

# The representation of gender on local person pronouns

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## 1 Introduction

Empirical focus:

- The category of gender on pronouns has received a fair amount of attention in the literature from various standpoints (see e.g. [Audring 2008](#); [Siewierska 2013a](#) for an overview of pronominal gender patterns and assignment regularities).
- Overlooked are languages in which local person (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person) pronouns show gender distinctions.
- An instance of a language in which local person pronouns show gender distinctions is Arabic, where second person pronouns distinguish between a masculine and a feminine form, as illustrated in Table 1.

Person	Singular	Dual	Plural
1	<i>ʔan-aa</i>	<i>nahnu</i>	<i>nahnu</i>
2M	<i>ʔan-t-a</i>	<i>ʔan-t-um-aa</i>	<i>ʔan-t-um(-uu)</i>
2F	<i>ʔan-t-i</i>	<i>ʔan-t-um-aa</i>	<i>ʔan-t-un-na</i>
3M	<i>h-uwa</i>	<i>h-um-aa</i>	<i>h-um-uu</i>
3F	<i>h-iyā</i>	<i>h-um-aa</i>	<i>h-un-na</i>

Table 1: Standard Arabic, nominative, free ([Fassi Fehri 1993:101](#))

- Aim: bring all such languages together under a single study and provide an corpus which can be further used to understand interactions of  $\phi$ -features.

Main questions:

- Previous studies on the representation and interactions of  $\phi$ -features focus at most on two types of features – person and number, or number and gender (see [Béjar and Řezáč 2009](#); [van Koppen 2012](#); [Puškar 2018](#); [Puškar-Gallien 2019](#); [Caha 2021](#)). Looking at languages with gender on local person allows us to probe into the interactions of all three types of  $\phi$  features simultaneously (see also [Puškar-Gallien to appeara,t](#)).
- Is there any interdependence between the features?
- How are they represented syntactically?
- What are the consequences of their syntactic representation on their morphology and morphosyntactic behaviour?

Main claims:

- $\phi$ -features involve hierarchical structures, both in their internal representation and in their syntactic location.

- Their internal structure can be represented in feature-geometric terms (Harley and Ritter 2002).
- Their syntactic location in the pronominal extended projection is as follows: base > person > number > gender > case.
- This accounts for the empirical generalisations on feature co-occurrence restrictions and pronouns' morphological realisation.

## 1.1 Previous literature

- Siewierska (2013a) lists 21 languages with gender on local person.
- Plank and Schellinger (1997) identify additional languages, but do not offer a formal proposal; focus more broadly on the interaction of person and number.
- Berg (2024) provides a balanced typological study, but puts a focus on a different puzzle (languages that show more number distinctions in the plural than in the singular and languages that show gender distinctions on 1<sup>st</sup> person). Languages that show gender distinctions on local person only in the singular are not taken into account.
- These works nevertheless contribute important discussions on counterexamples to two Greenberg's (1963) universals:
  - (1) Universal 37: A language never has more gender categories in non-singular numbers than in the singular.
  - (2) Universal 45: If there are any gender distinctions in the plural of the pronoun, there are some gender distinctions in the singular also.

## 2 Empirical Focus

- 62 languages with gender on local person, belonging to 20 families: Indo-European (Romance, Baltic, Slavic, Indic), Northwest Caucasian (Abkhaz-Adyge), Afro-Asiatic (Berber, Semitic, Chadic, Cushitic), Khoe-Kwadi (Central Khoesan, Khoekhoe), Austronesian (Malayo-Polynesian), Sko, Ndu, Sepik, Nuclear Trans New-Guinea, Maningrida, Southern Daly, Western Daly, Gunwinyguan, Gaagudju, Boran, Tupian, Witotoan, Matabeoan, Tunica, Bogia and 3 isolates.
- Table 2 presents a summary of the patterns exhibited by the languages under scrutiny.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Table 2 presents languages for which I was able to find sources. The WALS article by Siewierska (2013a) mentions Kofyar (Afro-Asiatic, Chadic) and Minangkabau (Austronesian) as languages with gender distinctions only on 2<sup>nd</sup> person. Furthermore, Berg (2024) mentions the following languages as having more genders in the (primarily 1<sup>st</sup> person) plural than in the singular, but I have not been able to find sources for them yet: Jul'hoan<sup>2</sup>, Bachamal (Wandjiginy), Pele-Ata (West New Britain), Hai//om-Akhoe, Nharo, Northern Tshiwa, Ts'ixa, Shua, Southern Tshiwa (Khoe-Kwadi), further members of the Berber genus, Muinane (Boran), Oceania (Witoto) and Skou (Skouic).

