

Filosofická fakulta University Palackého

# **Topics in Gender Assignment**

(Bakalářská práce)

2016

Kristina Smejová

**Filozofická fakulta University Palackého**  
**Katedra anglistiky a Amerikanistiky**

## **Topics in Gender Assignment**

**(Bakalářská práce)**

**Autor:** Kristina Smejová

Studijní obor: Anglická filologie

Vedoucí práce: Jeffrey K. Parrott, Ph. D.

Počet stran: 44

Počet znaků: 73743

Olomouc 2016

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla plný seznam citované literatury.

V Olomouci dne 2.5.2016

**Poděkování:** Děkuji vedoucímu své bakalářské práce za pomoc a rady při vypracování této práce.

**Abstract:** This thesis deals with gender assignment systems of Czech and English. Specifically, it focuses on the gender assignment of borrowed words, double and multiple gender nouns and hybrid nouns.

**Key words:** gender assignment, borrowed words, hybrid nouns, double gender nouns, multiple gender nouns, semantics, markedness, agreement

**Anotace:** Tato práce se zabývá systémy připisujícími rod podstatným jménům v češtině a angličtině. Především se seoutředuje na to, jakým způsobem se přiřazují do rodů slova přejatá, podstatná jména dvojího a vícečetného rodu a hybridní substantiva.

**Klíčová slova:** jmenný rod, přejatá slova, hybridní substantiva, slova dvojího rodu, slova s více než dvěma rody, sémantika, příznakovost, shoda

# Content

1. Introduction .....	7
1.1. Basis of Gender Systems .....	7
1.2. Outline .....	7
1.3. Sources .....	8
2. Gender .....	8
2.1. Definitions.....	8
2.1.1. Hockett .....	8
2.1.2. Greenberg .....	9
2.1.3. Corbett.....	10
2.1.4. Gender and Agreement .....	11
2.2. Frequency of Gender in WALS Languages.....	11
2.2.1. Markedness as Frequency.....	12
2.2.2. Markedness as Asymmetry .....	12
2.2.3. Summary.....	12
3. Restrictions on Possible Types of Languages .....	13
3.1. Methods .....	13
4. Types of Gender Assignment System .....	14
4.1. Defining Assignment .....	14
4.1.1. Strict Semantic Assignment.....	15
4.1.2. Predominantly Semantic Assignment.....	15
4.1.3. Formal Assignment .....	16
5. Borrowed Nouns .....	17
5.1. Markedness .....	18
5.1.1. Against Markedness .....	20
5.1.2. Pro Markedness .....	20
5.2. Animacy.....	21
5.3. Semantic Analogy and the Concept Association .....	23
6. Double and Multiple Gender Nouns .....	25
6.1. Diagnostics.....	26
6.1.1. Two Distinct Meanings .....	26
6.1.2. Difference in Gender .....	27
6.1.3. Two Different Agreement Classes .....	29
6.1.4. Summary.....	30

7. Hybrid Nouns.....	30
7.1. Agreement Hierarchy.....	30
7.1.1. Czech Neuter Plural.....	31
7.1.2. Nouns Denoting Young Human Beings.....	33
7.2. English Relative Pronouns.....	34
7.3. Other Factors.....	36
7.3.1. Style.....	36
7.3.2. Markedness.....	36
8. Change in Gender.....	37
8.1. Nouns Used as Insults.....	37
8.2. Copula.....	40
9. Conclusion.....	41
10. Works Cited.....	42

# 1. Introduction

This thesis will be concerned with special cases of gender assignment in Czech and English, with occasional glimpses at other languages, using Corbett's *Gender* (1991) as a main source. When the term gender is used in this thesis, it refers to grammatical or morphological gender, not to biological sex, or to patterns of speech used by individuals of different sexes, since this thesis is not concerned with gender studies, nor is its topic biology. Gender is defined by agreement as is discernible from Greenberg's description on the types of noun classifications. He states that 'a noun belonging to a particular gender determines a choice among a set of alternative "agreeing" forms in one or more other classes of morphemes or words' (1978, 50), he goes on to list some of the word classes that can take the agreement (we will look at those in section 2.1.2). An important thing to consider is that without such an overt realisation of gender the language cannot be seen as having a gender system. As it is not enough if the nouns belong to different declension types or if they simply seem to have a meaning that can be associated with a certain gender group in other languages, it is clear that agreement is thus an essential classifying parameter.

## 1.1. Basis of Gender Systems

Coming back to the biological view, it is true that a number of languages have a sex-based system, that means that the nouns group together according to the sex of a person or animal they denote. Nevertheless, there are systems that do not consider sex as a factor in determining the gender of a certain noun. According to Corbett, those are based on animacy (2013). It is noteworthy that there are also gender systems that are not based solely on semantic factors. These are called formal assignment systems and as the name suggest at least some nouns in those systems are assigned to their gender by formal rules. What is understood by those rules will be discussed later on in this thesis.

## 1.2. Outline

This thesis will first look at different definitions of gender as introduced by Hockett, Greenberg and Corbett. Then it will briefly turn its attention to restrictions on possible language types and language universals followed by a chapter on possible

gender assignment systems to establish a field for this thesis. Then it will move on to the three main topics which are borrowed nouns, double and multiple gender nouns and hybrid nouns. The final part of this thesis will then use the findings to look at insults in Czech and their change in gender.

### 1.3. Sources

The main source of this thesis will be the Corbett's book *Gender* (1991). It describes gender systems and agreement in over 200 languages. This thesis will be using its data to come up with conclusions about how the gender demonstrates itself in different languages to search for similar patterns in Czech and English and to explain why the gender assignment of the groups of nouns mentioned above. I chose the topic of gender because it seems to be a neglected field of linguistics judging by the amount of literature available that concentrates on it. At the same time, there is a number of articles that tackle the problem so it seems that it has its relevance. Apart from the already mentioned Corbett's book, journal articles and other literature will be used to support the claims that will be made in this thesis. Mainly Greenberg (1978) and then some more recent studies will be considered and taken into account, such as Gunter, Friederici and Schiefers (2000) and Schiller, Münte, Horemans and Jasma (2003).

## 2. Gender

### 2.1. Definitions

#### 2.1.1. Hockett

To be able to talk about gender it is necessary to know what is understood by this notion. From a definition by Hockett (1958) it seems that gender was even then a puzzling concept. He notices that for a noun to be said to have a gender it is necessary for this gender to manifest itself elsewhere. That means that gender is a matter of agreement. This notion is further developed and properly established by Corbett whose views will be considered in section 2.1.3. Quite clearly, Hockett's own definition causes him some trouble since he points out that in languages that have gender systems all nouns are classifiable into genders but gender is often ambiguous



in many of the nouns (1958, 231). What he means is that it is often not easy to determine which gender a noun belongs to or that a noun may even belong to more than one gender at the same time. He is also concerned with a number of nouns that do not seem to follow the assignment rules. One of the main aims of this thesis will be to establish how to account for such ambiguities and to show that many of them are actually rule governed cases rather than exceptions whose gender is in clash with what is expected of the gender assignment system of the particular language. The same has been observed by Rice (2006) who states that '[I]anguages frequently present nouns that show violation of their gender assignment principles.' He continues to point out that thanks to this the gender assignment system does not seem to be 'absolute' but rather seems to consist of 'tendencies'. However, in his own words, 'mere tendencies on the surface do not indicate the absence of reliable gender assignment principles. Instead tendencies are simply the expected consequence of resolution among conflicts between violable constraints' (2006, 1395). By violable constraints he means assignment rules that are applied at the same time to the same noun. This way it is proposed that there is no such a thing as an exception when it comes to grammar. The rules that operate within the language and make sure that appropriate gender is assigned to each noun are simply multiple and thus the calculation of the gender may seem at first difficult to discern. Nevertheless, it is possible to do so and it is only a matter of the proper understanding the grammar that underlies all languages to establish how a certain gender came to be assigned.

