GENDER, NOUN CLASS AND LANGUAGE OBsolescence:
THE CASE OF PAUMARÌ

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1. Gender and noun class in one language?

Almost all languages have some grammatical means for the linguistic categorization of noun referents. Grammatical agreement classes — known as genders or noun classes — are, cross-linguistically, the most frequent of these means (see Aikhenvald 2000; 2004). A rarer case is that of one language having two gender- or noun class-like agreement systems operating in the same morphosyntactic environments, and yet differing in their semantics and functions. If a language like this exists, how do we demonstrate the relative independence of the two agreement systems?

The aim of this paper is just that: Paumari, a highly endangered language from the Arawã family spoken in southern Amazonia (Brazil), has two ways of categorizing nouns through marking agreement on a modifier and on a verb. Neither is semantically transparent. One is based on a feminine/masculine opposition, and is termed ‘gender’. The other is based on shape and other intrinsic, structure-related, properties of the noun referent, and is termed ka- noun class (since this is how it is marked on agreeing constituents). The semantics of the two systems, their morphosyntactic contexts and principles of their marking unequivocally show that the two are relatively independent as grammatical systems. This is the topic of section 2.

And then another factor comes into play. Like so many languages of the world, Paumari is gradually shrinking and receding under the encroaching dominance of Portuguese, the national language of Brazil. How does this affect gender and noun class? I discuss this in section 3, comparing the speech of young bilinguals with what we know about the traditional language.
A word on Paumari itself. This language, a separate and quite innovative member of the small Arawá family (Dixon 1999; 2004a & b; Ade-laar 1991), was traditionally spoken in several communities on the Purús, Ituxi and Tapaua rivers. The number of people who identify themselves as Paumari is comparatively high (around 600 people), but the number of actual speakers is on the decline (Chapman and Derbyshire 1991). According to Dixon (2004b: 9), not more than 200 people still speak the language. All children speak Portuguese as their first language. People in their forties and younger are more comfortable speaking Portuguese than Paumari. And, if they use Paumari at all, they tend to simplify the linguistic structures. This is an example of gradual language obsolescence.

An excellent grammar by Chapman and Derbyshire (1991), with an additional sketch by Chapman and Salzer (1998), offer an outline of the traditional Paumari language. My discussion of its agreement systems in section 2 is based on these publications, and also on the analysis of traditional Paumari stories (unpublished), kindly offered to me by Mary-Ann Odmark (around 200 pages).\(^1\) In July-August 1993, I had the opportunity of working with representatives of the younger generation who are still fluent in their language, but whose Paumari is markedly different from that of older people. This is the basis for the discussion in section 3. For ease of reference, I will use the term Y(outer people's) P(auamari) to contrast the patterns of the language affected by its gradual loss with the documented language as it was spoken in the past by those who may have died monolingual.\(^2\)

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1. My warmest thanks go to Beatriz and Rodolfo Senn, Mary Ann Odmark and R. M. W. Dixon. I am extremely grateful to my teachers of Paumari — Marilda-Mamoni, Carlito and Valdir. The Paumari examples (all taken from my own data) are given in practical orthography.

2. My younger speakers’ Paumari (YP) materials include around 60 pages of texts of various genres, and also conversations and fieldnotes. My consultants for YP include two men (Valdir, Carlito-Aratxoa) and one woman (Marilda-Mamoni). They show varied degrees of language loss (yet none of them can be considered a semi-speaker). All of them are highly proficient in the regional Portuguese. Marilda comes from a traditional Paumari family (Purús river, the community of Maraha; curiously, the majority of the TP texts are told either by her mother - Sioniro, or by her late grandfather - Segundo). Among the three speakers, she was considered the ‘purest’ of all. Carlito-Aratxoa was raised in Maraha as an orphan; his language shows a deeper degree of divergence from TP than that of Marilda. The third consultant, Valdir, comes originally from Ituxi. Now he and his family live in Crispinho (on the Purús river). He has been most exposed to contact with the local Portuguese-speaking population, and his Paumari is the weakest of all.
2. Noun class and gender in Paumari