SG	3 + 2 + 1	Korana (Khoe-Kwadi), Hadza (Isolate), <b>Ngala</b> (Ndu)
SG	3 + 2	<b>Abkhaz</b> (Northwest Caucasian), Arabic, Hebrew, Berber (Riffian, Tacelhiyt, Kabyle, Aures, Tamazight), <b>Amharic</b> , <b>Aramaic</b> , <b>Musey</b> , <b>Kera</b> , <b>Lele</b> , <b>Hausa</b> , <b>Mupun</b> , <b>Kulere</b> , <b>Fyer</b> , <b>Ron</b> (Bokkos, Daffo-Butura), <b>Zari</b> , <b>Miya</b> , Beja (Afro-Asiatic), //Ani,   Gana, Buga/Khwe, Nama (Khoe-Kwadi), <b>Manambu</b> (Ndu), <b>Kwoma</b> (Sepic), Tunica (Tunica)
SG	3+ 1	Cocama-Cocamilla (Tupian)
SG	2 + 1	<b>Paez</b> (Isolate)
SG	2	<b>Iraqw</b> , Sha, <b>Burunge</b> , Tuareg Berber (Afro-Asiatic), <b>Moken</b> (Austronesian)
SG	1	
PL	3 + 2 + 1	<b>Spanish</b> , <b>Provençal</b> , <b>Shina</b> , <b>Slovenian</b> (Indo-European), <b>Gaagudju</b> (Gaagudju), Berber (Riffian, Tacelhiyt, Kabyle, Tuareg) (Afro-Asiatic), //Ani,   Gana, Buga/Khwe, Nama, Korana (Khoe-Kwadi), Hadza (Isolate), <b>Emmi</b> (Western Daly), <b>Monumbo</b> (Bogia)
PL	3 + 2	<b>Berber Tumzabt</b> Berber (Aures, Tamazight), Arabic, Hebrew, Beja (Afro-Asiatic), Tunica (Tunica)
PL	3 + 1	
PL	2 + 1	
PL	2	
PL	1	
DU	3 + 2 + 1	<b>Gaagudju</b> (Gaagudju), <b>Slovenian</b> , <b>Lithuanian</b> , (Indo-European), <b>Dumo</b> (Skou), <b>Djeebbana</b> , <b>Burarra</b> , <b>Nakkara</b> (Maningrida), <b>Ngandi</b> , <b>Nunggubuyu</b> , <b>Anindilyakwa</b> (Gunwinyguan), <b>Murrinpatha</b> (Southern Daly), <b>Touo</b> (Isolate), <b>Bora</b> (Boran), <b>Murui Huitoto</b> (Witotoan), //Ani,   Gana, Buga/Khwe, Nama, Korana (Khoe-Kwadi),
DU	3 + 2	<b>Kamoro</b> (Nuclear Trans New-Guinea)
DU	3 + 1	Cocama-Cocamilla (Tupian)
DU	2 + 1	
DU	2	
DU	1	<b>Wutung</b> (Skou)

Table 2: Languages with gender on local person pronouns

Additional notes:

- Aramaic shows gender distinctions in 1<sup>st</sup> person in object forms
- Nunggubuyu has gender distinctions in 1<sup>st</sup> person only in the trial number
- Touo has gender distinctions in all three persons in the trial as well
- Kamoro uses the same pronoun for 2.DU.M and 3.DU.M *ki-mané* and for 2.DU.F and 3.DU.F *ka°ka-mané*