### 2.1.2. Greenberg

Greenberg's definition of gender is expectedly also concerned with agreement; that is, the manifestation of gender on the elements outside the noun itself. He clarifies that agreement is not synonymous with concord. Agreement is 'a subtype in which the choice of alternative concord elements depends on the class to which the stem of the governing item belongs' (1978, 50). That means that whilst agreement is a type of concord, concord is a wider concept than agreement itself and therefore includes pairs that are not examples of agreement. Agreement is specific in that an item is required to show certain properties that are prescribed by a head noun that governs it. Greenberg's definition, however has to be modified to be more precise. As Greenberg admits if gender system is a number of classes to which stems are divided then most of the gender languages could not be considered as having gender (1978, 53). Not

only stems but stems with their affixes must be considered when the gender system of a language is examined. When taking affixes into account, it is nevertheless important to remember that agreement does not need gender markers to be present in nouns. Greenberg divides gender languages into 'overt' in terms of noun gender markers, these are those 'where a marker exists in the noun itself' and 'covert' where it is not so (1978, 53). It is sufficient if a noun governed item shows marks of being selected by the noun, the noun itself may or may not show overt marking of a gender.

### 2.1.3. Corbett

Corbett also considers agreement an essential part of the definition of gender. He claims that '[...] a language has a gender system only if noun phrases headed by nouns of different types control different agreements' (2006, 750). Then, there must be at least two distinct groups of nouns which require different agreement in at least one other type of grammatical item that is governed by the phrases which have the nouns as their heads in order for us to be able to say that a particular language has a gender system. But although it is true that '[a]greement can be used by linguists to determine gender, [...] native speakers must know the gender of a noun in order to create correct agreement' (Corbett 1991, 7). In other words, while it is agreement that is the main diagnostic feature of gender, it is gender that requires the agreement. And thus, the native speakers' lexicon and grammar<sup>1</sup> must provide information about the noun's gender. In order to use the noun correctly in a sentence the native speakers must determine what the correct agreement is, based on the noun's gender which they somehow instinctively know. The first thing to consider is whether or not information about the noun's gender is a part of what is memorised about the noun. Although this seems to be a convincing theory when the nouns of languages with strict semantic gender assignment systems are taken into account, it does not seem to be the answer when other types of gender languages are considered. A human memory as the only way of determining gender of a certain noun seems to be an insufficient tool. There are three main reasons to claim that it is not the case that all genders of all nouns are memorised. The first one, mentioned by Corbett, is that a relatively high number of errors should be expected if the gender of all nouns is stored in lexicon (1991, 7). Even if the number of errors made by native speakers is

---

<sup>1</sup> Here the term grammar is used to refer to the inner grammar of an individual. The rules that govern an individual's use of language.

quite a difficult thing to trace and Corbett actually does not specify what is meant by higher number of expected errors, it is notable that memorising a gender of every one noun in one's language is quite a wasteful thing to do. Having an assignment system that can quickly determine a gender of a noun is much more effective. The second reason that Corbett gives is the relative consistency in assigning gender to borrowed words and neologisms. Chapter 5 will be devoted to the rules that govern such assignment. The third reason is that native speakers have intuitions about words that are new to them, and they are able to assign them to a correct gender. When trying to predict the gender of nouns in a language then, it is necessary to uncover the grammar rules that assign gender in that language. Gender must be a part of grammar since it does not seem to be possible that it is simply a memorised quality of the noun.

#### 2.1.4. Gender and Agreement

At this point it might be useful to establish the character of items that agree with the nouns. Both Corbett (1991) and Greenberg (1978) make useful lists of such items, including adjectives, demonstratives, articles, numerals, possessives, participles, verbs, relative and personal pronouns, adverbs, adpositions and complementizers; for examples of agreement in a set of different languages see Corbett (1991, 106-113). English agreement is restricted only to pronouns. Besides personal pronouns where *he/him/his* agrees with masculine, *she/her* with feminine and *it/its* with neuter nouns, there are also demonstratives *that*, *which* and *who/whom* where animate nouns require either 'who(m)' or 'that' whilst the inanimate nouns need either 'that' or 'which' to follow. In Czech, on the other hand, a wide range of elements agree with a governing noun, including for instance adjectives, demonstratives, numerals, possessives or pronouns. To sum up, gender is demonstrated by agreement, a range of agreeing elements may be limited but for gender to exist in a language it is necessary that agreement is demonstrated in at least one of the above mentioned items.

## 2.2. Frequency of Gender in WALS Languages

Gender as a phenomenon is not really widespread across the world languages. How frequent it actually is can be discerned from the data of The World Atlas of

Language Structures Online (from now on referred to as WALS). In chapter 31 of WALS, Corbett (2013) lists 257 languages and divides them into groups according to the number of genders. Only little over a third of languages have gender systems. This means that gender as such is typologically marked. Since markedness will play an important role in dealing with the special cases of assignment that are going to be discussed in the following chapters, it is necessary to establish what the term stands for.

### 2.2.1. Markedness as Frequency

The term markedness will be used in this thesis in two different senses, it might be useful to distinguish what is meant by it in each of them. Croft maintains that to be infrequent across languages means to be marked. He explains that 'the absolute cross-linguistic frequency of a linguistic type will provide evidence for the markedness of that type' (1990, 85). From this view-point gender belongs to the marked category. According to Corbett, out of 257 languages in WALS, 145 do not have a gender system. Out of the gender languages, 84 have a gender system based on sex and only 28 have a non-sex-based gender system (2013).

### 2.2.2. Markedness as Asymmetry

The other view of markedness and the more important one for this thesis is concerned with asymmetry. Croft explains that '[t]he essential notion behind markedness in typology is the fact of asymmetrical or unequal grammatical properties of otherwise equal linguistic element - inflections, words in word classes and even syntactic construction' (1990, 64). In other words, markedness is possible to be observed in pairs of elements within one paradigm. 'The two values that can be related by a markedness pattern must be in some sense paradigmatic alternatives' (1990, 69). Croft shows how 'structural coding' and 'behavioural potential' can be indicative of markedness (see Croft 1990). These two notions are going to be elaborated on in the following chapters.

### 2.2.3. Summary

To sum up, there are two types of markedness that are important to understand when reading this thesis. The first one is synonymous to low frequency. When

grammatical phenomenon is widespread across the languages it is considered unmarked. The one that is rare is then in turn considered marked. Markedness, in the second sense, is concerned with pairs of alternatives within one paradigm. How marked an item is, is decided on the grounds of its structure and linguistic behaviour. These notions will be considered again in section 5.1.

### 3. Restrictions on Possible Types of Languages

This chapter will only be brief since the topic it explores is too wide and complex to be narrowed down into just one section of a thesis. Thus only the most relevant notions will be concentrated on. This will help to form a background for the topic of this thesis. In other words, if we are to generalise about grammar of various languages, it is necessary to establish that rules that apply to one language can apply to another. The methods used to generate rules about possible types of languages will be discussed in the following section.

#### 3.1. Methods

According to Croft, there are two methods that are used in searching for possible language types. The first one is the 'inductive method' (1990, 44) whereby a 'gap' is found in a sample of languages and then it is explained. By gap he means a type of language that does not seem to exist. For example, no language whose gender system is not based on animacy (see section 2.2.) is found in the sample of languages that are part of WALS. Once this 'gap' is found it must be explained. The explanation might be straightforwardly psychological and based on the role that animacy plays in human perception of the world. Or it can reflect markedness. An example of a markedness reflecting analysis follows. The rule that is going to be considered is the following: *In all languages that have gender, gender systems are based on animacy.* There are other possible types, for example, languages whose gender system is based on distinctions between several sets of inanimate<sup>2</sup> and in which animate is assigned formally<sup>3</sup>. The fact that such types are not attested can be explained by markedness because the inanimate category is more marked, languages that have the inanimate

---

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of animacy and its limits see section 5.2.

<sup>3</sup> For a definition of formal assignment see section 4.1.3.

category but do not have the animate one do not exist. The problem with inductive method is as Croft points out that 'an unattested language type is not necessarily an impossible language type' (1990, 45). That means that if something is not observed in the sample of languages in question, it does not follow that such a language cannot exist. There is still the possibility that it simply is not part of the sample but is perfectly possible. There are some languages that are 'logically impossible', though, due to phonetics or morphology (Croft 1990, 45). In other words, if something is not possible to be pronounced by a human being, it cannot exist in a human language. The 'generative approach' relies on deductions about learnability of certain grammatical constructions.

