

# Notes on the Gender of Nouns in Semitic

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## 1. Introductory

My contribution to the ‘First Barcelona Symposium on Comparative Semitics’, which I was asked to give in order to fill an otherwise empty slot, was on loanwords (Watson 2005). As we shall see at this Second Symposium, the same topic recurs in the present paper, which is on gender, or more specifically, on lexical gender or the gender of nouns.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Preamble

These days, the subject of grammatical gender is no longer topical. In library catalogues or on the Internet, almost all the entries on “gender” concern sociology, sexual orientation or the like. One exception is the recent book on gender by Greville Corbett (1991) with the disarmingly simple title *Gender*, which in fact deals with grammatical gender. In Semitic studies, the two main works on gender are *Du genre grammaticale en sémitique* by Féghaly / Cuny (1924) and Ibrahim’s book on *Grammatical Gender* (1973). There are also a number of partial studies in the journals (see bibliography).<sup>2</sup> My own studies of grammatical gender, in respect of nouns, have been specifically in connection with the poetic technique that I have labelled “gender-matched synonymous parallelism”, where words of the same gender are matched in a line of verse.<sup>3</sup> The fact that gender was exploited in poetry indicates that the speakers were aware of it. For example: in Ugaritic “like a sister (*ah̄t*) is the bed (<sup>c</sup>*rš*) of illness” (KTU 1.16 vi 35-36), where both *ah̄t* and <sup>c</sup>*rš* are feminine.

A history of the study of gender in Semitic is given by Ibrahim (1973: 14-23) and need not be repeated here. It should be noted, of course, that we are dealing with a dead as opposed to living language, with all the limitations that involves, including the lack of native speakers as informants, a small and restricted corpus of texts, etc. All this means that the conclusions will be correspondingly incomplete and to some extent, uncertain.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 Definitions of Grammatical Gender

1. My thanks to Gábor Takács for help with Egyptian.

2. It is curious that in Norwegian some f. nouns have to be feminine in gender but that generally it is optional whether or not a noun is of common (i.e. m.) gender. The f. form tends to be less formal and common gender is used in texts (see Bråtveit *et al.* 1995: 19).

3. Watson 1980; 1981. I have noted (Watson 1994b) that in the Hebrew Song of Songs, the masculine form is used in reference to the man and the feminine form refers to the woman. It is a matter of style or a poetic device. It also indicates an awareness of gender, as mentioned below. For some critical comments on this, see Zehnder 2004: 27 n. 22.

4. Not all dictionaries of ANE languages indicate the genders of nouns. For example, DNWSI does not but BDB, CDA and DUL do.

Before discussing grammatical gender in Semitic, we can look briefly at some definitions of gender. According to Ibrahim, “Gender ... is a syntactic category with sex as the corresponding notional category. In fact ... as a syntactic category gender simply classifies nouns into two or three classes for the purposes of agreement (or concord). In so doing, gender is not essentially different from other systems of noun classification...” (Ibrahim 1973: 11). Another definition: “Gender is a grammatical category used for the analysis of word classes displaying such contrasts as masculine/feminine/neuter, animate/ inanimate, etc.” (Crystal 1980: 158). A very recent book on grammatical gender (Franceschina 2005) provides no fewer than fifteen definitions of the term. For example: “...in many (and perhaps most) languages the gender assignment of nouns is semantically arbitrary except that for animate nouns or for human nouns gender is predictable from sex...” (Nichols 1992: 125). According to Corbett (1991: 312): “The ultimate source of gender systems is nouns, more specifically nouns with classificatory possibilities such as ‘woman’, ‘man’ and ‘animal’”, or what in our field would be called determinatives.

The generally accepted theory is that the presence of gender in a language is determined by *agreement* or *concord*, not by markers on nouns. This does not always seem to be the case, as we will see. Simplifying, we can say that gender is only one of a number of possible divisions of nouns into classes. In his contribution to the Symposium on Hamito-Semitic held in 1970, Castellino (1975: 354) proposed the following Table of Criteria based on classifications for number and gender:

- (1) masculine/feminine
- (2) animate/inanimate
- (3) person/thing (or human/non-human)
- (4) I/you / he/she
- (5) individual/collective
- (6) concrete/abstract
- (7) singular/plural
- (8) major/minor

Languages can have a number of genders, some languages with as many as twenty, as in Fula, a Niger-Congo language (cf. Corbett 2006: 753). Fortunately, in Semitic there are usually only two, namely masculine and feminine, although some nouns can have common gender.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.3 *Two Topics*

The two topics considered here are the assignment of gender and the function of gender.

(a) *The assignment of gender*: Here I look at sets of nouns in a range of Semitic languages and within one language (Ugaritic) to determine whether there are any rules or patterns, as Féghaly / Cuny already did in 1924, before the discovery of Ugaritic. I am also looking at the assignment of gender in loanwords.<sup>6</sup> Why, for instance is Akk. *ēkallu*, “palace” feminine, whereas Ugaritic *hkl*, Hebrew *hēkal* and Aram. *hykl* are masculine? All these are borrowed from Sumerian *é.gal*, lit. “large house”, which has no gender. Why is Ug. *krk*, “pickaxe”, feminine even though it is borrowed from Egyptian *grg*, which is masculine?

(b) *The function of gender*: What is the function of gender in terms of homonyms? Can gender differentiate similar sounding words? Why are there nouns where gender seems to make no difference to meaning? Tables of these types are provided for discussion.