## 2.1 Generalizations

### 2.1.1 Global level

- Gender distinctions on 1<sup>st</sup>+2<sup>nd</sup>+3<sup>rd</sup> person are present across all three number values.
- Gender distinctions in 3<sup>rd</sup>+2<sup>nd</sup> person are present across all three number values.
- Gender distinctions on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person to the exclusion of 3<sup>rd</sup> seem to be possible both in the SG and PL: Paez (isolate; Colombia) and Emmi (Western Daly; Australia).
- Gender distinctions only on 2<sup>nd</sup> person are present in 4 languages in the SG, none in the DU or PL. In those languages, gender distinctions are however present in 3<sup>rd</sup> person object pronouns: Iraqw (Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic; Tanzania, Mous 1993:112,114), Burunge (Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic; Tanzania, Kießling 1994:87), Sha (Afro-Asiatic, Chadic; Nigeria, Junggraithmayr 1970:249).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Tuareg Berber languages seem to have gender distinctions on object forms as well. I have no record of Moken object pronoun forms yet. Additionally, Kofyar and Minangkabau are claimed to have gender distinctions only in 2<sup>nd</sup> person by Siewierska (2013a).

- Gaps in the following conditions:
  - (i) only 1<sup>st</sup> person in singular and plural,<sup>4</sup>
  - (ii) only 2<sup>nd</sup> person non-singular,
  - (iii) only 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person non-singular,
  - (iv) 3<sup>rd</sup>+1<sup>st</sup> person in the plural.<sup>5</sup>

The generalizations above can be more formally summarised as follows:

- (3) *Generalisation I:*  
Having gender distinctions in 1<sup>st</sup> person singular entails having gender distinctions in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and/or 3<sup>rd</sup> person as well.
- (4) *Generalisation II:*  
Having gender distinctions in 1<sup>st</sup> person non-singular entails having gender distinctions on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person as well.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.1.2 Individual-language level

Languages that have gender distinctions in local person...

- **only in the SG:** Ngala, Abkhaz, Amharic, Aramaic, Musey, Kera, Lele, Hausa, Mupun, Kulere, Fyer, Ron, Zari, Miya, Burunge, Iraqw, Moken, Manambu, Kwoma, Paez
  - **only in the non-SG<sup>7</sup>:**
    - **both PL and DU:** Gaagudju, Slovenian
    - **only DU :** Dumo, Kamoro, Djeebana, Burrara, Nakkara, Murrinpatha, Nunggubuyu, Ngandi, Anindilyakwa, Touo, Murui Huitoto, Bora, Wutung, Lithuanian
    - **only PL (language lacks DU) :** Berber (Tumzabt), Spanish, Provençal, Shina
    - **only PL (language has DU):** Monumbo, Emmi<sup>8</sup>
  - **both in the SG and in the non-SG:** Korana, Hadza, Berber (Riffian, Tacelhiyt, Kabyle, Aures, Tamazight, Tuareg), Arabic, Hebrew, Beja, //Ani, Buga/Khwe, ||Gana, Nama, Cocama-Cocamilla, Tunica
- ⇒ The latter present a really good test case to inspect the interaction of all three types of features, e.g. in terms of their morphological realisation.