## 4. Types of Gender Assignment System

### 4.1. Defining Assignment

Corbett is concerned with the fact that many linguists seem to be happy to accept that gender of each noun is simply part of its meaning (1991, 7). He disclaims this with regards to the accuracy of human memory. If gender of a noun was indeed part of lemma, as Levelt et al. suggest, it would be impossible for the native speakers to be so successful when using gender (1999). By gender assignment, it is meant a set of rules which determine which agreement class a noun belongs to. The term 'agreement class' as used here is synonymous to the meaning of 'gender' as defined in previous chapters. There are different types of languages with regards to gender assignment. Following Corbett's example this thesis will divide languages into three groups according to whether the assignment is semantic, predominantly semantic or formal. Note that as Dahl puts it: 'In any language there is a general semantically based principle for assigning genders to animate nouns and noun phrases' (2000, 577). That means that any gender assignment system must have an element of semantics in it; even in formal systems, at least some nouns will be governed by semantics in their assignment to a certain gender.

#### 4.1.1. Strict Semantic Assignment

Strict semantic assignment systems are, as mentioned in Corbett's *Gender*, the ones in which it is sufficient to know what a particular noun means to be able to assign it to a correct gender. At the same time, 'if we know the gender we know something about the noun's meaning' (Corbett 1991, 8). In the case of strict semantic system, Levelt's assumptions about the way nouns are assigned to genders might prove correct. In such languages gender seems to be part of the information that is stored in the mental lexicon of the speakers. Corbett admits that this type of assignment system is not very common (1991, 8). Considering that Corbett defines a predominantly semantic system as a distinct category, there is not a great number of languages that are left in the strict semantic category since exceptions in but a small number of nouns render the language only predominantly semantic.

#### 4.1.2. Predominantly Semantic Assignment

In predominantly semantic systems of gender assignment, it is also true that nouns are assigned to genders according to semantic criteria. Thus it is the meaning of the nouns that is the main decisive factor in determining their gender. One such a language is English. Most of English nouns are assigned to gender according to their meaning. It is possible to tell what agreement the noun will take plainly by considering its meaning. Some of English nouns are listed in table 1 below.

noun	simplified meaning	gender
<i>actress</i>	female actor, human being	feminine
<i>car</i>	vehicle, thing	neuter
<i>husband</i>	male spouse, human being	masculine
<i>blue tit</i>	bird, animal	neuter
<i>lady</i>	woman, female human beings	feminine
<i>knight</i>	male warrior, human being	masculine
<i>clog</i>	wooden shoe, thing	neuter

Table 1

As can be seen from examples in table one, masculine nouns in English denote male human beings, females are denoted by nouns that are of feminine gender. Animals

and inanimates are represented by nouns of neuter gender. However, unlike in the strict semantic assignment systems, there is a group of nouns that Corbett calls the 'semantic residue' (1991, 13). The semantic residue consists of nouns that do not follow the strict semantic assignment rules but are assigned to one or more of the genders regardless of these principles. They seem to be exceptions. Nevertheless, at a closer examination some of them show signs of being assigned by the strict semantic rules after all. Some of such nouns are found in English, among them are double gender nouns and nouns denoting ships and other vessels and vehicles. Their gender assignment will be considered in the core of this thesis. Coming back to the characteristics of the predominantly semantic assignment, it is possible that some of the apparent exception are actually caused by our misunderstanding of the culture. Corbett admits that '[i]n some of [the languages], researchers have proposed that abstract semantic criteria partly miss the point, and that if we can gain a better grasp of the worldview of the speakers, we can then understand the assignment system more fully' (2006, 751). In other words, the culture of the speakers may influence their view of meaning and thus, for instance, mythology may play a part in the assignment of gender. In the case of English, the 'boat nouns' are a perfect example of such a possibility. The group of people who chose to refer to boats in a feminine gender are often doing so because they feel very affectionate towards their boats. As Corbett himself aptly puts it: 'In the strict assignment system, the rules are transparent; in the predominantly semantic systems, there are exceptions, although in some cases, these may be explicable once the cultural setting is taken into account' (2006, 751). Predominantly semantic assignment systems are hence possibly just strict semantic assignment systems whose assignment rules are not so easily discernible.

#### 4.1.3. Formal Assignment

Formal assignment systems are such, in which at least a portion of the nouns is assigned by formal rules. Formal rules for assignment are those that are based on either phonological or morphological form of the nouns. Czech is a perfect example of such a language. Whilst there is a semantic core it, there is a number of words that are assigned to gender purely on the bases of its phonetics or morphology. Nouns that end in -a such as *káva* 'coffee' or *žába* 'frog' are likely to be of feminine gender, even though they do not denote females. There are also morphological clues, for



instance, nouns that take a suffix *-ka* become feminine, consider the following example: *učitel* ‘male teacher’ *učitelka* ‘female teacher’. This shows how either phonetics or morphology can determine the gender of the noun. To come back to Greenberg’s claims (see 2.1.2.), it indeed seems that if we want to study formal assignment systems not only stems themselves but also their affixes need to be considered. As has been noted, there is a semantic element to the assignment of gender in Czech. Dahl points out that this is true of all languages. He writes: ‘Animate nouns normally get their gender by semantic rules, whereas inanimate nouns may or may not have semantic gender’ (2000, 577). This is true for semantic assignment as well as for the formal one. As has been mentioned before, ‘[i]n no language are nouns assigned to genders [...] by purely formal rules’ (Corbett 2006, 751-2). To understand what Dahl means it is necessary to grasp the notion of animacy, to know what is meant by ‘animate’ and ‘inanimate’. It is important to realise that it is not a dichotomy but a scale and that each language may have its own ‘animacy hierarchy’ and its own line between what is and what is not considered animate. Dahl claims that ‘[t]he animacy hierarchy is supposed to have (at least) the following components: HUMAN > ANIMAL > INANIMATE’ (2000, 99). The right end of the hierarchy is the most animate one. There may be distinctions drawn anywhere on the scale. Even within one language there may be speakers for whom, for example, pets and domestic animals are animate and others who draw the line of animacy between animals and humans. Nevertheless, there is always a group that is considered animate and one that is inanimate. Thus every gender language including the ones whose assignment system is formal has at its basis an element of semantic system, according to which the animate nouns are assigned. The residue is assigned by formal rules. To rephrase it using Corbett’s words, ‘[l]anguages may use semantic rules or semantic and formal rules, but not only formal assignment rules’ (2006, 751).

## 5. Borrowed Nouns

Borrowing is a process whereby nouns from one language are used in another language. They can change with regards to their phonetic form or spelling. They can even describe a different concept from the one they used to refer to in their original language. Consider words such as *álej* ‘alley’, whilst in English it can refer to a narrow street between two houses, in Czech it only ever means a road that has trees

and bushes alongside it. There are some phonetic and orthographic changes and even some change in meaning. The accommodation of the borrowed nouns into their new language reaches even as far as their gender. Nouns do not seem to carry their gender with them from the donor language to the one they are entering. Whilst in English ‘alley’ is of neuter gender, in Czech, it is a feminine.

1. álej
  - a. \*břez-ový álej  
birch tree-MASC alley  
a birch tree alley
  - b. břez-ová álej  
birch tree-FEM alley  
a birch tree alley
  - c. \*břez-ové álej  
birch tree-NEUT alley  
a birch tree alley

Even Corbett, after examining a case of mutual influence of Upper Serbian and German, concludes that 'the influence of the gender of nouns in the donor language is hard to substantiate, except when it results from conscious effort of educated speakers (as in the literary language)' (1991, 81). The Czech example in 1.a.-c. Supports his conclusions. The idea that a noun carries the gender with it when it enters a new language does not seem plausible if only for the fact that each language has its own gender system. Even if two genders in two different languages have the same name it does not ensure that they have the same content. Moreover, if there is such a thing as an assignment system in a language there is no reason for it not to be able to assign gender even to words that are new to it. Thus it is possible to conclude that rules that assign gender to nouns of a certain language will apply to borrowing into this language as well. In the following sections, some of these rules will be examined.