As mentioned in section 1, Paumari has two types of agreement classes. One is based on a feminine versus masculine opposition, and will be called 'gender' (following Chapman and Derbyshire 1991). The other, the *ka*- vs non-*ka*- noun class, has its semantics partially based on the intrinsic properties of a nominal, that is, its shape and structure. Both systems have only a partial semantic basis. Nouns are not overtly marked for either gender or noun class. Both categories are realized only through agreement, in a noun phrase and on the verb.3

Noun class and gender agreement are obligatory but differ in their contexts of use, and principles of assignment. In addition, gender agreement is characteristic of singular nouns. The gender distinction is neutralized in the plural. In contrast, the noun class agreement does not depend on number at all. In the examples below, noun class and gender of nouns is given in brackets.

2.1 Principles of agreement

Noun class and gender in Paumari are essentially covert categories. They are realized through agreement within a noun phrase, and on the verb, but not in the form of noun itself. We now turn to the principles of agreement in gender and in noun class in these two environments.

2.1.1 Agreement within a noun phrase

Within a noun phrase, gender and noun class agreement is obligatory (a) on modifiers, and (b) in possessive constructions with inalienably possessed nouns. Agreement markers and agreeing forms are underlined throughout this paper.

A. GENDER AND NOUN CLASS AGREEMENT ON MODIFIERS.

The kinds of modifiers which require agreement in gender and noun class in Paumari are summarized in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>demonstratives</th>
<th>small class of agreeing adjectives</th>
<th>stative verb used as modifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun class</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Gender and noun class agreement on modifiers in Paumari

3. In a recent typological overview, Corbett (2005) misinterpreted the Paumari system as having one system of four genders.
Gender agreement is obligatorily marked on demonstratives (which are similar to definite articles: Chapman and Derbyshire 1991: 261), e.g. *ida ojoro* (DEM+FEM.AGR turtle (ka-class, f)) 'this lady-turtle', *ada arakawa* (DEM+MASC.AGR rooster (non-ka-class, m)) 'this rooster'.

A small set of adjectives and the number 'one' have distinct forms for masculine and feminine, e.g. *kavina hoara-ng* (howler.monkey (non-ka-class, m) one-MASC.AGR) 'one howler monkey'; *jomahi hoara-ni* (jaguar (non-ka-class, f) one-FEM.AGR) 'one jaguar'.

Noun class agreement is obligatorily marked on this small set of adjectives, and on number 'one'. The modifier agrees both in gender and in noun class with the head noun. A ka-class noun can be feminine, e.g. *kaira ka-hoara-ni* (guava (ka-class, f) NCL-one-FEM.AGR) 'one guava'. Or it can be masculine, e.g. *kasi'i ka-hoara-ng* (crocodile (ka-class, m) NCL-one-MASC.AGR) 'one crocodile'.

Gender is not distinguished in plural demonstratives or adjectives, e.g. *adani kasi'i yi-ka-bami-ki* (DEM.PL crocodile (ka-class, m) PL-NCL-two-DESC) 'those two crocodiles'. If a stative verb is used as a modifier, agreement in noun class is obligatory. There is no gender agreement, e.g. *vanami ka-pororo-ki* (paddle (ka-class, f) NCL-black-DESC) 'a black paddle'.

The types of modifiers which warrant agreement in noun class and in gender overlap, but are not fully identical.

B. GENDER AND NOUN CLASS AGREEMENT IN POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS WITH INALIENABLELY POSSESSED NOUNS.

Like most other Arawá languages (Dixon 1995; 1999), Paumari distinguishes alienably and inalienably possessed nouns. Inalienably possessed nouns include the majority of plant and body parts (with the exception of 'afo/afo 'lungs', *joho 'breast', and *kajori 'heel'), most kinship terms, and important objects, such as *gora 'house' and jorai 'sleeping mat' (unlike most other Amazonian groups, the Paumari sleep on mats rather than in hammocks).