### 2.1.3 Morphological level

- Languages whose pronouns can be further segmented and which have been argued to have separate gender morphemes: Spanish, Provençal, Lithuanian, Slovenian, Berber, Amharic, Arabic, Beja, //Ani, ||Gana, Buga, Nama, Korana, Hadza, Dumo, Kwoma, Kamoro, Djeebana, Burrara, Murrinpatha, Nunggubuyu, Anindilyakwa, Gaagudju, Touo, Bora, Paez, Tunica, Ngandi, Nakkara, Wutung, Emmi
- Languages where the pronouns are not that obviously segmentable: Abkhaz, Musey, Kera, Lele, Hausa, Mupun, Monumbo, Shina,
- Not entirely clear picture in: Aramaic, Hebrew, Kulere, Fyer, Ron, Sha, Zari, Miya, Burunge, Iraqw, Moken, Ngala, Manambu, Cocama-Cocamilla, Murui Huitoto

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<sup>4</sup>Distinctions on 1<sup>st</sup> person only are found in Wutung (Skou) in the dual. Marmion (2010:250f.) notes that they are in fact formed by combining the formative *he-* with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun form in order to create a masculine and a feminine version of the 1<sup>st</sup> person dual exclusive pronoun, and with the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular pronoun to form 1.DU.INC. Additionally, the author states: “While these three pronouns were well-known to my informants, only one of them occurs in my text collection, and that in only a single example” (Marmion 2010:251).

<sup>5</sup>The combination 3+1 should arguably be excluded across the board as in Cocama Cocamilla, there is a difference between female and male speech with respect to using particular morphology, such as agreement suffixes and pronouns. The gender of the third person pronoun actually reflects the gender of the speaker, and not the gender of the pronoun’s referent (Vallejos Yopán 2010)

<sup>6</sup>Cocama-Cocamilla (Tupian) and Wutung (Skou) apparent counterexamples.

<sup>7</sup>These are interesting as counterexamples to Greenberg’s Universal 37, but also in terms of number being important as a precondition for the realisation of gender, as well as for the interaction between all  $\phi$ -features.

<sup>8</sup>Though not entirely clear, since ?:124 uses features MINIMAL and AUGmented to denote number and AUG allegedly corresponds to the traditional plural.

### 3 Analysis

#### 3.1 Feature representation

- The generalizations above, repeated in (5)–(6) point towards a dependency between person, number and gender features in the languages under scrutiny.

(5) *Generalisation I:*

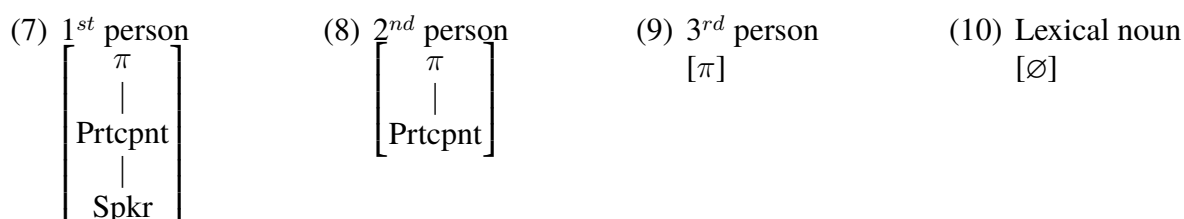
Pronouns that have gender on 1<sup>st</sup> person in the singular have it on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and/or 3<sup>rd</sup> person as well.

(6) *Generalisation II:*

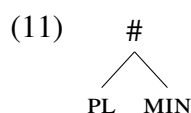
Having gender distinctions in 1<sup>st</sup> person non-singular entails having gender distinctions on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person as well.

#### Person features:

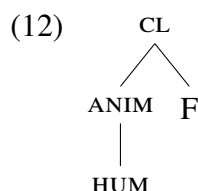
- Generalisation II basically indicates that the formal description of second person is included in the formal description of the first person, see Harley and Ritter (2002); Ackema and Neeleman (2013, 2018).
- **Assumption 1: Person** features can be further decomposed such that the complexity of their representation increases from the 3<sup>rd</sup> (9) towards the 1<sup>st</sup> person (7) (McGinnis 2005; Georgi 2012, 2013; Nevins 2007; Béjar and Řezáč 2009; Preminger 2014; Deal 2015; Kalin 2019).