5. On gender in Semitic see Lipiński 2001: 235-242.

6. See the brief discussion in Hoch 1994: 443-445.

## 2. Assigning Gender

### 2.1 *The Assignment of Gender*

According to the textbooks on gender, speakers of a language know the gender of a noun from two kinds of information: meaning (or semantics) and form. “Languages may use semantic rules, or semantic **and** formal rules, but not **only** formal assignment rules” (Corbett 2006: 751). In other words, gender can be assigned by semantics alone, e.g. terms for males are masculine, terms for females are feminine. In addition, gender can be determined by morphology. For example, the *-at* ending is usually feminine. Sometimes, of course, both criteria apply, as in Akk. *iššurtu*, “female bird”, which is semantically feminine but also has the marker *-t*. However, there are unmarked feminine nouns such as Akk. *šer’u*, “furrow”<sup>7</sup> and conversely, some apparently feminine nouns are masculine, e.g. Ug. *dlt*, “door”. In Semitic languages, the default, unmarked gender is masculine and the marked gender (with endings such as *-t*, *-y* etc.) is, generally, feminine. However, unmarked nouns that refer to females (women, female professions, female animals) are of course feminine. Unmarked feminine nouns (in Ugaritic) are, for example, *um*, “mother”<sup>8</sup>, *arḥ*, “cow”, *tat*, “ewe”, *atn* (only pl. attested) “she-ass”. These are all semantically determined for gender. According to Tropper (UG, 284-87) other unmarked feminine nouns have the following groupings: certain species of animals, parts of the body, especially in pairs, terms for the countryside and cosmic terms, raw materials, trees, certain vessels, tools, measures, and geographical terms. Yet these groupings are not exclusively feminine in gender and the sets seem somewhat arbitrary.<sup>9</sup> This is exemplified by the list of names for parts of the body *in pairs* (see below). Evidently, the masculine/feminine distribution for such names of pairs is about even (note that only four have a feminine marker). In other words, the *semantic* criterion does not apply.

Another example of how gender is assigned is the complete set of nouns that refer to parts of the body (here both humans and animals are included) given in Table 1. Of the 57 items listed, 20 are feminine, 21 are masculine, the rest are uncertain. Which criteria are being applied here? For example, the term for “kidneys” is feminine throughout and the term for “mouth” is masculine in all the languages, but there is no set gender for others, such as the term for “liver”. Some of these fluctuations can be explained. For example, in the set of words for “hair”, Heb. *šē<sup>c</sup>ār* (m.) denotes hair in general and *šā<sup>c</sup>rāh* (f.) denotes a single hair. Also, Akk. *rēmtu*, “womb”, is used only of animals, whereas Akk. *rēmu* is used generically. In general, though, there is no dominant gender for names of parts of the body. As mentioned above, this even applies to paired items: terms for “breast”, “heel”, “horn”, “testicle”, “thigh” and “left” and “right” hands are masculine; terms for “ear”, “elbow”, “eye”, “foot”, “kidney”, “knee”, “lip” “palm” and “plait” are feminine. The gender of other items in pairs, such as “arm”, “flank”, “hand”, “loin”, “shoulder” and “wing” remains uncertain, and the same applies for some items in individual languages.

The above can be summarised as follows. Corbett (2006: 751-752) claims that “In no language are nouns assigned to genders ... by purely formal rules”. However, against this claim is the fact that in Semitic, feminine endings such as *-t*, *-at* (and their allomorphs such as *-āh* or *-ā*) and *-y* (realised as *-ī*) *can*

7. For possible cognates see Kogan 2006: 272 and n. 8; Pentiuć 2001: 172.

8. “It is noteworthy that such well represented terms as *\*?amm-at-* ‘elbow, cubit’ and *\*?imm-* ‘mother’ are primarily differentiated by the constant presence of the feminine marker on the former vs. its absence in the latter than by the quality of the root-vowel. The same applies to *\*kull-* ‘all’ vs. *\*kall-at-* ‘daughter-in-law, bride’” (Kogan 2005: 155 n. 48).

9. See also Zehnder (2004: 25) for a critique of Albrecht’s criteria for ascribing gender to nouns.

determine the gender of nouns.<sup>10</sup> Also, apart from obvious cases (such as terms for males/females), generally semantics *does not* seem to apply.

## 2.2 Assigning Gender to Loanwords

Another aspect of the topic we are considering is the question of how loanwords are assigned their gender. It would seem that the following factors determine the gender of a loanword.<sup>11</sup>

(a) If the loanword refers to an animate being, semantic content is foremost:

- both Ug. *ṭdr*, “girl” (a loanword from Hurro-Hittite *šiduri*, possibly through Akkadian) and Ug. *ṭl*, “girl” (also a loanword from Hurro-Hittite *šali*) are clearly feminine, even though there is no gender in Hurrian.

(b) If the loanword refers to an inanimate object:

(1) unmarked loans are assigned to the unmarked (masculine) gender

This applies, for example, to most Heb. and Ug. loanwords, which are m.

- Ug. *all*, “garment”, a loan from Hurrian *alāli*<sup>12</sup> (no gender), is m.

(2) the loanword adopts the gender of the native word it replaces:

- Sum. *é.gal* (no gender) → Akk. *ēkallu* (f.) (rarely m.) but → Ug./Heb. *hkl* (m.). Here, apparently, Ug. *hkl* adopts the gender of *bt* in the expression *bt mlk*, lit. “house of the king”, i.e. “palace”.<sup>13</sup>

- Ug. *ušpḡt* (f.), “garment” (< Akk. *uš/spahḫu* (m.), “garment” < Hurr. no gender) replaces Ug. *ktn* “tunic”, which is f. The feminine ending has been added in Ugaritic (*ušpḡt*).

(3) the loanword retains its original gender:<sup>14</sup>

- Akk. *asītu* (f.), “tower”<sup>15</sup> → Heb. *’ašayāh* (f.), “watch-tower”

- Akk. *maqartu* (f.), “a vessel” → Ug. *mqrt* (f.), “container”<sup>16</sup>

- Akk. *pirištu* (f.), “secret” → Ug. *prtṭ* (f.), “secret”

- Akk. *azamillu* (pl. f.), “sack, net” → Ug. *a/izml* (f.), “sack”

- Akk. *igāru* (also *igartu*, f.) (pl. f.), “wall” → Aram. *’gr* (f.), “wall”<sup>17</sup>

- Heb. *mazzālôt*, “constellations of the zodiac”, a loan from Akk. *mazzaltum*, “position” (of constellations), both f.<sup>18</sup>

10. “In Egyptian all feminine nouns have the ending *t* added to the root” (Allen 2001: 35). It is a separate ending, hence the separating dot, e.g. *sn.t*. Masculine nouns have no special ending, but some have *j* or *w* added to the root. Place names are always treated as feminine, whatever their ending (Allen 2001 §4.8).