## 5.1. Markedness

Since it is essential know which of the gender is more marked in the following actions, this chapter will provide some examples of diagnostics used in determining the more marked of the categories. Recall Since it will be important to know which

of the genders is more marked in order to understand Rice's claims presented in section 2.1.2. we notice that gender seems to be assigned by 'tendencies' and not by 'absolutes'. That is, due to violations of gender assignment principles in numerous nouns, it is not possible to rely completely on a certain assignment rule when predicting the gender of nouns (see Rice 2006). Before moving on to consider how he resolves the situation using the concept markedness, the second of the two views on markedness presented in section 2.2.2. should be refreshed, that is the notion of 'structural coding' and 'behavioural potential'. According to Croft, 'structural coding' can show which of the members of a category is marked: 'the marked value of a grammatical category will be expressed by as many morphemes as the unmarked value of that category' (1990, 73). So can behavioural potential: 'if the marked value has a certain number of distinct forms in an inflectional paradigm, then the unmarked value will have at least as many distinct forms in the same paradigm' (1990, 73). So, if English gender is considered, it seems that masculine is less marked than feminine and neuter. Masculine is structurally coded by zero morphology in words such as *actor*, *usher*, or *director*, whilst the feminine equivalents *actr-ess*, *usher-ette*, or *director-ise* are overtly coded. There are more morphemes in the feminine gender, thus it must be marked. Behavioral potential can be used to uncover which gender is more marked in the following way. Pronouns in English have more case distinctions in masculine than in feminine and neuter. See the following table.

case/pronoun	masculine	feminine	neuter
subjective	he	she	it
objective	him	her	it
possessive	his	her	its

Table 2

Whilst there are three distinct forms of the masculine pronoun, there are just two distinctions in feminine and neuter, thus masculine must be less marked than the other two. This is just a quick sample of how it is possible to determine which of the genders is the less marked one. When then a gender of a language is referred to as unmarked or less marked in the following passage, this structurally and behaviourally coded markedness is meant by it.

### 5.1.1. Against Markedness

At first, Corbett's standpoint must be considered to be able understand why he disregards markedness as a factor in the assignment of loanwords. He maintains that markedness, if it were to apply in the process of gender assignment 'would apply to the assignment of loanwords only.' He doubts 'the idea that loans may be assigned to the unmarked gender, which in this context is generally taken to be the one with the largest number of nouns in it' (1991, 77). The first thing to notice is the definition of markedness chosen. It is the frequency bases markedness discussed with regards to WALSH in section 2.2.1. not the notion reflected upon in section 5.1. Corbett's avoidance of markedness as relevant notion when it comes to gender assignment is based on his observations that although it might seem on the surface that borrowings are assigned to the unmarked (understand: most frequent) gender, there are often formal or semantic rules to account for them entering this particular gender. Therefore, even though Corbett considers the possibility of markedness entering the equation of gender assignment he dismisses this possibility on the grounds that assignment principles that exist in the language can explain the assignment of concrete nouns without reaching for help to markedness. The following section will show why this conclusion might not necessarily be the correct one.

### 5.1.2. Pro Markedness

If we are to consider markedness, its scope needs to be properly defined. Markedness should not be seen as the only decisive factor in gender assignment but rather it should be seen as a factor that is considered once there is a conflict between other assignment rules that are applied. As has been already discussed, Rice came up with the idea that markedness plays its part in the gender assignment. He proposes that 'when two constraints are in conflict, the noun is assigned to the least marked of the conflicting categories' (2006, 1397). To understand his proposal, it is necessary to know what is meant by a constraint. As follows from his article, by constraint an assignment rule is meant. If there are two different assignment rules competing against each other, the one advocating for the less marked gender will be followed. This claim is in contrast to what Fraser and Corbett have to say. They believe that formal and semantic rules compete against each other. They state that '[t]he two sets of rules can make conflicting assignments, and when they do it is the semantic rules

which dominate' (1996, 128). To support Rice's theory, it is necessary to find examples that are possible to explain using his suggestions but are not at the same time explainable by Fraser and Corbett's claim. It seems that Rice's theory may explain why formal assignment systems exist since if in case of a conflict of two assignment rules it was the semantic one which was then followed, then there is no reason why formal assignment rules should exist. When form and semantics, or any other two constraints come up with two different genders a noun should belong to, it is the less marked gender which it becomes. Rice suggests one more rule that balances out his markedness proposal. He believes that '[w]hen the conflict is imbalanced, the noun is assigned to the category that is most vigorously advocated' (2006: 1399). That means that when there are several assignment rules and a greater number of them assigns the noun to one gender, the gender that they assign will be adopted by the noun. Thus he resolves a few problematic cases where the least marked category was not assigned.

## 5.2. Animacy

Recalling Dahl's claims about the connection between animacy and semantic assignment from section 4.1.3., it is clear that all the animate nouns that enter the language should automatically adopt the gender that corresponds to their sex, that is in case that the language has a sex based system, otherwise it is expected that they will enter the animate gender. An example of such a word entering Czech vocabulary is *gigolo* 'gigolo', its form would place it in neuter gender since it ends in '-o', the only formal sign that a noun cannot belong to any other than neuter gender. Although, Lehečková believes that there are two such signs, according to her, both nouns ending in '-í' and those ending in '-o' belong to neuter gender in Czech (2000, 756). However, there is a plentiful supply of nouns ending in '-í' that disregards at least half of her claim. For example, feminine nouns, such as *paní* 'lady', double gender nouns such as *účetní* 'accountant', and masculine nouns such as *kočí* 'coachman'.

2. paní
  - a. \*mil-ý paní  
nice-MASC lady  
a nice lady

- b. mil-á paní  
nice-FEM lady  
a nice lady
  - c. \*mil-é paní  
nice-NEUT lady  
a nice lady
3. účetní
- a. mil-ý účetní  
nice-MASC accountant  
a nice accountant (male)
  - b. mil-á účetní  
nice-FEM accountant  
a nice accountant (female)
  - c. \*mil-é účetní  
nice-NEUT accountant  
a nice accountant
4. kočí
- a. mil-ý kočí  
nice-MASC coachman  
a nice coachman
  - b. \*mil-á kočí  
nice-FEM coachman  
a nice coachman
  - c. \*mil-é kočí  
nice-NEUT coachman  
a nice coachman

What all those nouns have in common, though, is that all of them denote an animate. There are no inanimate nouns in Czech that end in '-í' and at the same time belong to any other gender than neuter. Thus even though, Lehečková's claims about a possibility to establish gender of nouns ending in '-í' and '-o' solely on the basis of their form has been proven wrong, her observations can be used to support the claim that animacy has its role in assigning gender since animacy clearly overrides formal rules of assignment in the given examples. Besides, there really are no nouns which

are not borrowed and end in '-o' that are not neuter. To sum up, examples from the Czech language support Dahl's observations. Animate nouns, indeed, seem to be assigned to a gender that corresponds to their sex.<sup>4</sup>

### 5.3. Semantic Analogy and the Concept Association

'Exotic words may have variable gender, often taking gender by semantic analogy' Corbett claims (1991, 76) giving a Russian borrowed word *avenju* 'avenue' as an example of such a process. Semantic analogy as described ibidem, is an assignment rule that determines the borrowed noun's gender by appealing to its meaning and at the same time to a meaning of another noun (or a group of nouns) in the target language, so that the borrowed noun becomes a member of the same gender as a word that has a very close meaning to it. Coming back to Corbett's 'avenue' example, in Russian there is a word *ulica* 'street'. It is feminine and its meaning is similar to the one of 'avenue'. Thus 'avenju' is also of feminine gender in Russian. A rule that operates in semantic analogy cases seems to be the same as the one that assigns nouns by concept association (Corbett 1991, 77). To imagine what a concept association is, we may have a look at the English example of 'boat nouns', Nouns denoting boats, ships and such, in English are feminine<sup>5</sup>, feminine pronoun 'she/her' agrees with them. All the boat nouns share the same concept, any noun in English language that denotes a vessel, including spacecraft, can take feminine agreement. Thus, it is not surprising that the same rule applies to a borrowed noun *yacht*, coming from Dutch *jacht* 'yacht'. As for Czech, there are instances in which it seems that semantic analogy is working, such as German origin nouns *luft* 'air', used in Czech expressions such as *vyletět do luftu* 'to explode' or *být v luftě* 'to disappear into a thin air'. It is as expected of masculine inanimate gender. So is *ksicht* 'face(vulg.)' from a German word *Gesicht* meaning 'face', it could be expected be analogical to the Czech noun *obličej* 'face'. However, there is also a Czech word *tvář* with exactly the same meaning but it is of a feminine gender. The question is, then, why should 'ksicht' not have become feminine when it entered the Czech vocabulary. Admittedly, markedness could be called for to help to resolve this problem, stating that if there are two possible genders a word can be assigned to, it is the less marked one it will