- Generalisation II (6) also seems to indicate that number may block gender from appearing on 1<sup>st</sup> or on 2<sup>nd</sup> person to the exclusion of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, i.e. enforces the presence of gender on 3<sup>rd</sup> person as well. Since 3<sup>rd</sup> person is included in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> is included in the 1<sup>st</sup> person, in order to account for this we need to make sure gender and plural number are represented together with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person – 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person should come for free.
- **Assumption 2: Number** is represented by features [#] as a general number node and [PL] node below it, as in (11) based on Harley and Ritter (2002). To that we can add the feature [MINIMAL] to represent dual number.
- Singular number is the absence of number, hence the absence of #P (Kratzer 2007; Nevins 2011; Pesetsky 2013; Despić 2017).



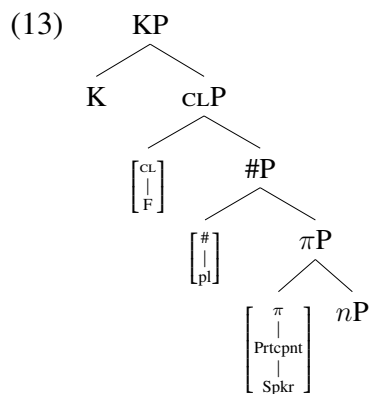
- **Assumption 3: Gender** is represented in terms of a general gender node CLASS, a marked feminine value [F] and an animacy and humanness specification, represented as an [ANIM] and [HUM] nodes, as in (12) (see also Hammerly 2018; Caha 2021; Adamson and Anagnostopoulou 2025; Puškar-Gallien to appear,t for similar proposals for French, Zapotec, Czech, Greek and Serbo-Croatian). Proposed hierarchy for gender:



- The representation of gender in (12) Direct link between gender and features [ANIM] and [HUMAN] as subparts of its specification.
  - [CL]: Root node always present when representing gender.
  - [F]: Activated with feminine nouns.
  - [CL[F]]: Feminine grammatical gender.
  - [CL[ANIM[HUM]][F]]: Feminine natural gender.
  - [CL[ANIM[HUM]]]: Masculine natural gender<sup>9</sup>
  - [CL] alone: grammatical masculine gender.
  - no [CL]: no gender, hence neuter.
- Differences between natural and grammatical gender fall out from their feature structure.
- Markedness of gender may be expressed in terms of the number of nodes it contains: feminine natural gender the most marked one, grammatical masculine the least.
- **Assumption 4:** Each feature type projects a phrase.
- No root –  $n$  is the base (Moskal 2015).
- Person is lower than number: Noyer (1992); Trommer (2002); Harbour (2007, 2008, 2016); Arregi and Nevins (2012) argue that person affixes strongly tend to be linearised towards the left, and number affixes to the right; Mirror Theory (Baker 1985; Brody 2000; Brody and Szabolcsi 2003) suggests a lower base position of person with respect to number;
- Harbour (2016); Ackema and Neeleman (2018): person higher than number makes wrong predictions for possible and impossible pronoun inventories.
- Following van Urk (2018); Smith et al. (2018), I assume  $\pi$  to be local to the pronominal base, however I take it to head its own projection,  $\pi P$ , above the  $nP$ . Number heads a further projection,  $\#P$ .
- Grammatical gender heads its own projection  $CLP$  above  $\#P$ .
- GENDER as a category can be dispersed across the nominal spine (Steriopolo and Wiltschko 2010; Pesetsky 2013; Landau 2016; Kučerová 2018; Steriopolo 2018a,b; Fassi Fehri 2018, but see Arsenijević 2021 for an alternative view).
- Here,  $CLP$  will host the morphologically realised GENDER.
- Finally, case is hosted by a projection above the  $CLP$  –  $KP$  (Bittner and Hale 1996; Caha 2009; Neeleman and Szendrői 2007; Moskal 2015a,b; Smith et al. 2018).
- **Assumption 5:** Morphology interprets syntactic structures (Distributed Morphology, c.f. Halle and Marantz 1993), Vocabulary Insertion discharges syntactic features root-outwards; **cyclic realisation** of the phrases in (13) (Bobaljik 2000).
- **Assumption 6:**  $\#P$  is a cyclic domain in the sense of Moskal (2015b).