11. These rules have been adapted from Ibrahim 1973: 61-62.

12. Watson 1990: 139-140.

13. See the data collected by Mankowski 2001: 51-52. The word was also borrowed in Egyptian as m. (dual) (Hoch 1994: 213 §290).

14. As Hoch (1994: 445) notes: “In general, the Egyptians maintained the gender of the source language quite carefully, but there are a few instances of gender changes, most of which were introduced by error”.

15. For the various forms see CDA, 25b under *asa’itu*; see also Mankowski 2000: 40-42.

16. See also Arab. *miqrāt*, borrowed in Egyptian as *maqru* and *mqrt*: cf. Hoch 1994: 167 §218.

17. The discussion of this word by Kogan 2006: 270 §2 makes no reference to gender.

18. See Kaufman 1974: 69-70; Mankowski 2001: 86-87.

Retention of gender may indicate that Ug. *krpn* (m.) does not come from Akk. *karpatu* (f.), “pot” but from Old Akk. *karpum*, “pot” (CDA, 149b; CAD K, 221a) which is m.<sup>19</sup> However, see next section.

(4) differentiation in meaning can motivate a difference in gender:

- Akk. *kamānu* (f.), “a sweetened cake” → Heb. *kawwānīm* (m.), “sacrificial cake”. Akk. *kamānu* was simply a shepherd’s dish prepared with honey and figs (cf. CAD K, 111a), but Heb. *kawwānīm* were “sacrificial cakes” offered to the Queen of Heaven.<sup>20</sup>
- Akk. *zamru* (m.), “fruit(s)” → Heb. *z<sup>l</sup>môrāh* (f.), “vine-(shoot)”, where the change in meaning is clear.

However, this is not always the case. Note the change of gender in Akk. (*a*)*bukkatu* (f.), “a rush” → Ug. *<sup>c</sup>bk* (m.), “a plant”, although there is no change of meaning: both are medicinal plants. Similarly, a change in gender unaccompanied by a difference in meaning is apparent in Ug. *<sup>c</sup>rq* (m.), “wagon”, borrowed from Akk. *erequ(m)* (f.), also “wagon”.<sup>21</sup> Other problems remain unresolved. For example, what is the reason for the feminine gender of Ug. *ḥbrt*, “stewpot” (DUL, 385)? It is a loan from Hurrian *ḥuprušhi*, “vessel” (through Akkadian) - but the Hurrian word has no gender - and its gender is not marked in any Akk. dictionary (presumably it is m.). Similarly, Ug. *ḥlu*, “cake” is masculine (DUL, 389), but Heb. *ḥallāh*, “bread cake” is feminine. Is it perhaps a loan from Hittite *ḥāli*, “pastry”, which is common in gender? Why is Heb. *sullām*, “stairs”, masculine when it seems to have been borrowed from Akk. *simmiltu*, “staircase”, which is feminine?<sup>22</sup> Curiously, Ug. *šin* (A), “shoe” is masculine, whereas Akk. *šēnu nu* (A) with the same meaning is feminine - but Ug. *šin* (B), “part of chariot” is feminine, whereas Akk. *šēnu* (B), also part of chariot, is masculine. As yet there is no *systematic* study of this aspect of loanwords.

### 3. The Function of Gender

#### 3.1 Gender and Homonyms

Some homonyms are distinguished by gender in Semitic, although of course they may have been pronounced differently as well, and so would be merely homographs. The function of gender here is *disambiguation*, i.e. to separate the two meanings of words that seem to be indistinguishable. The following sets of apparently identical words have different meanings depending only on their gender.

##### 3.1.1 Words Identical in Form but Differentiated by Gender

Note that the feminine forms of almost all these words have *no* gender marker. Generally, they have different etymologies.

(a) AKKADIAN: *īnu* (m.), “wine” (< *yayin*) / *īnu* (f.), “eye” (< *<sup>c</sup>ayin*); *išrum* (m.), “tithe” (< \**<sup>c</sup>šr* “ten”) / *išrum* (f.), “sash”; *lulû* (m.), “luxury” (< *lalû*) / *lulû* (f.), “slag” (of metals) (Sum. lw.); *nāru* (m.), “musician” (Sum. lw.) / *nāru* (f.), “river” (com. Sem. *nhr*); *qû* (m.) “flax” / *qû* (f.), “measure”; *saparru*

19. However, see Syriac *krpt*, “vessels”, cited by Kaufman 1974: 63.

20. For discussion, but without reference to gender, see Mankowski 2000: 61-62.

21. See Dietrich / Loretz / Sanmartín 1975: 107 §20, although the change in gender went unnoticed.

22. See the discussion of this specific point in Mankowski 2001: 116; he suggests that the word may be of foreign origin and mentions Phoen. *smlt* (cf. DNWSI, 788).

(m.), “net” / *saparru* (f.), “cart”; *šibtu* (m.), “seizure” / *šibtu* (f.), “interest”; *šamū* (m.), “sky” / *šamū* (f.), “rain”; *zerqu* (f. *zerqatu*), “desert lynx”<sup>23</sup> / *zerqu* (m.) (pl. f.!), “strewn plants, litter”.

(b) HEBREW: *’āh* (m.), “brother” (com. Sem.) / *’āh* (f.), “brazier” (lw. from Eg. *ḥ* m.); *kôš* (m.), “owl” / *kôš* (f.), “cup”; *’îr* (m.), “agitation” / *’îr* (f.), “city”; *tôr* (m.), “plait, string” / *tôr* (f.), “turtle-dove”<sup>24</sup>.

(c) UGARITIC: *ḥzm* (m.), “power” / *ḥzm* (f.), “bone” (Akk. *ešemtu*); *dlt* (m.), “door” (cf. Akk. *edēlu*) / *dlt* (f.), “poverty” (*dll*); *lh* (m.), “missive” (Heb. *lū<sup>a</sup>h*) / *lh* (f.), “jaw” (Heb. *l<sup>h</sup>hî*); *npš* (m.), “wool” (lw. from Akk. *nipšu* (m.), “tuft”) / *npš* (f.), “throat” (Heb. *nepes̄*, Akk. *napištu*, both f.); *pṯt* (m.), “linen”, pl. *pṯtm* (Heb. *pištâ* (f.), “flax”) / *pṯt* (f.), “cosmetics box” (lw. from Akk. *piššatu* (f.), “ointment container”)<sup>25</sup>; *rḥ* (m.), “aroma” (Heb. *r<sup>a</sup>h* (m.), HALOT, 1226a) / *rḥ* (f.), “gust breath” (Heb. *rū<sup>a</sup>h* f. but often m.); *šin* (m.), “shoe” (Akk. *šēnu* (f.), “sandal(s), shoe(s)”, CDA, 367a) / *šin* (f.), “tyre rim (of wheel)” (Akk. *šēnu*, *šinu*, “part of waggon”); *yd* (m.), “love” (*ydd*) / *yd* (f.), “hand” (a primary noun).