---

<sup>4</sup> Apparent exceptions with regards to animacy, are nouns denoting infants. Those will be discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>5</sup> They can also be neuter, but this will be discussed later.

favour. However, since there are plentiful other borrowed words that need to be accounted for, it might be more useful not to start from semantic analogy as the first way of explaining how borrowed nouns gained a gender in Czech. Corbett warns that 'there is a problem that semantic analogy has been suggested as a factor which operates for loanwords in languages in which the assignment of native words can be accounted for without appealing to concept association' (1991: 77). Thus, the first thing to consider when we want to claim that semantic analogy is responsible for a word's assignment to a certain gender, is whether or not concept association is at work in the particular language. In Czech, names of colours seem to comply, at least at first examination. Words such as *červeň* 'red', *běloba* 'white' or *modř* 'blue' are all feminine.

5. *červeň*, *běloba*, *modř*

- a. \**jahod-ov-ý červeň*, \**alabastr-ov-ý běloba*, \**nebes-k-ý modř*  
strawberry-ADJ-MASC red, alabaster-ADJ-MASC white, sky-ADJ-MASC  
blue  
strawberry red, alabaster white, sky blue
- b. *jahod-ov-á červeň*, *alabastr-ov-á běloba* *nebes-k-á modř*  
strawberry-ADJ-FEM red, alabaster-ADJ-FEM white, sky-ADJ-FEM blue  
strawberry red, alabaster white, sky blue
- c. \**jahod-ov-é červeň*, \**alabastr-ov-é běloba* \**nebes-k-é modř*  
strawberry-ADJ-NEUT red, alabaster-ADJ-NEUT white, sky-ADJ-NEUT  
blue  
strawberry red, alabaster white, sky blue

However, at a closer examination, we find a number of exception, such as *okr* 'ochre', *karmín* 'crimson' or *ticián* 'titan' which are all masculine inanimate.

6. *okr*, *karmín*, *ticián*

- a. *světl-ý okr*, *syt-ý karmín*, *tmav-ý ticián*  
light-MASC ochre, rich-MASC crimson, dark-MASC titan  
light ochre, deep crimson, dark titan
- b. \**světl-á okr*, \**syt-á karmín*, \**tmav-á ticián*  
light-FEM ochre, rich-FEM crimson, dark-FEM titan  
light ochre, deep crimson, dark titan
- c. \**světl-é okr*, \**syt-é karmín*, \**tmav-é ticián*



light-NEUT ochre, rich-NEUT crimson, dark-NEUT titian  
light ochre, deep crimson, dark titian

Since it seems that concept association does not really apply to Czech, or at least it has not been proven to work, it might be useful to appeal to formal criteria instead, even in the case of other loanwords. Thus previously mentioned 'luft' and 'ksicht' can be classified as masculine inanimate using combination of formal criteria and markedness. Formal criteria stating that whatever ends in a consonant must be of either feminine or of masculine gender, since there are no neuter declension types ending in a consonant (for a full table of 'interaction between declination types and gender' see Lehečková 2000, 756). Masculine animate is ruled out by the inanimacy of the nouns in question, feminine then in turn by markedness. To conclude, it seems that Czech shows that it is necessary to bear in mind that there might be other processes involved in the assignment of gender to loanwords before appealing to semantic analogy. However, this should not serve to disregard semantic analogy as a possible assignment rule in all languages, but rather to be careful when reaching out for semantic analogy before considering other possibilities. Corbett suggests that since there may be found 'clusters' of words with a similar meaning that share the same gender even in 'languages where formal rules cover a large proportion of the nouns [...] semantic analogy/concept association is always potentially available, for native and borrowed nouns' (1991, 77). However, '[t]he normal situation is one in which borrowings are assigned in essentially the same way as are native words' (Corbett 1991, 81).

## 6. Double and Multiple Gender Nouns

Double and multiple gender nouns are those nouns 'which can take agreement of more than one consistent pattern' (Corbett 1991, 181). That is, nouns that seem to belong to two different agreement classes. Their agreement is, however, consistent and they can take all agreements of each of the two (or more) genders. Thus they differ from hybrid nouns which will be discussed later. An example of such a noun is the Czech word *saranče* 'grasshopper' as shown on its choice of adjectival agreement

with the adjective *zelený* 'green' compared to declension types *mladá růže* 'young rose' for feminine and *mladé kuře* 'young chicken' for neuter.

case/gender	feminine		neuter	
nominative	mlad-á růž-e	zelen-á saranč-e	mlad-é kuř-e	zelen-é saranč-e
genitive	mlad-é růž-e	zelen-é saranč-e	mlad-ého kuř-ete	zelen-ého saranč-ete
dative	mlad-é růž-i	zelen-é saranč-i	mlad-ému kuř-eti	zelen-ému saranč-eti
accusative	mlad-é růž-i	zelen-é saranč-i	mlad-ém kuř-eti	zelen-ém saranč-eti
vocative	mlad-á růž-e	zelen-á saranč-e	mlad-é kuř-e	zelen-é saranč-e
locative	mlad-é růž-i	zelen-é saranč-i	mlad-ém kuř-eti	zelen-ém saranč-eti
instrumental	mlad-ou růž-í	zelen-ou saranč-í	mlad-ým kuř-etem	zelen-ým saranč-etem

Table 3

As can be observed from the table, *saranče* can be of either feminine or neuter gender since it can take agreements of each of the two genders. This is exactly what is meant by a term double gender noun.

## 6.1. Diagnostics

However, not all nouns that seem to belong to two different genders are actually double gender nouns. To recognise whether or not we are dealing with a double gender noun, there are some guidelines set up in Corbett (1999). These will be presented in the following sections.

### 6.1.1. Two Distinct Meanings

If a noun that seems to belong in two different genders at the same time carries two distinct meanings it is not really a case of double gender. Corbett calls it either 'polysemy' or 'homonymy' depending on whether or not those two nouns whose form is accidentally the same are related (1991, 181-2). A case of polysemy is for example the couple of French nouns *un aide* 'helper' (masculine) and *une aide* 'help' (feminine) whose meaning is similar but they are not actually one word but two nouns with related meaning. A case of homonymy is represented by French words *un*

*livre* 'a book' (masculine) and *una livre* 'a pound' (feminine). Each of these two words has a separate meaning and is of different origin. The fact that they share a form is accidental. It might be a subject of a further investigation to find out why words that share form and are both inanimate ended up in two different agreement classes. Corbett points out that '[i]n languages in which gender is determined by semantic rule only for a proportion of the nouns, it might nevertheless appear meaningful in the residue under special circumstances' (1991, 92). So he does not rule out the possibility that there is some quality in a book that for a French speaker could be connected with the meaning of a masculine gender and that a pound has a feeling of femininity to it. However, there is not enough evidence for this analysis and there might be other explanations as well. Nevertheless, it might be useful to realise that even speakers of languages with formal gender systems may connect each gender to a certain meaning and thus they might feel that nouns assigned to a gender by formal rules share some qualities possessed by the semantically assigned ones. There are studies which are concerned with the connection between gender and residual meaning<sup>6</sup>.