Inalienably possessed nouns are marked with a variety of affixes indicating pronominal possession. They agree in gender with third person possessor: masculine is marked with a suffix -na or -ø/-i on the

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4. The ka-class prefix has the allomorphs ka-, ko-, ki-, -ak, -a. Their distribution is partly accounted for by phonological rules (e.g., ka- always appears before a root-initial bilabial). Partly they appear to be morphologically or even lexically determined (e.g., ki- is always used with the root hi 'to exist, to arrive' and some other roots; -ak is used with oga 'to know', etc.) (also see Chapman and Odmark 1973).
possessed noun, and feminine is marked with a suffix -ni. Constructions with alienable possession do not require gender or noun class agreement between possessor and possessed.

Gender agreement in possessive constructions involving an inalienably possessed noun is with the possessor, e.g. kahami 'dama (palm.tree(non-ka- class, m) foot(ka- class, f)+MASC.POSS) 'foot of a palm tree'; ava vadi-ni (tree(non-ka- class, f) branch(non-ka, f)-FEM.POSS) 'tree branch'. That is, the possessor is the head of a noun phrase with respect to gender assignment since it is the component of the noun phrase which determines its categories.

If the possessor itself consists of a possessive noun phrase with an inalienably possessed noun, the gender of a resulting possessive construction is determined by this same possessor. This is the case in (1), where the masculine agreement form of the possessed noun 'flower of' is determined by the possessor 'banana' (masculine).

(1) [kharo
  banana.inajá(non-ka- class, m)
  'dama
  leg/trunk(ka- class, f)+MASC.POSS
  mova-ná]
  flower(non-ka- class, f)-MASC.POSS
  'a flower of the (trunk) of banana inajá'

In constructions like (1), the possessor remains the head of the whole construction. A modifier to a possessed noun agrees with it in gender, as shown in (2).

(2) [kavina
  monkey(non-ka- class, m)
  [vadi
  arm(non-ka- class, f)+MASC.POSS hoara-ni]]
  one-FEM.AGR
  'one arm of a monkey'

Thus, the possessed noun is to be considered the head of these possessive constructions, as far as gender agreement is concerned. The agreement in ka- noun class goes along the same lines, e.g. kaira ka-bono-ni

5. Further subdivisions of inalienably possessed nouns (see Dixon 1995, 2000) have no correlations with gender assignment.
(guava (ka-class, f) NCL-fruit (non-ka-class, f)-FEM.POSS) 'fruit of guava': here, both the noun class marker ka- and the feminine gender agreement -ni on the possessed noun 'fruit of' are determined by the class, and the gender of the possessor, 'guava'. If the possessor does not belong to the ka- noun class, the ka- agreement marker does not appear on the possessed noun, e.g. kavina wadi (howler monkey (non-ka-class, m) arm (non-ka-class, f)+MASC.POSS) 'howler monkey’s arm'.

The ka- class and gender marking on the noun 'tail' are determined by the possessor, e.g. kasi’i ka-mi’i (alligator (ka-class, m) NCL-tail (non-ka-class, f)+MASC.POSS) 'alligator’s tail' (where 'alligator' is inherently masculine and also belongs to the ka-class).

If either the possessor, or the possessed noun (or both) belong to the ka-class, a modifier takes the ka-class marking, no matter which one of the two it modifies. In (3), the ka-marking on the static verb modifier 'be big' is determined by the possessor, ojoro 'turtle', which belongs to the ka-class. The possessed noun, bodi 'mouth', does not belong to the ka-class. This example has two meanings which can be disambiguated by context only.

(3) ojoro ka-bodi-ni turtle (ka-class, f) NCL-mouth (non-ka-class, f)-FEM.AGR
ka-karaho NCL-big
'big mouth of a turtle' or 'mouth of a big turtle'

If both possessor and possessed belong to the ka-class, agreement is also obligatory, e.g. ojoro ka-dama-ni ka-paitxi (turtle (ka-class, f) NCL-foot (ka-class, f)-FEM.POSS NCL-small) 'small foot of a turtle' or 'foot of a small turtle'. We conclude that, as far as noun-class agreement is concerned, it is impossible to establish which constituent is the 'head' in a possessive construction of this kind.