### 3.1.2 Words with Different m. and f. Forms, Differentiated in Meaning

See for example Spanish *paso* (m.), “step” / *pasa* (f.), “raisin” or Italian *faraone* (m.), “pharaoh” (a loan from Egyptian) / *faraona* (f.), “guinea-fowl” (so-called because it comes from Egypt). Other near-homonyms are only differentiated by the presence or lack of a feminine ending. Many of these differences can be explained from their etymology or they may be loanwords. Ug. *yp*, “beauty” derives from the root YPY, “to be beautiful” whereas *ypt*, “cow” has an assimilated *-n-*, as it can be explained by Arab. *yafanat*. In some cases, it is clear that one word has been derived from the other, as in Akk. *sinnu(m)*, “swallow-fish”, which evidently derives from *sinuntu* “swallow”. Another example is Ug. *rimt*, “zither” (i.e. “bull-shaped musical instrument”), which comes from *rum*, “bull”.<sup>26</sup> In the following list the masculine form is given first, then the feminine form.

(a) AKKADIAN: *eripu*, “bronze object” (< Hurr.) / *eriptu*, “colourful garment” (W. Sem.?); *ḥalḥallu*, “a basket” / *ḥalḥallatu*, “a kind of drum”; *išaru*, “penis” / *išartu*, “prosperity”; *kizzu* “goat” (also *kazzu* and *gizzu*) / *kizzatu*, “deduction” (*k/gazāzu*, “to shear”, so possibly they are cognate); *maḥḥalu*, “basket, box” / *maḥḥaltu*, “sieve” (but both from *naḥālu*); *masla’u*, “jug” / *masla’tu*, “infection”; *nakkapu*, “tip” / *nakkaptu*, “brow”; *nappalu*, “caterpillar”<sup>27</sup> / *nappaltu*, “rubble; balance”; *naspanu*, “harrow” / *naspantu*, “devastation”; *sinūnu(m)*, “swallow-fish” / *sinuntu*, “swallow”; *sūqu*, “street” (pl. m. and f.;  $\sqrt{\text{siāqu}}$ ) / *suqtu(m)* (also *zuqtu*), “chin”; *šubulu*, “jewellery” / *šubultu*, “ear of barley”; *tamḥāru*, “battle” / *tamḥartu*, “square (number)”; *ṭābu*, “good” / *ṭābtu*, “salt”; *ubbunu*, “garment” / *ubbuntu*, “vessel”.

23. Note the meaning “sheep” in NA.

24. Once m. (Lev 14:3); note that Ug. *tr*, “turtle-dove”, is m. (DUL, 876).

25. “Man sollte übriges zwischen ug. *pṯt* I ‘Leinen’ *pṯt* II ‘(Schmink-)Kästchen’ unterscheiden” (Sanmartín 1987: 54 n. 7).

26. For more examples see Kogan 2005: 153-156.

27. The variation in spelling (*nappillu*, *nabillu*) may indicate it to be a loanword.

(b) HEBREW: *beqa<sup>c</sup>*, “half-shekel” / *biq<sup>c</sup>āh*, “valley”; *ḥāsīd*, “pious” / *ḥ<sup>a</sup>sīdāh*, “stork”; *libnēh*, “storax-tree” (Eg. *nnjb* m.) / *l<sup>l</sup>bānāh*, “full moon”; *mikmār*, “snare” / *mikmeret*, “fishing-net”;<sup>28</sup> *melîš*, “go-between” / *m<sup>e</sup>lîšāh*, “proverb”; *mānēh*, “mina” / *mānāh*, “portion” (cf. Ug. *mn* and *mt*); *mānôh*, “weaver’s beam” / *m<sup>e</sup>nôrah*, “lampstand”; *sûp*, “reed” / *sûpâ*, “storm, gale”; *sîr*, “cooking-pot”<sup>29</sup> / *sîrah*, “hook” (Eg. *sr.t*, “thorn”); *ēd*, “witness” / *ēdāh*, “throng, etc.” (Ug. *dt*); *pûr*, “lot”<sup>30</sup> / *pûrah*, “trough”; *šāpîr*, “goat” / *š<sup>e</sup>pîrah*, “wreath”; *tôr*, “dove” / *tôrah*, “instruction”<sup>31</sup>.

(c) UGARITIC: *al*, “ram” / *alt*, “curse”; *anš*, “tendon”<sup>32</sup> / *anšt*, “weakness”; *ar*, “light” / *art*, “shield” (Akk. *arī.tu*, “shield/dagger”); *d*, “throne” / *dt*, “assembly”; *pr*, “social group”<sup>33</sup> / *p<sup>r</sup>t*, “clothing”; *bšr*, “flesh” / *bšrt*, “news”; *dkr*, “male animal” / *dkrt*, “bowl”; *dm*, “blood” / *dmt*, “tower” (lw. from Akk. *dimtu*); *dn*, “strength” / *dnt*, “fornication”; *kdr*, “trough” / *kdrt*, “ball”; *kpr*, “henna” / *kprt*, “henna-plant”<sup>34</sup>; *mṭ*, “rod” (Heb. *maṭṭēh*) / *mṭt*, “bed” (Heb. *miṭṭāh*); *np*, “peak” / *npt*, “sieve” (Akk. *nappī.tu*); *pnm*, “face” (Heb. *pānīm*) / *pnt*, “knuckle” (Heb. *pinnāh*, “corner”); *qšr*, “anklebone” (Pun. *qšrt*) / *qšrt*, “shortness”; *qš*, “tankard” / *qšt*, “bow”; *rum*, “buffalo” / *rimt*, “zither”; *rq*, “sheet” / *rqt*, “temple” (Akk. *raqqatu*, Heb. *\*rqh*)<sup>35</sup>; *rt*, “mud” / *rtt*, “net”<sup>36</sup>; *skn*, “stela” / *sknt*, “form”; *šp*, “dune” / *špt*, “lip” (Eg. *sp.t*); *ššr*, “minium” / *ššrt*, “gizzard”<sup>37</sup>; *yp*, “beauty” / *ypt*, “cow”; *yrk*, “shoulder” / *yrkt*, “beam”; *ytn*, “group” / *ytn*, “gift”.

