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## Noun Categorization: A Comprehensive Typology

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Almost all of the languages of the world have some noun categorization devices in their grammar. The most widespread is linguistic genders — grammatical classes of nouns based on core semantic properties such as sex (female and male), animacy, humanness, and also shape and size. Numeral classifiers categorise the noun referent in terms of its inherent nature, animacy, shape and form, and occur with a number word or a quantifier. Further types of noun categorization include noun classifiers, possessive classifiers, verbal classifiers, and a number of rarer types (locative and deictic classifiers). Noun categorization devices cover a range of types from the large systems of numeral classifiers in South-East Asia to the highly grammaticalised gender agreement classes in Indo-European languages. Each type of noun categorization device has its preferred semantic parameters. One can develop from another. All of them provide a unique insight into how people categorise the world through their language in terms of universal semantic parameters involving humanness, animacy, sex, shape, form, consistency, and functional properties. In one language, a human will be classified in terms of orientation, as ‚vertical‘, in another as male or female, and in another one as simply animate, or ‚rational‘. In a number of languages, the same, or almost the same, set of classifiers is used in multiple contexts — with number words, with deictics, in possessive constructions, and so on. This points towards the unity of noun categorization via classifiers. There is no evidence for the synchronic primacy of any of the multiple contexts. Diachronically, they may display distinct pathways of development, and undergo language obsolescence at different rates.

Gender and various types of classifiers share discourse functions, and are never semantically redundant. Gender and classifiers can refer anaphorically to a previously mentioned entity and serve as referent-tracking devices. They change as the society changes, reflecting the ways in which language and social environment are integrated into a single whole. The meanings, the uses, the acquisition, and dissolution of noun categorization offer a window into how the world is seen through language, revealing the workings of the human mind and its cognitive capacities.

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