The same agreement principles apply to postpositional constructions. Since the Paumari postpositions are morphologically relational nouns, postpositional constructions are a subtype of possessive constructions, with a relational noun in the 'possessed' slot, e.g. kanava ka-bodi-ni-a (canoe (ka-class, f) NCL-mouth/inside-FEM.POSS-OBL) 'inside the canoe'.
Both gender and the noun class can be marked in one noun phrase, following different principles. Agreement in gender and in noun class on the verb displays further differences.

2.1.2. Gender and noun class agreement on the verb
Three of at least a dozen final verbal suffixes in Paumari distinguish gender; but not noun class: feminine -hi/masculine -ha ‘theme’; feminine -ja, -a/masculine -ra ‘immediate’, and feminine -ni/masculine -na ‘dependent intransitive’ (Chapman and Derbyshire 1991: 288; and see Dixon 1999). Other verbal suffixes do not mark gender agreement. In intransitive clauses, the agreement is with the intransitive subject, S:

(4) voroni-'a-ha       ada
    fall-ASP-TH.MASC.AGR DEM+MASC.AGR
    kahami
    palm.tree(non-kase class, m)
    ‘This palm tree fell down.’

The noun class agreement (marked with the prefix ka-) is also with the S of an intransitive clause, as in (5):

(5) ka-voroni-'i-hi    ida
    NCL-fall-ASP-TH.FEM.AGR DEM+FEM.AGR
    ojoro
    turtle(non-kase class, m)
    ‘The turtle fell down.’

Transitive constructions operate on a different principle. In a similar way to other Arawã languages, Paumari has two types of transitive structures whose choice depends on whether the object (O) or the subject (A) is the pivot of the discourse. These are known as O-constructions and A-constructions respectively (Dixon 1999: 305). The A in O-constructions in Paumari is marked with the ergative case -a; and if both A and O are third person, the verb takes the prefix bi-. The preferred constituent order is AVO. In such constructions, the verb agrees in gender with the object; the buriti fruit is what the story (in (6)) is about. It has feminine gender, and this determines the choice of a feminine form of the verbal suffix (underlined).
In the A-construction type, the preferred order of which is OVA, the object takes the accusative case marking -ra. The transitive subject (A) is the pivot (that is, it is what the story is about), and it triggers the gender agreement marked in the verbal suffixes. In (7), from a stretch of a story about a man, makhira, this noun is masculine, and triggers masculine agreement on the thematic marker -'a-ha (underlined).

In contrast, noun class agreement is always with the object, independently of the construction type. In the A-construction in (7), the ka-class agreement is with the object ('turtle'). So it is in (8a) which is an example of an O-construction: the noun ba'dana 'lizard', which is the pivot of this stretch of discourse, is feminine and belongs to the ka-noun class.
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[jida ba’dana]
DEM+FEM.AGR lizard(ka-class, f)
‘When I had defecated on top of a lizard, I mistook the lizard for a snake.’

b. ’o-ijo-na-ra ’o-a-rokhori-vini
1sg-feces-POSS-OBJ 1sg-STATIVE-push.out-DEP.TR
kaba’i ka-danodano-’i-hi [jida
then NCL-squirm-ASP-TH.FEM.AGR DEM+FEM.AGR
ba’dana]₄
lizard(ka-class, f)
‘Because I was defecating (on it), the lizard was squirming.’

The continuation of this, (8b), contains an intransitive main clause: here the verb ‘squirm’ bears the agreement marker for gender and number of its only argument, ‘lizard’.

The principles of noun class and gender agreement on the verb in Paumari are summarized in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>intransitive clause</th>
<th>transitive clause: O-construction</th>
<th>transitive clause: A-construction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>agreement with S</td>
<td>agreement with A</td>
<td>agreement with O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Gender and noun class agreement marked on the verb

Noun class agreement is purely syntactic — it is based on an ‘absolutive’ (S/O) principle. This is reminiscent of verbal classifiers (Aikhenvald 2000: 149-65) which always signal an argument in S/O function. In contrast, gender agreement in transitive constructions is pragmatically determined: it is governed by the pivot of the clause, in a similar way to pragmatically determined gender agreement with a topical constituent in a few Papuan languages (e.g. Motuna, from Bougainville: Onishi 1994).