The point is that even if there are etymological or historical explanations for these similar forms, most probably the average user of a language was unaware of them (or they were not uppermost in his mind) and therefore he had to base his analysis on context and experience.

### 3.1.3 Words Identical in Meaning Irrespective of Gender

On the other hand, some words have both masculine and feminine forms with *no* clear differentiation between them (excluding, of course, masculine and feminine forms of the same word, e.g. Ug. *kdn* and *kdnt*, meaning “male mule” and “female mule” respectively). Examples are:

(a) AKKADIAN: *uggu* and *uggatu*, “anger”; *izziru* (also *izru*) and *izzirtu*, “curse”<sup>38</sup>; *būru* and *būrtu*, “cistern”; *kīmu* and *kimtu*, “family”; *lubāru* and *lubārtu*, “garment”; *maksû* and *maksûtu*, “bandage” *maltaku* and *maltaktu*, “test”; *masharu* and *mashartu*, “container”; *narpasu* and *narpastum*, “threshing shovel”; *nēberu* and *nēbertu*, “ford”; *peqû* and *peqqûtu*, “colocynth”; *sammû(m)* and *sammîtum*, “lyre”; *summu* and *summatu*, “dove”; *šarbu*<sup>39</sup> and *šarbatu*, “Euphrates poplar”; *šaršaru* and *šaršartu*, “forest”;

28. As Hoch (1994: 169) notes: “the feminine form designates a fishing-net, and the masculine form a snare for land animals”, a pattern to which the Egyptian loanword *\*makmarôta*, “fishnet” also conforms (*ibid.* §222).

29. Cf. HSED, 96 §399.

30. For a possible etymology see Kogan 2006: 271 §6. Note that Akk. *pûru*, “lot”, is f., but *pûru*, “bowl” may be m.; see CAD P, 526-29.

31. Although these are hardly likely to be confused.

32. See below (Comments on Table 1).

33. Literally, “dusty (ones)”, from *pr*, “dust”.

34. Unless this is a case of denoting a single item in a class.

35. See Watson 2000 for details and discussion.

36. Any connection with Akk. *rašūtū*, a garment (CAD R, 213b; CDA, 300a) remains very uncertain.

37. See Watson 2006.

38. Note that Akk. *izru* is the literary form.

39. Only in divine names; see CAD Š, 109b; CDA, 334b.

*šappu* and *šappatu*, “bowl”; *taknû* and *taknîtu*, “care”; *tānîhu* and *tānîhtu*, “sighing”; *tēnînu* and *tēnintu*, “supplication”; *ṭēru* and *ṭērîtu*, “mud”.

(b) HEBREW:<sup>40</sup> *g<sup>e</sup>bûl* and *g<sup>e</sup>bûlāh*, “border”; *gîl* and *gîlāh*, “rejoicing”; *ḥoq* and *ḥuqqāh*, “regulation”; *mikmer* and *mikmeret*, “fishing-net”; *merkab* and *merkabāh*, “chariot”; *pešet* and *pištāh*, “flax”; *šîr* and *šîrāh*, “song”; *šôšan* and *šôšannāh*, “lotus”<sup>41</sup>.

(c) UGARITIC: *dġt* and *dġtt*, “perfume-offering”; *ġrpl* and *ġrplt*, “cloud”; *msk* and *mskt*, “mixture” (Eg. *mṭk*); *mṭr* and *mṭrt*, “rain” (Eg. *mtr.t*); *n<sup>c</sup>m* and *n<sup>c</sup>mt* (also *n<sup>c</sup>my*), “delight”; *nr*, “lamp” (derived from “sheen, gleam”) and *nrt*, “lamp”<sup>42</sup>; *ntb* and *ntbt*, “path” (cf. Heb. *ntyb* and *ntybh*); *qdm* and *qdmṭ*, “front part”; *tdmm* and *tdmmt*, “lasciviousness”; *thm* and *thmt*, “ocean”; *tmn* and *tmnt*, “frame”.

Sometimes the difference relates to number, e.g. Heb. *ānān*, “clouds”, plur. and *ānāh*, “raincloud”, sing.<sup>43</sup> It is also possible that in some cases the difference is due to historical reasons, as gender does change within a language<sup>44</sup>. For example, some nouns in the Qumran scrolls are different in gender from their classical Hebrew counterparts, e.g. Heb. *’eben* is f. in biblical Hebrew but m. in the *Hodayoth* from Qumran Cave 1. Another factor may be due to difference in dialect (cf. Lipiński 2001: 238). In any case, gender can fluctuate. For instance, Heb. *kerem*, “vine” is usually m. but in one text at least (Isa 27:2-3) it is f. Similarly, Heb. *šā’ar*, “gate” may be either m. or f.<sup>45</sup> Occasionally, the difference reflects a distinction in meaning, e.g. Heb. *šāpāh* is f. when it means “lip” but can be m. when it means “hem” of a garment.<sup>46</sup>

#### 4. Terms for Parts of the Body in Semitic: A Comparison

In order to illustrate the stability and fluctuation of gender across a range of Semitic languages (Akkadian, Arabic, Hebrew, Ugaritic) with some reference to a Hamitic language (in this case, ancient Egyptian), a table of names for parts of the body is provided below. The comments on individual entries are simply for further clarification and discussion.

