The Purview Effect: Feminine Gender on Inanimates in Halkomelem Salish

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1 Introduction

Halkomelem has been described as having a natural gender system: singular female humans take feminine determiners and other nouns take masculine determiners. However, feminine gender "leaks" onto hundreds of inanimate nouns, especially if they fit into certain semantic categories, as discussed in section 2. Interestingly, feminine gender is optional for feminine inanimates as they often also appear with masculine determiners. This raises the question: when will an inanimate appear in the feminine gender?

Research based on texts and elicitations has revealed three factors that affect gender choice. The first is the sex of the speaker, as discussed in section 3. The second is the sex of the possessor of a noun, as discussed in section 4. The third is the cognitive setting in which the NP occurs, as discussed in section 5. The Halkomelem data show that NPs that come into the feminine purview are more likely to appear with feminine determiners.

2 Halkomelem Gender

Table 1. Masculine versus feminine articles

	MASCULINE	FEMININE
PROXIMAL	tthu	thu
DISTAL	kwthu	lhu

Table 2. Proximal articles and gender of animates

	MALE	FEMALE
SINGULAR	tthu swuy'qe' *'the man'*	thu slheni' *'the woman'*
PLURAL	tthu suw'wuy'qe' *'the men'*	tthu slhunlheni' *'the women'*

(1) lhiq'=t thun'   snuhwulh   'u thu   lelum'!
     move=TR   F.DT.2POS canoe   OB F.DT   house
     'Move your car (F) closer to the house (F)!' (RP)

(2) nem' lhu   shem=ut thun'   kupou 'u   thu   huy'qw!
     go   IMP   dry=TR F.DT.2POS   coat   OB F.DT   fire
     'Go and dry your coat (F) by the fire (F)!' (RP)

(3) shhwimelu 'store', smeent 'rock', tsulqama' 'raspberry', lupat 'cup', telu 'money',
     stekun 'sock', qwlhuy'shun 'shoe', shyat'qw'usum' 'facecloth', s'itth'um 'dress',
     luxwtun 'blanket', xwi'lum' 'rope', sum'shathut 'sun'

(4) shqw'qwum 'axe', qw'aqwustun 'club', q'uw'u 'cane', sq'umul' 'paddle',
     thqet 'tree', luplash 'board', xul'tun 'pencil', shewuq 'carrot',
     lutem 'table', shts'e'nutstun 'chair', t'amun 'wall', tumuhw 'ground'

(5) tthu/*thu tumuhw
     DT/F.DT   ground
     'the ground'

(6) tthu/thu snuhwulh
     DT/F.DT canoe
     'the canoe'

Table 3: Masculine vs. feminine for four nouns in Samuel Tom's texts

		MASCULINE	FEMININE
smeent	rock, mountain	10	3
t'iw'i'ulhew't-hw	church	3	1
telu	money	2	3
huy'qw	fire	1	1
TOTAL		**16**	**8**

3 Sex of the Speaker

Table 4: Gender of determiners in four hours of texts

	MASCULINE		FEMININE		TOTAL
Samuel Tom	1256	95%	72	5%	1328
Ruby Peter	1390	80%	340	20%	1730

Table 5: Masculine vs. feminine for five nouns in Sophie Micheal's texts

		MASCULINE	FEMININE
lelum'	house	1	3
huy'qw	fire	0	5
shyum'tun	belt	2	1
skweyul	day	1	3
st'ilum	song	2	1
TOTAL		**6**	**13**

4 Inanimates and Possession

(7) nilh   kwthu/*lhu   sne=s   nu=s=tl'i'kw'unus tul'=nuhw.
    3PRO   DT/F.DT   name=3POS   1SG.POS=N=want   DT.1POS.N
           know=LCTR
    'I'm trying to remember his name.' (RP)

(8) nilh   kwthu/lhu   sne=s   nu=s=tl'i'   kw'unus   tul'=nuhw.
    3PRO DT/F.DT   name=3POS 1SG.POS=N=want DT.1POS.N   know=LCTR
    'I'm trying to remember her name.' (RP)

(9) ni'   'untsu kwthu /*lhu shuptun=s   tthey' swiw'lus?
    AUX   where DT/F.DT   knife=3.POS   DT   boy
    'Where is that boy's knife?' (MJ)

(10) ni'   'untsu kwthu /lhu   shuptun=s   they' q'emi'?
     AUX   where DT/F.DT   knife=3.POS   F.DEM girl
    'Where is that girl's knife?' (MJ)

(11) ni'   'untsu   kwthu=nu /*lhu=nu   ts'qw'alstun?
     AUX   where   DT=1SG.POS/F.DT=1SG.POS   fork
    'Where is my fork?' (BS)
    [male speaker/possessor]

(12) ni'   'untsu kwthu=nu /lhu=nu   ts'qw'alstun?
     AUX where DT=1SG.POS/F.DT=1SG.POS fork
     'Where is my fork?' (RP)
     [female speaker/possessor]

(13) ni'   'untsu   kwthu=nu /*lhu=nu   suw'a'lum'?
     AUX   where   DT=1SG.POS/F.DT=1SG.POS   toy
     'Where is your toy?' (RP)
     [female speaker, male addressee/possessor]

(14) ni'   'untsu kwthu=nu /lhu=nu   suw'a'lum'?
     AUX where DT=1SG.POS/F.DT=1SG.POS   toy
     'Where is your toy?' (RP)
     [female speaker, female addressee/possessor]

5   Cognitive Setting of the Noun

(15) nem' tse'   'ath   tthu lutem   'u thu 'uhwiin' li' lutem'.
     go   FUT   lengthen DT table   OB F.DT little   table.DIM
     'You will lengthen the table (M) by adding the small table (F).' (RP)

(16) tl'ulim' 'uw'   sthuthekw' tthu/*thu   shelh.
     really LNK   straight   DT/F.DT   road
     'The road (M) is very straight.' (RP)

(17) na'ut   hwi'   pay=thut   tthu/thu shelh.
     AUX.DT   unusual bend=REFL   DT/F.DT road
     'The road (M/F) is unexpectedly curved.' (RP)

(18) na'ut   wulh hw=ts'imum   tthu   t'umuw'luch 'u   tthu   qa'.
     AUX.DT PERF PRFX=full   DT   tub   OB   DT   water
     'The tub is almost full of water (M).' (MJ)

(19) 'e'uth   wulh hikw'   thu   qa'   wulh qwulhqwulh tthu qwuqwilhi'.
     AUX.F.DT PERF flood   F.DT water PERF drift.PL   DT   log.PL
     'The high tide (F) has drifted the logs to shore.' (RP)

6 Conclusion: The Purview Effect

Halkomelem gender is somewhat unusual in that inanimates exhibit fluidity of gender marking, unlike European languages where "the gender of a noun, qua lexical item, is decided once and for all, rather than on each occasion when the noun is used" (Dahl 2000:110). Halkomelem nouns in the feminine purview can be marked feminine. These include (i) nouns referring to singular female humans, (ii) nouns referring to inanimate objects that are semantically feminine (based on their size, shape, or function), (iii) nouns that appear in a context that is feminizing, i.e. cognitively perceived as being feminine in size, shape, or function, (iv) inanimate objects that belong or relate to a female, and (v) feminine inanimate nouns spoken by a female.

References

Dahl, Östen. 2000. Animacy and the Notion of Semantic Gender. In Barbara Unterbeck et al., eds., 99–116.