We will see, in section 3, how the two systems are changing in the modern-day language in the process of gradual obsolescence. The two follow quite different paths, both enhanced by contact with the now dominant Portuguese.

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6. This example comes from a story told by Segundo (the late grandfather of Marilda, a younger speaker: see section 3).
2.2. Semantics of genders, and of noun classes
As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, both gender and noun class assignment in Paumari are only partially semantically motivated — similar to genders in German (Zubin and Köpcke 1986). The semantic basis for the two categories in Paumari is not the same.

A. GENDER ASSIGNMENT.
All nouns with female referents belong to the feminine gender. Those with male referents belong to the masculine gender. All body parts, parts of plants and the vast majority of artifacts and their parts, and all nominalizations are feminine. Of 52 names for cultivated plants, 17 are feminine, and the remainder are masculine. Of 92 names for wild plants and trees, 53 are feminine. Out of 45 mammals, 27 are feminine; out of 80 bird names, 41 are feminine; out of 15 reptiles, one is feminine; out of 34 amphibians (turtles, lizards, crocodiles), 25 are feminine; all the 8 molluscs are masculine; out of 74 insects, 14 are feminine, and out of 84 fish, 8 are feminine (these figures are based on the information from Chapman and Salzer 1998). Nouns denoting terrestrial natural phenomena, such as ‘earth’, ‘lake’, ‘beach’, are feminine. Nouns denoting celestial bodies are mostly masculine (e.g. ‘star’, ‘moon’, ‘sun’); the word for ‘sky’ is feminine. Some nouns denoting weather phenomena are masculine (e.g. ‘rain’, ‘fog’), and some are feminine (‘rainbow’, ‘wind’); all names of seasons are feminine. That is, gender assignment in Paumari shows a high degree of semantic opacity.

In terms of functional markedness, feminine is often the unmarked choice (see Aikhenvald 2000: 50-55). This is a feature shared with Jarawara, another language of the Arawá family (Dixon 1999; 2004a). First and second person pronouns take feminine agreement. Many nouns which denote higher animals can be of either gender according to the sex of the referent (e.g. *ojôro* ‘turtle’, *hotairri* ‘deer’), but are more frequently feminine than masculine. For example *hotairri* ‘deer’ (double-gender; feminine functionally unmarked) always receives feminine gender agreement, even when used as a Paumari name for a man (Rodolfo Senn, p.c.).

B. THE KA-CLASS ASSIGNMENT.
Nouns with human referents, abstract nouns (e.g. nominalizations) and nouns which refer to natural objects and phenomena, never be-
h gender and noun class are semantically motivated (Pick 1986). The sex of the same.

inine gender. Those gender. All body parts, their parts, and all
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of either gender be'
hotairi 'deer'); but
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as a Paumari nam

long to the ka-class. Out of 45 mammals, only two belong to ka-class: ba'iri 'sloth' and baka'da'di 'night monkey'.