Meaning	<u>Akk.</u>	<u>Heb.</u>	<u>Ug.</u>	<u>Arab.</u>	<u>Egypt</u>	<u>Main gender</u>
Arm	<i>durā’u</i> (NA), <i>zuruḥ</i> (EA)	<i>z<sup>e</sup>rôd<sup>c</sup></i> f./m.	<i>dr<sup>c</sup></i> f.	<i>dirā<sup>c</sup></i> (f.)	–	f.?
back, loin	<i>ka/islu</i> m.	<i>kesel</i> m.	<i>ksl</i> m.	( <i>kisl</i> )	–	m.
Back	<i>sēru</i> m.	[ <i>šohar</i> f.]	<i>zr</i> m.	<i>zahr</i>	<i>drww</i> m.	m.

40. There are 117 such nouns: see Ben-Asher 1978: 1 and Zehnder 2004: 22.

41. For more detail on this word see Štrba 2004 and Suderman 2005.

42. Cf. Heb. *nēr*, (m.) pl. *nērôt* and Akk. *nūru* (m.?). “light, lamp”.

43. See Zehnder 2004: 22, with further references.

44. For the chronological argument, see Albrecht 1896: 55 and the critique by Zehnder 2004: 38.

45. Normally it is m., but for personification it is f.; cf. Zehnder 2004: 23, who refers to Albrecht.

46. So Albrecht 1896: 76, quoted by Zehnder 2004: 23.

NOTES ON THE GENDER OF NOUNS IN SEMITIC

Meaning	Akk.	Heb.	Ug.	Arab.	Egypt	Main gender
beard, chin	<i>ziqnu</i> f.	<i>zāqān</i> f.	<i>dqn</i> m.	<i>daqn</i> m.	–	?
Blood	<i>dāmu</i> m.	<i>dām</i> m.	<i>dm</i> m.	<i>dam</i>	–	m.
bone	<i>ešemtu</i> f.	<sup>c</sup> <i>ešem</i> f.	<sup>c</sup> <i>zm</i> f.	<sup>c</sup> <i>azm</i>	–	f.
brain, marrow	<i>muḥḥu</i>	<i>moaḥ</i> m.	<i>mḥ</i> m.	<i>Ma/uḥḥ</i>	<i>jm3ḥ</i> m.	m.
breast udder	<i>zīzu</i> m.	<i>dad, šad, zīz</i> m.	<i>dd, td, zd</i>	<i>dīd, tady, zīzat</i> f.	–	m.
breath	–	<i>rū<sup>a</sup>ḥ</i> f.(/m.)	<i>rḥ</i> f.	<i>rīḥ</i> f. (m.) <i>rūḥ</i> m./f.	–	?
cheek, jaw	<i>lahû</i> (?)	<i>l<sup>h</sup>ḥi</i> f.	<i>lh</i> f.	<i>Lahy</i>	–	f.?
ear	<i>uznu</i> f.	<i>'ozen</i> f.	<i>udn</i> (?)	<i>dn</i> f.	<i>*jdn</i> f.	f.
elbow	<i>ammatu</i> f.	<i>ammâ</i> f.	<i>amt</i> f.	–	<i>*jm(t?)</i> f.?	f.
eye	<i>īnu</i> f.	<sup>c</sup> <i>ayin</i> f.	<sup>c</sup> <i>yn</i> f.	<sup>c</sup> <i>ain</i> f.	–	f.
face (pl.)	<i>panū(m)</i> m.	<i>pānīm</i> m.	<i>pnm</i> m.	–	–	m.
finger	<i>nešbettu</i> f.	<i>'ešba<sup>c</sup></i> f.	<i>ušb<sup>c</sup></i> f.	<i>'išba<sup>c</sup></i>	<i>db<sup>c</sup></i> f.	f.
flank	(w)arkatu f.	<i>yārēk</i> f.	<i>yrk</i> m.	<i>warik</i>	–	?
foot	<i>pēm/nu</i> m./f.	<i>pa<sup>c</sup>am</i> f.	<i>p<sup>c</sup>n</i> f.	–	–	f.
forehead	<i>pūtu</i> f.	[ <i>pē<sup>a</sup>ḥ</i> f.]	<i>pit</i> f.	–	<i>wpt</i>	f.
foreskin	<i>u/arullu</i> (f. pl.)	<sup>c</sup> <i>orlāh</i> f.	–	<i>ḡurlat</i> f.	[ <i>*ḡurl-ata</i> ]	f.
gall-bladder	<i>martu</i> f.	<i>m<sup>e</sup>rērāh</i> f.	<i>mrrt</i> f.	<i>mirrat, marārat</i> f.	–	f.
hair	<i>šārtu</i> f.	<i>šē<sup>c</sup>ār</i> m. <i>ša<sup>c</sup>râ</i> f.	<i>š<sup>c</sup>r</i> m. <i>š<sup>c</sup>rt</i> f.	–	–	m. f.
hand	<i>idu</i> m.	<i>yād</i> f.(/m.)	<i>yd</i> f.	<i>yad</i> m? / <i>'id</i> f.	<i>*d</i>	?
head	<i>rēšu</i> m.	<i>ro's</i> m.	<i>riš</i> m.	<i>ra's</i> m./f.	<i>3js</i> m.	m.
heart	<i>libbu</i> m.	<i>lēb</i> m.	<i>lb</i> m./f.	<i>lubb</i> m.	<i>jb</i> m.	m.
heel, hoof	<i>eqbu</i>	<sup>c</sup> <i>āqēb</i> m.	<sup>c</sup> <i>qb</i> m. /f.?	<sup>c</sup> <i>aqib</i>	–	m.?
horn	<i>s/šappartu</i> f.	<i>šôpār</i> m.	<i>špr</i> m.	–	–	m.
innards	<i>qerbu</i> m.	<i>qereb</i> m.	<i>qrb</i> m.	<i>qur(u)b</i> m.	<i>q3b</i> m.	m.
kidneys	<i>kalītu</i> f.	<i>kilyāh</i> f.	<i>klyt</i> f.	<i>kulyat</i> f.	–	f.
knee	<i>birku</i> m.?	<i>berek</i> f.	<i>brk</i> f.	<i>rukbat</i> f.	–	f.
left (hand)	<i>šumēlū</i> m.?	<i>š<sup>e</sup>mo'l</i> m.	<i>šmal</i> m.	<i>šamāl</i>	–	m.
lip	<i>šaptu</i> f.	<i>šāpāh</i> m.	<i>špt</i> f.	<i>šafat</i> f.	<i>sp.t</i> f.	f.
liver	<i>g/kabīdu</i> m. <i>kabattu</i> f.	<i>kābēd</i> m./f.	<i>kbd</i> f.	<i>kabid</i> m./f.	–	?