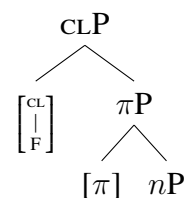
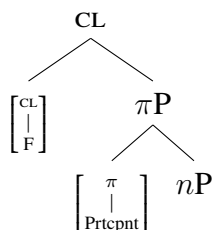
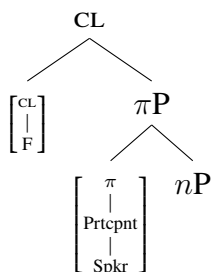
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<sup>9</sup>For all human-denoting nouns, in languages where a prototypical referent is by default male as in Serbo-Croatian; Arsenijević et al. 2022).

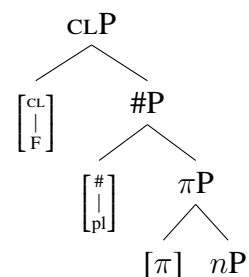
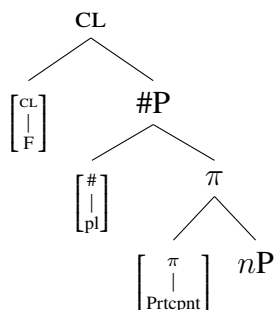
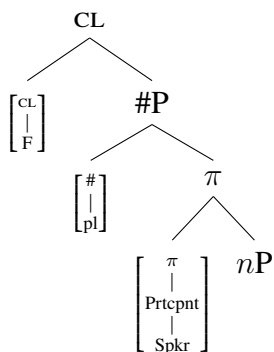


### 3.2 The representation of pronouns

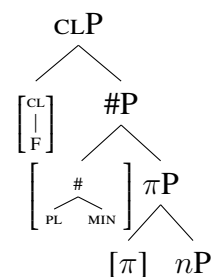
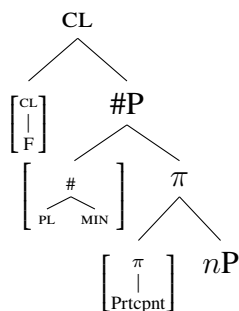
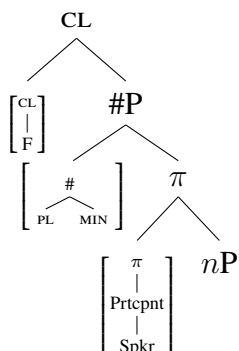
(14) Gender on 1SG pronoun:    (15) Gender on 2SG pronoun:    (16) Gender on 3SG pronoun:



(17) Gender on 1PL pronoun:    (18) Gender on 2PL pronoun:    (19) Gender on 3PL pronoun:



(20) Gender on 1DU pronoun:    (21) Gender on 2DU pronoun:    (22) Gender on 3DU pronoun:



- Singular pronouns (14)–(16) lack the #P. Their person specification depends on the features present under the  $\pi$  node.
- Plural pronouns (17)–(19) include an #P between the person features and the gender feature-bearing phrase.
- Dual pronouns (20)–(22) look similar to the plural ones, but involve one node more, the [MIN] node as a sister to [PL].

## 4 Consequences

### 4.1 Global level

- The structures above offer a possibility to represent each of the combinations from Table 2.
- *Generalisation I*: If gender is present on 1<sup>st</sup> person, it will be present on other persons due to their mutual entailment relations, c.f. Assumption 1.
- *Generalisation II*: Gender does not combine freely with any person in the non-singular number, due to cyclicity and since #P introduces a locality barrier (c.f. Assumption 2, A, A, A).
- Since the #P delimits a locality domain, by the time that the CLP gets spelled out, the lower two XPs have already been sent to Spellout. This requires a realisational approach to morphology, as is standardly assumed in Distributed Morphology. Following Bobaljik (2000), if the heads are sent to spellout cyclically, the current head that undergoes Transfer can make reference to, but cannot alter what has already been realised. Thus gender can only combine with the already realised person and number.
- In the singular this is more flexible due to the absence of the #P, so gender can combine freely either with the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> person.