The assignment is partially semantically based, and the principles vary, depending on the semantic field to which the referent belongs. These principles are given in Table 3. Some body parts distinguish two forms — a ka-class and a non-ka-class one (see 1. in Table 3): for instance, sa'ay means 'finger' if it does not belong to the ka-class; as a ka-class noun, the same form refers to a hand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>semantic group</th>
<th>ka-class</th>
<th>non-ka-class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Body parts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Whole, extended:</td>
<td>sa'ay 'hand', damay 'foot'</td>
<td>singular parts: sa'ay 'finger', damay 'toe'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Inner (i.e. more vital) organ:</td>
<td>moroboy 'inner ear', viridi 'inner part of the nose'</td>
<td>outer organ: moroboy 'outer part of the ear', viridi 'outer part of the nose'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Plants, fruits, artifacts, and other objects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Larger size/extension and/or flat in shape:</td>
<td>vanam i 'paddle', katopahiari 'rainbow', a'u'o 'manioc bread, beiju; kajoviri 'island (in river)'; and most containers: kanawa 'canoe', karo 'car', varaja 'a flat basket', a'iri 'sieve', va'u 'cup; cup, dzari 'grater'</td>
<td>small, thin, long objects: dono 'pestle', hado 'knife'; other objects: gora 'house'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Substances which consist of small particles:</td>
<td>ka'i 'pepper', or are thick in texture: kojihari 'banana mash'; fruit with many seeds: jaro'a 'corn', joroma 'pumpkin'</td>
<td>other substances and fruit: pana 'water', simaka 'manioc', sipathi 'banana'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Animals</td>
<td>big, flat:</td>
<td>others:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>big, flat:</td>
<td>ojoro 'turtle', ba'dana 'lizard'</td>
<td>others:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Ka-class assignment in Paumari
In a few cases, a more generic noun belongs to the ka-class, while a more specific noun does not, e.g. *siho* 'fire, fireplace' (ka-class), *siho* 'firewood' (non-ka-class). Just occasionally, the prefix *ka-* is used as a derivational device with a general meaning of 'extended surface', e.g. *ida* 'behind', *ka-ida* 'back'; *da-di* 'part of the head', *ka-da-di* 'head (as a whole)', *nabidi* 'neck', *ka-nabidi* 'heart, breast'.

The choice of a semantic feature in noun class assignment correlates with the meaning of a noun referent — just as in most other languages of the world (see Aikhenvald 2000: 22-4). Size and shape play a role in the noun class assignment of inanimate objects: objects of a larger size or extension and/or flat in shape are frequently assigned to the ka-noun class.

Loan words are also assigned to the noun class according to their semantics: flat and large objects belong to the ka-class, as do *xapiva* 'hat' (from Portuguese *chapéu*), *mesa* 'table' (from Portuguese *mesa*), and *sandalia* 'sandals' (from Portuguese *sandála*). So do loan words referring to 'containers', e.g. *sako* 'bag' (from Portuguese *saco*), *karo* 'car' (from Portuguese *carro*), and *kajira* 'spoon' (from Lingua Geral *cutéra*, itself a borrowing from Portuguese *colher*. Stradelli 1929). Structure and consistency also play a role: referents which consist of smaller particles, or are thick in texture, belong to the ka-class (see 2b in Table 3) — this principle of assignment works just as well for loans as it does for native words, e.g. *leite* 'powder milk' (from Portuguese *leite* 'milk'), *arroz* 'rice' (from Portuguese *arroz*), *jokira* 'salt' (from Lingua Geral *jokira* 'salt'; Stradelli 1929), and a number of fruits which have seeds, e.g. *barasia* 'watermelon' (from Portuguese *melancia* 'watermelon'), *lima* 'lemon' (from Portuguese *limão* 'lemon'), and *maracuja* 'passionfruit' (from Portuguese *maracuja* 'passionfruit').

The masculine-feminine gender and the ka-noun class interact in certain ways. The vast majority of nouns with non-human inanimate referents which belong to the ka-class are inherently feminine. Few ka-class nouns are inherently masculine; those which are include *kasi* 'alligator', *wahajari* 'cayman', *maobo* 'the ritual building'.

We saw above that feminine value of gender appears to be the functionally unmarked one. No such markedness relations can be established for the noun class. We will now turn to the ways in which gradual language obsolescence of Paumari is affecting gender and noun class.
3. Gender and noun class in language obsolescence

Rapid loss of linguistic diversity and obsolescence of minority languages is a feature of our times. Like hundreds more of the world’s languages, Paumari is severely endangered, and under constant pressure from the national language, Portuguese. The number of speakers is on the decline. And most of those who do speak the language display unmistakable signs of language loss.