Meaning	Akk.	Heb.	Ug.	Arab.	Egypt	Main gender
loin, tendon	<i>matnu</i> m.	<i>motnayim</i> m.	<i>mtn</i> m. <i>mtnt</i> f.	<i>matn</i>	[ <i>mt</i> ]	m.
mouth	<i>pû</i> m.	<i>pēh</i> m.	<i>p</i> m.	<i>fû</i> m.	–	m.
nail	<i>šupru</i> (pl. f.)	<i>šipporen</i> m.	–	<i>zufr</i> m.	–	m.
nose	<i>appu</i> f.	<i>'ap</i> m.	<i>ap</i> m.	<i>'anf</i> m.	–	m.
palm	<i>kappu</i> (?)	<i>kap</i> f.	<i>kp</i> f.	<i>ka/iffa</i> m.	<i>kp</i> m.	f.?
palm	<i>rittu</i> f.	–	<i>rḥt</i> f.	<i>rāḥat</i> f.	<i>jh.t</i> f.	f.
penis	<i>išaru</i> m.	–	<i>ušr</i> m.	–	–	m.
plait(s)	[ <i>taḥlapānu</i> m.]	<i>maḥ<sup>a</sup>lapāh</i> f.	<i>mḥlpt</i> f.	–	–	f.
rib	<i>sī/ēlu</i> f.	<i>sēlā<sup>c</sup></i> f.	<i>st<sup>c</sup></i> f.	<i>ḍil(a)<sup>c</sup></i> m.	[ <i>ḍr<sup>c</sup>t</i> f.]	f.
right (hand)	<i>imnu</i> m. <i>imittu</i> f.	<i>yāmîn</i> f.	<i>ymn</i> m.	<i>yamîn</i>	<i>ymn</i>	?
shoulder	[ <i>katappātu</i> ]	<i>kātēp</i> f.	<i>ktp</i> f.	<i>katif</i> m.	–	?
skull	<i>qaqqadu</i> (pl. f.)	<i>qodqod</i>	<i>qdqd</i> m.	–	–	m.
snout	<i>ḥaṭṭimmu</i> m.	<i>ḥôṭām</i> (MH)	<i>ḥtm</i> m.	<i>ḥaṭm</i>	–	m.
spleen	<i>ṭulīmu</i> m.	<i>ṭ<sup>e</sup>ḥōl</i>	<i>ṭḥl</i> m.	<i>ṭihāl</i> (pl. - <i>āt</i> ) <i>ṭuhul</i>	–	m.?
tail	<i>zibbatu</i> f.	<i>zānāb</i> m.	<i>ḍnb</i> f.	<i>ḍanab</i> m.	–	?
temple	<i>raqqatu</i> f.	<i>raqqāh</i> f.	<i>rqt</i> f.	–	–	f.
tendon	<i>nimšū</i> m.	<i>nāšēh</i> m.	<i>anš</i> m.	<i>nasa</i>	–	m.
testicle	<i>išku</i> m.	<i>'ešek</i> m.	<i>ušk</i> m.	–	–	m.
thigh	<i>sāqu</i> m.	<i>šūq</i> m.	<i>šq</i> m.	<i>šāq</i>	<i>sbq</i> m.	m.
throat	<i>napištu</i> f.	<i>nepeš</i> f.	<i>npš</i> f.	<i>naḥs</i> f.	–	f.
tongue	<i>lišānu</i> f.	<i>lāšōn</i> m./f.	<i>lšn</i> f.	<i>lisan</i> m./f.	<i>ns</i>	?
tooth	<i>šinnu</i> f.	<i>šēn</i> m./f.	<i>šn</i> m./f.	<i>sinn</i> f.	–	f.
torso	<i>bamtu</i> f.	<i>bāmāh</i> f.	<i>bmt</i> f.	–	–	f.
wing	<i>kappu</i>	<i>kānāp</i> f.	<i>kp</i> f.	<i>kanaf</i> m.	–	?
womb	<i>rēmu(m)</i> m. <i>rēmtu</i> f.	<i>reḥem</i> m.	<i>Rḥm</i> f.	<i>raḥim</i> <i>riḥm</i>	–	?

Table 1: Names for parts of body in Semitic: Comparison of genders

## COMMENTS ON TABLE 1

- *arm*: Eg. *ḍr<sup>c</sup>t* literally means “plank” and is borrowed from Semitic (cf. Hoch 1994: 394 §592).
- *back*: Heb. *šohar* means “roof” and Eg. *ḍr* means “side, loins, flank” (DLE II, 271). Note that (EA) Akk. *šu'ru*, *šūru*, “back”, is a loan from W. Semitic and may be m.
- *brain*: for Eg. *jm3ḥ* see Takács 2005: 635 §9.
- *breath*: the word for “breath” in Akkadian is completely different, i.e. *šaru* (m.), but see under “throat”, below. Note also Akk. *napišū(m)*, “breath(ing)” (CDA, 239a).
- *face*: for other cognates see Sanmartín 1991: 200 §60.
- *forehead*: for other cognates see Sanmartín 1991: 199 §58.

