markers

  - Garifuna *uá* ♀ vs. *inó* ♂ 'no' discourse marker (Rose 2015)
  - illocutionary (Fleming 2012)

  } lexicon + (inter)subjectivity

Our methodology: our coding

  - subjectivity: linguistic expression of speaker involvement (beliefs and attitudes)
  - intersubjectivity: linguistic expression of a speaker's attention to the hearer

- **address terms/vocatives**
  e.g. Sir! (*a sir crossed the street)

---


Results
Genderlects are definitively not a rarity

- **57 cases / 319 languages: 18%**
- Our study confirms that “genderlects” are not two very distinct lects.
  - **phonology**: maximally targets a few phonemes, sometimes phrase-final modification
  - **morphology**: from one to a handful of morphemes
  - **lexicon:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexemes</th>
<th>Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Ranges of lexemes with genderlects per language
Worldwide distribution

Map 1. Worldwide distribution of languages with / without genderlects

Fig. 1. Proportion of languages with genderlects in North America, in South America, elsewhere

South America vs North America: \( X^2 (1, p<.05) \)
South America vs. outside of Americas: \( X^2 (1, p<.005) \)
Types

- Indexing the gender of the speaker is most common

Fig. 2. Distribution of genderlect types based on the speaker, the addressee, both speaker/addressee, mixed types

Fig. 3. Proportion of genderlect types based on the speaker, the addressee, both speaker/addressee, mixed types
Loci

First wide-scope typological study with three strictly-defined loci

- mostly in lexicon
- 17/57 languages with 2 loci
  - primarily lexicon & morphology (13/17)
  - no language with 3 loci

Fig. 4. Distribution of genderlect systems by loci:
phonology, morphology, lexicon
(Inter)subjectivity

- Morphology: 76% with some (inter)subjectivity
  - sentence type (interrogative, prohibitive...), emphatic particle, 2sg pronoun, narrator’s point of view, empathy, vocative suffix
  - Bilua (Papunesia, Obata 2003:61)
    
    \[
    \begin{array}{ll}
    \text{ngo-iza} & \text{ngo-ila} \\
    2\text{SG-VOC.SG.F} & 2\text{SG-VOC.SG.M} \\
    \text{‘you (woman addressee)’} & \text{‘you (man addressee)’} \\
    \end{array}
    \]

- Lexicon: 93% with some (inter)subjectivity
  - interjections, greetings/routines, phatic particles, address terms, attention-getters, ‘yes’
  - Shipibo-Konibo (South America, Valenzuela 2003:182)
    
    \[
    \begin{array}{ll}
    \text{jojo} & \text{jeje} \\
    \text{‘yes (woman speaking)’} & \text{‘yes (man speaking)’} \\
    \end{array}
    \]


Discussion on the areal distribution
Why this areal distribution? Inheritance

Inheritance

- our results: 13 isolates, 32 families (7 with several cases)
- "gender dialect systems are diachronically unstable" (Dunn 2013: 63)
- a priori not the most prevalent diffusion mode
  - rarely some cognacy within a family, but no reconstruction in the proto-language
    - Li 1982 on Atayalic dialects (Austronesian, Taiwan),
    - Rose & Chousou-Polydouri 2017 on Tupian (South America)
  - more frequently no cognacy within a family (cf. Jê languages, Rose 2015: 502-503)
    - No cognacy in our sample, i.e. two Pano-Takanan genderlects:
      - Shipibo-Konibo ‘yes’
      - Matsés: interjections for displeasure, surprise, pain, complaining

Why this areal distribution? Language change

Independent language change

- statistical genderlects → categorical or categorical → statistical
- some case studies
  - morphology: Alberdi (1995) on Basque
  - phonology: Dunn (2000) on Chukchi; Ribeiro (2012) on Karajá
  - 'yes': Rose & Chousou-Polydouri (2017) on Tupi
- could be enhanced by cultural factors? (more on this later)
  - would explain the areal distribution
  - would explain the non-cognacy of genderlects within a family


Why this areal distribution? Contact

Contact-induced emergence of genderlects

- few cases discussed
  - language mixing in Island Carib (Taylor 1956)
  - diffusion of the pattern in the lexicon across families in Pueblo Southwest (Kroskrity 1983)
- (inter)subjective elements facilitating genderlects
  - borrowability of pragmatic items (Matras 2007, Andersen 2014)
  - Hyp: saliency in discourse → higher borrowability?
- diffusion in South America
  - no obvious cognacy in our sample → rather a pattern diffusion?
  - diffusion could be enhanced by cultural factors?

Why this areal distribution? Culture

- Amazonian cosmogony: conviviality vs. predation
  - Amerindian perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1998)
  - Differentiation through the ‘otherness’ (Santos-Granero 2007)
- High number of Amazonian lects/linguistic variants due to the fact that “the negotiation of linguistic boundaries involves the challenge of maintaining one’s own social identity alongside a constant risk of absorption into another sphere” (Epps 2021:5)
  - shamanic varieties
  - variants associated with descent groups and affinal relations
  - pet & hunting registers
  - genderlects
- (Inter)subjectivity
  - salient in discourse → culturally significant (=identity tag)
  - 97% of South America genderlects with some (inter)subjectivity items vs. 86% in the rest of the world (not statistically significant)

Conclusions

- Summary on categorical genderlects:
  - not a rarity
  - areal distribution confirmed: South America
  - typological generalizations confirmed: essentially speaker, in the lexicon
  - strong relation with (inter)subjectivity
  - role of culture?

- Limitations:
  - Is it specific to South America or more generally to areas less-impacted by globalization?
Thank you!

- our meticulous research assistants David Perrot and Oscar Cocaud-Degrève
- Natalia Chousou-Polydouri and David Inman for inspiring discussions and suggestions
- and... the audience for your attention!
Address terms

Some address terms index the gender of the addressee → a case of genderlects?

If address term is also used referentially, it is considered as gender in lexicon. Ex: Mum! / A mum crossed the street.

If not, it is a good candidate for genderlects. Ex: Madam! / *A madam crossed the street.

But then, genderlects would virtually be present in all languages? Addressee indexicality inherent in address terms.

A continuum between address terms/vocatives/attention-getter (Zwicky 1974)