### 6.1.2. Difference in Gender

If we rule out the type of seemingly double gender nouns that have been discussed in a previous section, two more groups of nouns are left to consider. The nouns in which 'the difference is derivable from the meaning of the genders' (Corbett 1991, 182). For example, the English animate nouns whose difference in gender correlates with the different sexes of its possible referents, such as *singer* (male) vs *singer* (female). In Czech, there seems to be just a few such nouns, including the noun *choť* 'spouse'.

#### 7. singer

- a. Have you met the singer? He is adorable.
- b. Have you met the singer? She is adorable.
- c. Have you met the singer? \*It is adorable.

#### 8. choť

- a. M-ůj choť je vysok-ý.  
my-MASC spouse is tall-MASC

---

<sup>6</sup> For an example see Schwitzenberg and Schiller, 2004.

- My husband is tall.
- b. M-á choť je vysok-á.  
my-FEM spouse is tall-FEM  
My wife is tall.
- c. \*M-é choť je vysok-é.  
my-NEUT spouse is tall-NEUT  
My spouse is tall.

Other words that show such tendencies in the Czech language are words with an emotional colouring, especially those that are deprecative. There is a handful of such expressions that can be treated as either masculine or feminine dependent on the sex of their referents. For instance *držgrešle* 'cheapskate', *naivka* 'simpleton', or *nešika* 'butterfingers' are all examples of such double gender nouns. They can take agreement and case-endings of either feminine or masculine class. English offers a much wider range of such nouns. Almost all nouns denoting people are of this kind. According to Ferguson, the nouns whose form suggest that they denote a particular sex, such as *actress*, *ballerina*, *fireman*, *postman* or *male nurse* and others are sexist and they ought to be replaced in learning material for foreign students by 'gender-neutral terms' such as *actor*, *ballet dancer*, *firefighter*, *letter carrier*, and *nurse* that are according to her already widely used by native speakers<sup>7</sup> (2004). These terms are all of double gender nature since they all can take either feminine or masculine agreement. A notable noun when considering multiple gender is the English noun *baby* which can take agreement of all three genders.

9. baby
- a. A baby sucked his thumb.
- b. A baby sucked her thumb.
- c. A baby sucked its thumb.

Whilst 9.a. and 9.b. can be used only if the sex of the baby is known, 9.c. is used both when we know whether the baby is a boy or a girl and when we do not. To sum up, there is a very limited number of double gender nouns whose only difference in meaning is the sex of the referent, in English on the other hand, there is a great

---

<sup>7</sup> The reason why I include her statement is not because she claims that the nouns should be used but because she points out that it is already so in everyday usage.

number of them and the trend seems to be that a number of such nouns is increasing rather than decreasing.

### 6.1.3. Two Different Agreement Classes

According to Corbett, there are nouns that 'can belong to two different declensional types, in both cases the gender is derivable from morphology' (1991, 182). That is nouns such as the Czech 'saranče' mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. These are nouns whose form makes them ambivalent and thus enables them to take agreement of two different genders. Corbett argues that since the nouns that show such an anomaly are often either borrowed or they are currently undergoing a change in gender, their double gender is viewed as stylistically unequal (1991, 182). This does not seem to be the case in the set of Czech words that will be presented shortly; words such as *esej* 'essay', *hřidel* 'arbour', *prestiž* 'prestige', *rez* 'rust', *smeč* 'smash', *sršeň* 'hornet', *kredenc* 'china closet' or names of cities and towns that end in a consonant, such as *Olomouc*, *Plzeň* 'Pilsner' or *Kroměříž*. Due to their form, each of them can be treated as either masculine or feminine. There are also nouns that are undecided between feminine and neuter (recall the 'sršeň' example). The words that are listed above include several borrowed words, namely 'esej', 'prestiž', 'smeč', and 'kredenc', however, there are also Czech words that follow the same patterns. All of them are animate or low animals (insects), thus the two different genders cannot be explained by appeal to the sex of the referent. When it comes to English, the number of such nouns is limited since English gender system is not formal but rather a semantic one. If a noun refers to an inanimate or denotes a low animal, it is of neuter gender. If it is animate, it is either of feminine or of masculine gender according to the sex of the referent as has been reflected upon earlier. An exception is the group of 'boat nouns' including nouns referring to cars and aeroplanes. They are of double gender in the similar way to the Czech examples.

#### 10. sailing ship

- a. Can you see that sailing ship over there? \*He is beautiful.
- b. Can you see that sailing ship over there? She is beautiful.
- c. Can you see that sailing ship over there? It is beautiful.

While it is ungrammatical to say 10.a, there is no problem in terms of grammaticality with either 10.b or 10.c. Corbett's claims about different stylistic value of the two

possible genders in one noun (see Corbett 1991, 182) are applicable to these examples. *Chicago Manual Style* states clearly that '[w]hen a pronoun is used to refer to a vessel, the neuter *it* (rather than *she* or *her*) is generally preferred' (Grossman 2003, 356). That shows that at least in American English, the usage of feminine agreement with boat nouns is considered to be something rare and unusual. That makes them different from the Czech nouns which are stylistically equal. To sum up, nouns that belong to two different genders according to the agreement only are divided into two groups, those that are considered as different in terms of the stylistics and those that are stylistically equally acceptable.

#### 6.1.4. Summary

Nouns that appear to have more than one gender can be found across various gender languages. Some of them are actually either homonymous or polysemous examples of words whose meaning is separate but whose form is the same. Others are either assigned to two different genders according to the sex of their referents, or they are nouns whose form may suggest two different genders. There might or might not be a stylistic difference in usage of one or the other genders.

## 7. Hybrid Nouns

Apart from nouns that belong to two different genders at the same time there are also nouns, whose gender is difficult to define because some of the items they govern show agreement of one gender and others of another one. 'These are nouns that neither simply take agreements of one consistent agreement pattern nor belong to two different genders. The agreement form to be used depends in part on the type of target involved' (Corbett 1991, 183).

### 7.1. Agreement Hierarchy

An example of such a word might be the Czech word *veličenstvo* 'majesty'.

#### 11. veličenstvo

- a. \*Váš králov-ský veličen-stvo, přá-l js-te si se mnou mluvit?

your.MASC royal-MASC majesty-NEUT wish-PAST.MASC be-2.PL RP<sup>8</sup>  
with me speak

Your royal highness, did you wish to speak with me?

- b. Vaš-e králov-ské veličenstvo, přá-l js-te si se mnou mluvit?

your-NEUT royal-NEUT majesty-NEUT wish-PAST.MASC be-2.PL RP  
with me speak

Your royal highness, did you wish to speak with me?

- c. \*Vaš-e králov-ské veličen-stvo, přál-o js-te si se mnou mluvit?

your-NEUT royal-NEUT majesty-NEUT wish-PAST.NEUT be-2.PL RP  
with me speak

Your royal highness, did you wish to speak with me?

The personal pronouns and adjectives agree with the noun's neuter ending, however, the verb agrees with the sex of the noun's referent. There are several other words that behave in the same way in Czech, to list just a few of them, nouns *výsost* 'highness' and *excelence* 'excellency' agree with the feminine pronouns, but the personal pronouns they take are of the gender that corresponds to the sex of their referent. Similarly, the noun *blahorodí* 'honour' agrees with neuter adjectives but the personal pronouns again take agreement according to the sex of their referent. Corbett offers a solution for this situation in form of an 'Agreement Hierarchy'. It consists of four 'agreement targets': 'attributive<predicate<relative pronoun<personal pronoun'. 'As we move rightwards along the hierarchy, the likelihood of semantic agreement will increase monotonically' claims Corbett (1991, 226). The following chapter will look at Agreement Hierarchy and try to use it to explain some phenomena in Czech.

### 7.1.1. Czech Neuter Plural

Agreement Hierarchy is a useful concept. However, it can be shown that perhaps the straightforward reaching for the semantic as the decisive factor might be misleading. For example, the Czech noun *dítě* 'child' agrees in singular with neuter gender, whilst in plural (*děti* 'children') it takes agreement of the feminine gender.

12. dítě

- a. \*Mil-ý dítě spal.

nice-MASC child slept.MASC

---

<sup>8</sup> reflexive pronoun

A nice child slept.