### 4.2 Individual-language level

- A language like Korana (Khoe-Kwadi, South Africa), argued to offer the most complete paradigm by Siewierska (2013b), will make use of all the available structures.
- Having gender present in some environments justifies postulating it across the board.
- As a consequence, even if gender is absent in the subject pronouns, it may surface in the object forms. As mentioned above, this is the case in languages that have gender only on the 2<sup>nd</sup> person – gender distinctions are present in 3<sup>rd</sup> person object pronouns: Iraqw (Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic; Tanzania, Mous 1993:112,114), Burunge (Afro-Asiatic, Cushitic; Tanzania, Kießling 1994:87), Sha (Afro-Asiatic, Chadic; Nigeria, Jungraithmayr 1970:249).

### 4.3 Morphological level

- Assuming incremental bottom-up realisation of the syntactic structure proposed above under the general premises of Distributed Morphology, and taking the Mirror Principle (Baker 1985) into account, we predict that person should be realised closest to the nominal base, followed by number and then by gender.
- Languages in Table 3 below seem to conform to this prediction.



SG	Korana	Hadza	Beja	Gaagudju
1			(un)àni	ngaanj
1M	ti-re	'ono		
1F	ti-ta	'ono-ko		
2				ngiinja
2M	sa-ts	te	(um)baɾu:k	
2F	sa-s	te-ko	(um)baɾu:k	
3M	ll'di-b	bami	(um)baɾu:	ngaayu
3F	ll'di-s	bo-ko	(um)baɾu:	naawu
3C	ll'di-'i			
DU				
1INM	sa-kham			manaa-mana
1INF	sa-sam			manaa-njdja
1INC	sa-m			
1EXM	si-kham			ngaa-mana
1EXF	si-sam			ngaa-njdja
1EXC	s-im			
2M	sa-kharo			nginjaa-mana
2F	sa-saro			nginjaa-njdja
2C	sa-khaoo			
3M	ll'di-khara			nowoo-mana
3F	ll'di-sara			nowoo-njdja
3C	ll'di-kha			
PL				
1			(an)hiɲin	
1INM	sa-tje	'uni-bi'i		man-aada
1INF	sa-se	'one-be'e		man-eemba
1INC	sa-da			
1EXM	si-tje	'u-bi'i		ng-aada
1EXF	si-se	'o-be'e		ng-aamba
1EXC	si-da			
2M	sa-kaoo	'iti-bi	(am)baɾa:k(na)	nginj-aada
2F	sa-sao	'ete-be	(am)baɾa:k(na)	nginj-eemba
2C	sa-du			
3M	ll'dku	bi'i	(am)baɾa:	now-ooda
3F	ll'dide	be'e	(am)baɾa:	now-oomba
3C	ll'dine			

Table 3: Personal pronouns in Korana (Khoekwadi, South Africa; Siewierska 2013b), Hadza (isolate, Tanzania; Sands 2013:270), Beja (Cushitic, Sudan; Vanhove 2014:16,18,19) and Gaagudju (Gaagudju, Australia; Harvey 2002)

## 5 Further predictions and future work

- Apart from looking at the pronominal paradigms in the languages mentioned above, I have been looking at their entire  $\phi$  system and its expression.
- In order to understand the interactions of  $\phi$ -features, we need to inspect the other parts of the language system where they play a role:
  - (1) Pronoun form (including subject and object forms and morphological categories that they express)
  - (2) Clitics
  - (3) nominal inflection
  - (4)  $\phi$ -feature encoding on verbs
  - (5)  $\phi$ -feature encoding on adjectives

- Agreement: A prediction that the proposal makes is that gender should be present on agreement markers, if it is present on pronouns, it should be present on agreement markers. This is still under scrutiny.

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