In the Paumari situation, linguistic attrition results in morphological reduction and insecurity of younger speakers (see Aikhenvald 2002: 258-9, on similar phenomena in Tariana, an unrelated language from northern Amazonia). The patterns absent from Portuguese are among the most endangered: for instance, younger speakers tend not to use the ergative case in transitive O-constructions that require it in the traditional language.

Language obsolescence of noun classes and genders is typically accelerated by patterns present in the dominant language as demonstrated by Schmidt (1985) for Dyirbal, and by Dorian (1981: 124-9, 147-8) for Scottish Gaelic (also see Aikhenvald 2000: 389-90). Not surprisingly, both gender and noun classes are affected by the obsolescence of Paumari. The two categories, however, follow different paths.

A comparison of younger speakers’ Paumari with the patterns documented for the language when it was fully spoken shows that speakers have a good knowledge of which gender is assigned to which noun. Not so with noun classes. While the speakers had no trouble assigning animates to the ka- noun class, they had difficulties with determining which names of animate nouns belonged to the ka- class, and which did not. Younger speakers treated kaboko ‘a kind of ant’, ba’iri ‘sloth’ and bakada di’da’di’ ‘night monkey’ (see section 2.2) as not belonging to the ka- class (that these nouns in fact belong to the ka- class is mentioned in Chapman and Salzer 1998). This is the result of simplification of the ka- class assignment: there is now a strong tendency to treat all animate nouns as members of the non-ka- class. Occasionally, a noun which would warrant feminine agreement in the traditional language is treated as masculine in spontaneous speech.

7. Paumari was the first Arawak language to have been recorded (by Johannes Natterer in 1833). I am grateful to Willem Adelaar for sharing this list with me. Chandless (1866) commented that at that point in time about half the Paumari understood Lingua Geral. We have no information about the age of Paumari - Portuguese bilingualism.
following the gender assignment in Portuguese. Consider example (9) from a story about a jaguar and a turtle told by Carlito Aratxoa, a man in his thirties whose Paumari is fluent but somewhat halting. We can recall that in traditional Paumari double-gender nouns trigger feminine agreement more frequently than masculine (in accordance with the functionally unmarked feminine gender). At the beginning of the story it was established that the turtle was female, and for a while it consistently triggered feminine agreement on the verb, as expected, as in (5) and (6) above. As soon as Carlito gets into the swing of storytelling, he switches to masculine agreement — as in (9). In the first clause the verb ‘throw’ agrees with the A, since this is an A-construction; and in the second clause it agrees with the S (as expected in an intransitive clause).

(9) oniaroa abono-ra a-rakha-'a-ha
    so    self-OB1   CAUS-motion-ASP-NTH,MASC.AGR
voroni-'a-ha  jomahi
fall-ASP-NTH,MASC.AGR  jaguar(non-ka-class, f)
bodi-ni-a
mouth-PEM.POSS-OB1
‘So she (the turtle) threw herself, she fell into the mouth of the jaguar’

This switch from feminine to masculine can be explained by influence from Portuguese, which is the language Carlito is most confident in speaking. The Portuguese word for turtle, *jabuti*, belongs to the masculine gender.

Examples of such gender switches have been attested only for double gender animate nouns: masculine agreement was preferred where the traditional Paumari would have used a functionally unmarked feminine form.

All speakers followed the rules for gender agreement in noun phrases and on the verb outlined in section 2.1. Not so for the *ka*-noun class. In careful slow speech (produced for my benefit as a language learner), the *ka*-class agreement was always in place. Whenever the speakers relaxed, they would omit the *ka*-agreement marker. In the second clause of (9), a traditional speaker would have used *ka*-prefix on the verb ‘fall’, just like in (5). In fact, Marilda, a young speaker with a tendency towards purism, was unhappy about *ka*-being
absent. Along similar lines, ka- was omitted from every verb but one in (10). Given that the turtle, a member of the ka- class, is the O in these clauses, the agreement ought to have been there. The forms where ka-agreement is expected but did not occur are underlined:

(10) oniaroa jorakia bi-najoraha-'i-ha
    then suddenly 3SG.TR-follow-ASP-NTH.MASC.AGR
    napaja bi-(k)a-noki-ha
    far 3SG.TR-NCL-see-NTH.MASC.AGR
    ada ojoro
    DEM+MASC.AGR turtle(ka-class, m)
    itxo-ha-na
    play-?-DEP.TR.MASC.AGR
    bi-na-ki'iri-'a-ha
    3SG.TR-CAUS-go.slowly- ASP-NTH.MASC.AGR
    ada ojoro
    DEM+MASC.AGR turtle(ka-class, m)
    'He (the jaguar) followed him (the turtle), he saw this turtle play (the flute) from afar. He went slowly following this turtle.'