- b. \*Mil-á dítě spal-a.  
nice-FEM child slept-FEM

A nice child slept.

- c. Mil-é dítě spal-o.  
nice-NEUT child slept-NEUT

A nice child slept.

### 13. děti

- a. \*Mil-í děti spal-i.  
nice-PL.MASC children slept.PL.MASC

Nice children slept.

- b. \*Mil-é děti spal-y.  
nice-PL.FEM children slept-PL.FEM

Nice children slept.

- c. Mil-á děti spal-a.  
nice-PL.NEUT children slept-PL.NEUT

Nice children slept.

Such a word is outside the scope of Corbett's explanation. It is not the case that the verbs are taking different agreement than adjectives which could be explained by referring to the agreement hierarchy and showing that for example verbs being more to the right in the agreement hierarchy will take agreement according to semantics, whilst adjectives will take agreement according to the noun's form. In fact, the agreement differs according to the number. In singular, 'dítě' is treated by both adjectives and verbs as neuter. In plural, it is the feminine gender it is assigned to. Moreover, why should the plural noun 'děti' take agreement of the feminine gender if it should be the semantics that decides? Then, it should be possible to use either masculine or feminine, according to the sex of its referents. However, it not so. Nor is 'dítě' the only word that shows such tendencies, pair organs *uši* 'ears' and *oči* 'eyes' show the same pattern. They are neuter in singular, but their agreement in plural is feminine. In colloquial speech, moreover, the neuter agreement in plural is often syncretic with the form of the feminine plural agreement. This gives us a whole new perspective, if the nouns that belong to the neuter gender do not in fact have a separate agreement pattern from the masculine and feminine nouns in plural but



rather their agreement is syncretic with the one of the feminine gender. Or if this is becoming the case by changes that take place in the language. The case of the noun 'dítě' is solved without having to appeal to the Agreement Hierarchy. Corbett's analysis then might still be salient.

### 7.1.2. Nouns Denoting Young Human Beings

Corbett states that nouns that denote young animals are usually neuter (1999, 227). Even nouns that denote young humans, such as German *Mädchen* 'girl' or Czech *děvče* 'girl' and *pachole* 'boy' can belong to the neuter gender. As Corbett points out a conflict can thus arise since the nouns denote persons of a particular sex and at the same time their form or other semantic criteria assign them to neuter gender (1999, 227). This is resolved on the level of personal pronouns. All the rest of the Agreement Hierarchy agrees with the neuter gender of the noun as is illustrated on the two following examples.

#### 14. pachole

- a. \*T-en mal-ý mil-ý pachole zpíva-l.  
that-MASC small-MASC nice-MASC boy sing-PAST.MASC  
That nice little boy was singing.
- b. \*T-a mal-á mil-á pachole zpíva-l-a.  
that-FEM small-FEM nice-FEM boy sing-PAST-FEM  
That nice little boy was singing.
- c. T-o mal-é mil-é pachole zpíva-l-o.  
that-NEUT small-NEUT nice-NEUT boy sing-PAST-NEUT  
That nice little boy was singing.

#### 15. děvče

- a. Koukni na t-o vesel-é děvče. Je hezk-á, že?  
look at that-NEUT cheerful-NEUT girl. is pretty-FEM, right  
Look at that cheerful girl. She is pretty, isn't she?
- b. Koukni na t-o vesel-é děvče. Je hezk-é, že?  
look at that-NEUT cheerful-NEUT girl. is pretty-NEUT, right  
Look at that cheerful girl. It is pretty, isn't it?
- c. \*Koukni na t-u vesel-ou děvče. Je hezk-á, že?  
look at that-FEM cheerful-FEM girl. is pretty-FEM, right  
Look at that cheerful girl. She is pretty, isn't she?

In Czech both 15.a. and 15.b. are acceptable, thus the noun 'girl' can be considered either as a hybrid noun which agrees partly with neuter and partly with feminine gender, or as a neuter noun. Corbett came up with the two following rules that apply to hybrid nouns and their agreement targets:

- I. 'If a parallel targets show different agreement forms, then the further target will show semantic agreement.'
- II. 'For a particular target type, the further it is removed from its controller the greater the likelihood of semantic agreement' (1999, 240).

The nouns that denote young human beings in languages such as Czech or German behave as predicted by these rules. They take the formal agreement with neuter gender in targets that are close to them in syntactic structure and they take personal pronouns according to the sex of the referent. In this aspect they are similar the the nouns such as 'veličenstvo' that were discussed at the beginning of this chapter, in section 7.1.

## 7.2. English Relative Pronouns

The already discussed English 'boat nouns' are perhaps the most interesting case within the category of gender in English. As it was mentioned before they can be seen as double gender nouns as well as nouns whose gender is assigned according semantic analogy. When they were classified as double gender, though, the fact that even though they take feminine agreement in personal pronouns, they select inanimate relative pronouns has been omitted. Now the time has come to consider this aspect of such nouns. In spite of them being feminine, they do not at the same take time the animacy that is associated with all the other nouns that belong in this gender.

### 16. ship

- a. \*That is his new ship whom he loves.
- b. That is his new ship which he loves.

### 17. wife

- a. That is his new wife whom he loves.
- b. \*That is him new wife which he loves.

A reverse pattern can be observed in the multiple gender nouns 'baby' or 'child'. When they take agreement with the pronoun 'it' they still retain their animacy.

18. baby

- a. That is his new baby whom he loves.
- b. \*That is his new baby which he loves.

Occasionally, native speakers might consider 18.b. grammatical, however, all the cases that I have come across (which were scarce) described a stillborn baby. It might be useful to conduct an experiment which would determine whether or not native speakers find 16.a. and 18.b. acceptable. Nevertheless, when it comes to English relative pronouns, the question to ask is whether or not they actually agree with gender. Considering that both masculine and feminine (and in the case of 'baby' and similar nouns even neuter) gender agree with the relative pronoun 'who(m)', 'whose' or 'that' as long as their referent is animate and that inanimate nouns just like the rest of the inanimates requires 'which', 'whose' or 'that' in place of a relative pronoun, it is difficult to argue that this agreement has anything to do with gender. That is not to say that relative pronouns as such cannot agree with gender. Consider for example the Czech pronoun *který* 'who/which'.

19. *který*

- a. Muž, *kter-ý* tam st-ál.  
man who-MASC there stand-PAST.MASC  
A man who stood there.
- b. Žena, *kter-á* tam st-ál-a  
woman who-FEM there stand-PAST-FEM  
A woman who stood there.
- c. Dítě, *kter-é* tam st-ál-o.  
child who-NEUT there stand-PAST-NEUT  
A child who stood there.

As it seems the English relative pronouns do not agree with gender but rather with the animacy of the noun that governs them. In Czech, unlike in English, the relative pronouns agree with gender. With the English relative pronouns, there is left to establish what is the dividing line between 'which' and 'who'.

20. dog

- a. \*That is his new dog whom he loves.
- b. That is his new dog which he loves.

It seems that 'who' is reserved for human referents and if it is not the case of a personification animal referents cannot take it. However, there are native speakers who have intuitions against 'which' used with animal referents. In any case, it seems that the line between usage of 'which' and 'who' is drawn between animals and humans.

### 7.3. Other Factors

The Agreement Hierarchy is not the only influential factor in the assignment of gender to the hybrid nouns. Corbett points out that factors such as register (style) or background can play a role in gender assignment of such nouns (1999, 240-1).

#### 7.3.1. Style

How the style can play a role can be observed on the examples of Russian feminine and masculine agreement with nouns whose gender is formally masculine but whose referent can be feminine. Some such nouns are discussed by Corbett (1999, 178-180, 184), one of them being the noun *vrač* 'doctor'. It is used for both male and female doctors. The noun can either take all agreement of feminine or masculine gender or behave as a hybrid noun. The gender that it is assigned to depends on the register. If the noun appears in a newspaper that uses a formal style it is of masculine gender even though the referent is a female (1999, 232). That clearly shows how style can influence the choice of gender in a noun.