- *foreskin*: the f. gender of the loanword is retained in Egyptian (Hoch 1994: 302 §436).
- *hand*: for other cognates see Sanmartín 1991: 213 §84. Note that Akk. *qātu* is f.
- *head*: the term was borrowed by Egyptian (Hoch 1994: 209-210 §205).
- *heel*: m. sg. but f. pl. (see Tropper UG, 298).
- *innards*: the meaning “vulva” only occurs in Ugaritic.
- *kidney*: a Semitic loanword in Egyptian; cf. Hoch 1994: 352-353 §520.
- *loin, tendon*: note the difference between Ug. *mtn* (m.), “tendon, loin” in general and Ug. *mtnt* (f.), “loin” used only in cultic offerings (see DUL, 600-601). See also Agaw \**tin-*, “kind of muscle” (HSED, 504 §2401) and Eg. *mt*, “muscle, etc.” (DLE I, 212-213).
- *mouth*: for the whole gamut of Common Semitic see Sanmartín 1991: 201 §61. For other body orifices see Akk. *pû* (CAD P, 469 meaning 9) and Ug. *p* (KTU 1.10 iii 9-10).
- *plaits*: note that Akk. *taḥlapānu* denotes a “(goat/lamb) covered with fleece” (cf. CAD T, 50b); cf. also Phoen. *mḥlph* (f.), “lock of hair” (DNWSI, 613).
- *snout*: for other cognates see Kaufman 1974: 57, although he makes no mention of Ugaritic.<sup>47</sup>
- *tail*: for other cognates see Sanmartín 1991: 188 §35. The gender fluctuates.
- *temple*: Ug. *rqt* occurs in KTU 1.19 ii 38 and has cognates in Heb. *raqqāh* (cf. HALOT, 1288) and Akk. *raqqatu* (CAD R, 170-171); see discussion in Watson 2002. Other words for “temple, side of the head” in Akkadian are *bibinnum*, *bibēnu* (cf. CAD B, 219 and CDA, 44a), which is m., and *nakkaptu* (CDA, 234a).
- *tendon*: De Moor (1980) had considered Ug. *anš* to be a loan from Hitt. *anašša-*, which denotes a part of the body between the back and the buttocks. However, Hitt. *anašša-* is a Semitic loanword in Hittite<sup>48</sup>. Besides the standard Semitic cognates (given in HALOT, 729a and DUL, 83), see Akk. *nimšū* “sinews” (CDA, 253).
- *testicle*: note that both Syriac *ʿeškē tā* and Eth. *eskit* (cited HALOT, 95a) are f. See also Tropper UG, 285.
- *throat*: in Akkadian there is the additional form *napištu* (*napšatu(m)*). Akk. *napuštu* (*napultu*) means “life, throat” (cf. CDA, 239a; 240b; CAD N/1, 296-304).
- *tongue*: for other cognates see Sanmartín 1991: 193 §47.
- *torso*: cf. Kogan / Tishchenko 2002 for full discussion of this term.
- *womb*: for the difference between Akk. *rēmu(m)* and *rēmtu* see above.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The main conclusion from this paper is that in Semitic, gender *can* be determined by terminations or endings, especially for the feminine, and that semantics is not always involved. This is contrary to accepted theory. Even so, several questions concerning the gender of nouns remain open. We do not yet know the *rules* for assigning gender. This applies both to native words and to loanwords. Furthermore, it is not always the case that the gender in a cognate language can be transferred to the language in question. For example, words for “hand” [see Table 1]. Similarly, we do not know why certain words occur in both

47. Note Akk. *ḥatāmu*, “to muzzle, etc.” (CAD H, 152b; CDA, 112b)

48. See Kassian / Korolëv / Sidel'tsev 2002: 524 and n. 11.

masculine and feminine forms.<sup>49</sup> Some may be explained by their etymology, but often the presence of two forms seems superfluous. Perhaps they are due to the change of gender over time.

Other questions could also have been discussed, notably the polarity of gender with certain numerals<sup>50</sup> or the matter of concord in personal names, where the gender of the name-bearer can determine the gender of that person's name<sup>51</sup> or whether plural forms of nouns can be of a different gender from the singular. In addition, the more general topic of gender in pronouns, demonstratives and of course verbs has not been touched on here.

Finally, I can quote two comments on the significance of noun gender in linguistics. The first is: "Gender is a key feature for lexicology, since it is crucial for understanding the nature of lexical entries" (Corbett 2006: 753). The second is: "part of knowing a noun is knowing its gender" (Ritter 1993: 795). These statements should encourage us to take another look at grammatical gender and attempt to resolve some of the problems that it entails.

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49. Zehnder (2004: 42-43) concludes that "morphological and phonological, as well as possible syntactical factors may have been decisive" for the assignment of gender to Heb. *derek* and the same may apply to other nouns in Hebrew and other Semitic languages.

50. See Brugnatelli 1982: 83-112 and Luján Martínez 1994.

51. A topic discussed by Fronzaroli (1979) for Ebla personal names and by Edzard (1963) for Akkadian theophoric names.

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#### Abbreviations used

AHw	W. von Soden, <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> , I-III, Wiesbaden 1965-1981.
BDB	F. Brown – S. R. Driver – C. A. Briggs, eds, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , Oxford 1906.
CAD	I. J. Gelb <i>et al.</i> , eds, <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> , Chicago IL 1956 -.
CDA	J. Black – A. George – N. Postgate, eds, <i>A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian</i> (SANTAG Arbeiten und Untersuchungen zur Keilschriftkunde 5), Wiesbaden 2000.
DLE	L. H. Lesko, <i>A Dictionary of Late Egyptian</i> . 2 vols., Providence RI 2002 <sup>2</sup> , 2004 <sup>2</sup> .
DLU	G. del Olmo Lete - J. Sanmartín, <i>Diccionario de la lengua ugarítica</i> . Vol. I (AuOrSupp. 7), Sabadell (Barcelona) 1996; Vol. 2 (AuOrSupp. 8), Sabadell (Barcelona) 2000.
DNWSI	J. Hoftijzer – K. Jongeling, <i>Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions</i> . 2 vols. (HdO I/21), Leiden 1995.

- DUL G. del Olmo Lete – J. Sanmartín, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition* (English Version Edited and Translated by W. G. E. Watson). 2 vols. (HdO I/67), Leiden 2003<sup>1</sup>, 2004<sup>2</sup> (= revised ET of DLU).
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- HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Vols. I-V, translated by M. E. J. Richardson, Leiden 1994-2001 (= revised ET of HAL).
- HSED V.E. Orel – O.V. Stolbova, *Hamito-Semitic Etymological Dictionary. Materials for a Reconstruction* (HdO I/18), Leiden 1995.
- KTU M. Dietrich – O. Loretz – J. Sanmartín, *The Cuneiform alphabetic texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and other places* (ALASP 8), Münster 1995.
- UG J. Tropper, *Ugaritische Grammatik* (AOAT 273), Münster 2000.