Noun class agreement marker with S was also omitted, in the sentence immediately following (10):

(11) oniaroa haha-ni-'a-ha
    then laugh-?-ASP-NTH+MASC.AGR DEM+MASC.AGR
    ojoro
    turtle(ka-class, m)
    'Then this (he-)turtle laughed.'

All in all, over half of the 20 instances of ka-class agreement on the verb did not have the marker in the stories told by the younger speakers. In conversations, these speakers would also frequently omit the agreement token; but then put it back in when asked to repeat the sentences. This is a clear instance of morphological reduction, so typical in obsolescent languages.

Gradual language obsolescence is affecting genders and the noun class in different ways. Occasional change of gender is often due to the
influence of Portuguese: where Portuguese uses a functionally unmarked masculine form, younger speakers of Paumari tend to do the same, rather than using a ‘traditional’ unmarked feminine form. In contrast, the noun class agreement on verbs is in decline. And speakers are less certain in their judgements about noun class assignment than about the gender choice.

Gender agreement is plainly more stable in the situation of encroaching language obsolescence of Paumari than noun class. The explanation for this is threefold.

Firstly, gender — whose assignment is transparent for humans and high animates but less so for other semantic groups — is a central category in the grammar, given the pervasive nature of gender agreement in a noun phrase and on the verb. Paumari, like all the Arawá languages, is an example of high functional load for genders, a feature it shares with a wide variety of the world’s languages including Afroasiatic. Gender agreement on the verb is anchored in the pragmatic organization of Paumari discourse. In contrast, noun class agreement on the verb is the only category in the language operating on an absolutive (S/O) basis. This ‘odd one out’ gives way more easily than gender.

Secondly, the dominant language — Portuguese — also has a system of two genders and a robust system of gender agreement. The maintenance of gender in Paumari is at least in part due to similar agreement patterns in Portuguese.

And thirdly, it appears that some genetically inherited categories are more central to the grammar and more resistant to contact influence than others. Just like gender and number in Nilotic languages which have survived waves of areal influence (see Storch 2006), gender in Paumari is highly resistant to change.

Noun class agreement has no support from Portuguese: there is no category in this, now dominant, language which would correspond to it. Also, the fate of the ka-noun class in other Arawá languages varies — this is not such a stable and pervasive category as gender is. It has been plainly lost from some languages, such as Jarawara (Dixon 1999). Consequently, its days in younger people’s Paumari appear to be numbered.

The two different agreement systems — ‘gender’ and ‘noun class’ — have different origins, different morphosyntactic behaviours, and
different fates in a language which is ‘retreating, contracting, as it gradually falls into disuse’ (Dixon 1991: 199).

Abbreviations:
A - transitive subject; AGR - agreement form; ASP - aspect; CAUS - causative; dem - demonstrative; DEP, TR - dependent transitive verbs; DESCR - descriptive; EMPH - emphatic; ERG - ergative case; f - feminine inherent gender; FEM - feminine agreement marker; kα - class - noun belonging to the ka- noun class; LOC - locative; m - masculine inherent gender; MASC - masculine agreement marker; ncl - noun class; NEG - negative; NTH - non-thematic; non-ka-class - noun not belonging to the ka- noun class; O - direct object; OBJ - object; OBL - oblique; PL - plural; POSS - possessive; S - intransitive subject; sg - singular; TH - thematic; TP - Traditional Paumari; TR - transitive; YP - younger speakers' Paumari.

References


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