#### 7.3.2. Markedness

Rice asserts that it is not really the Agreement Hierarchy which governs the assignment but rather the 'optimal gender assignment theory'. Some principles that work within it have already been discussed in chapter 5. It is possible to sum it up in the following words: 'when a high-ranking constraint [...] is not decisive, then the optimal candidate is selected by lower ranked constraints. The lower ranking constraints relevant for gender assignment are the constraints reflecting markedness hierarchy for the categories' (2006: 1415). It is not the semantic criteria as Corbett claims but rather markedness which decides (see 5.1.2). In other words, the reason,

why semantic criteria decide about the gender of the elements that are syntactically further from the noun, is not that semantic is a factor which is somehow more powerful or more important than all the other factors. It is simply that semantics happens to propose the less marked gender and thus it is semantic criteria that are followed.

## 8. Change in Gender

Gender systems are not constant and changes in gender assignment are to be expected when we are dealing with natural languages. One of the possible forces that may bring about a change in a gender system of a language which is mentioned by Corbett is an abundance of borrowed nouns whose form can then change the whole of the system (1999). The change which will be explored in the following chapter is not of this kind. It is a change in gender of a concrete noun that is brought about by a change in its meaning and usage. It will investigate whether there is such a change in the Czech nouns that are used as insults and whether these nouns follow the previously described rules.

### 8.1. Nouns Used as Insults

As has been discussed before, nouns denoting humans will take the agreement of the gender to which all the rest of the nouns denoting humans of the same sex belong. Borrowed nouns certainly follow this principle as has been observed earlier in this thesis. Other nouns, namely the hybrids are less consistent. Not all of their agreement targets take the same gender. Nevertheless, there is still at least one of the targets that does agree in this manner. This chapter will look at principles that apply to those nouns in Czech that are used as insults. Several examples will be considered. It seems that nouns in Czech can change gender when they are used as insults. But not all of them do. This chapter will attempt to explain why it is so. The words that will be used to demonstrate this are the following, they are organised in a table that gives two translations into English. The first one is a translation of its ordinary meaning and the second will then provide an approximate translation of the meaning that the noun adopts when it is used as an insult.

	Czech Word	Meaning	Insult
a.	motovidlo	niddy noddy <sup>9</sup>	clumsy
b.	salát	salad	coward
c.	trumpeta	trumpet	silly
d.	trouba	oven	silly
e.	osel	donkey	stupid and clumsy
f.	dřevo	wood	clumsy
g.	svině	sow	cruel and treacherous
h.	prase	pig	messy

Table 4

The nouns in the table above can be divided between neuter (T4.a., i.), feminine (T4.c., d., h.), masculine inanimate (T4.b.) and masculine animate (T4.e.) gender when used in the meaning in the 'Meaning' column. However, they are not divided in the same way when used as in the 'Expletive' column. A sentence that will be used to demonstrate it is the following: *Takov-x ~ jsem ještě neviděl.* 'I have never seen such a ~.' Where the morpheme 'x' will be the diagnostic morpheme, *-ého* signalling masculine, *-ou* being feminine and *-é* for neuter.

#### 21. expletives

##### a. motovidlo

- i. \*Takov-ého motovidla jsem ještě neviděl.
- ii. \*Takov-ou motovidlu jsem ještě neviděl.
- iii. Takov-é motovidlo jsem ještě neviděl.

##### b. salát

- i. Takov-ého saláta jsem ještě neviděl.
- ii. \*Takov-ou salátu jsem ještě neviděl.
- iii. \*Takov-é saláto jsem ještě neviděl.

##### c. trumpeta

<sup>9</sup> A tool used by a weaver.

- i. Takov-ého trumpetu jsem ještě neviděl.
  - ii. Takov-ou trumpetu jsem ještě neviděl.
  - iii. \*Takov-é trumpetu jsem ještě neviděl.
- d. trouba
  - i. Takov-ého troubu jsem ještě neviděl.
  - ii. Takov-ou troubu jsem ještě neviděl.
  - iii. \*Takov-é troubu jsem ještě neviděl.
- e. osel
  - i. Takov-ého osla jsem ještě neviděl.
  - ii. \*Takov-ou osla jsem ještě neviděl.
  - iii. \*Takov-é osla jsem ještě neviděl.
- f. dřevo
  - i. \*Takov-ého dřeva jsem ještě neviděl.
  - ii. \*Takov-ou dřevu jsem ještě neviděl.
  - iii. Takov-é dřevo sem ještě neviděl.
- g. svině
  - i. Takov-ého sviňu jsem ještě neviděl.
  - ii. Takov-ou sviňu jsem ještě neviděl.
  - iii. \*Takov-é sviňu jsem ještě neviděl.
- h. prase
  - i. \*Takov-ého prase jsem ještě neviděl.
  - ii. \*Takov-ou prase jsem ještě neviděl.
  - iii. Takov-é prase jsem ještě neviděl.

The most striking thing is that none of the neuter words change in gender, that might be explained as being a result of their form. They are assigned formally to a neuter gender and the same rules apply when the nouns are denoting a human being. However, they might be considered rather as hybrid nouns than as strictly neuter nouns. With the originally feminine nouns, both masculine and feminine gender can be used as can be seen in 21.c., d. and h. It seems that the sex of the referent is taken into account. The masculine nouns stay masculine, as can be seen in both 21.b. and e. The only instances in which they can be used to refer to a woman are when in vocative or in a clause that includes a copula verb. Since such sentences seem to allow much wider variety of gender than other constructions, a short section will be

devoted to them before the end of this thesis. To conclude this section, it seems that both masculine and neuter nouns retain their original gender when their meaning changes, only feminine nouns become double gender nouns. The reasons for it might be of formal character. (See section 6.1.2.)

## 8.2. Copula

Sentences that include a copula verb seem to allow more possibilities than other constructions. Compare the two following sentences. Whilst 22.a. is perfectly grammatical, 23.a. is not.

### 22. copula

- a. Ona je dobr-ý doktor, operova-l-a vždy úspěšn-ě.  
she is good-MASC doctor, operate-PAST-FEM always successful-ly  
She is a good doctor, her operations were always successful.
- b. Ona je dobr-á doktor-ka, operova-l-a vždy úspěšn-ě.  
she is good-FEM doctor-FEM, operate-PAST-FEM always successful-ly  
She is a good doctor (female), her operations were always successful.

### 23. without copula

- a. \*T-en dobr-ý doktor operova-l-a vždy úspěšn-ě.  
that-MASC good-MASC doctor, operate-PAST-FEM always successful-ly  
That good doctor's operations were always successful.
- b. T-a dobr-á doktor-ka operova-l-a vždy úspěšn-ě.  
that-FEM good-FEM doctor-FEM operate-PAST-FEM always successful-ly  
That good doctor's (female) operations were always successful.

From the examples, it is possible to draw a conclusion that if a noun follows a copula, its gender does not need to be the same as the gender that would be ordinarily required by the referent. To test this hypothesis its limitations must be explored. To investigate whether a masculine noun can be followed by a feminine noun if there is a copula verb, the Czech word *herečka* 'actress' will be looked at.

### 24. herečka

- a. \*On je dobr-á hereč-ka.



he is good-FEM actr-ess

He is a good actress.

b. On-a je dobr-á hereč-ka.

she is good-FEM actr-ess

She is a good actress.

As it seems neither Czech nor English allow 24.a., that is a construction where a copula is followed by a feminine noun although the referent is a male. To explain this, the concept of markedness might be used once again. In Czech, the feminine ender is the more marked one, as has been shown in previous chapters. Thus, it cannot replace a masculine noun when the masculine is available and required. Example 24. leads to rephrasing of the original proposition. A copula is followed by a noun of the same gender as a referent or of the gender that is less marked. This can then explain why 21.b.ii. and 21.e.iii. were not grammatical, whilst 21.c.i., 21.d.i. and 21.h.i. were.

## 9. Conclusion

This thesis used Corbett's approach to gender assignment systems as a basis to explain how gender is assigned to borrowed nouns, hybrid nouns and insults in Czech and in English. After introducing the topic, looking at the definitions of gender that were formulated throughout the time when the study of gender was developing, the topic of markedness which proved to be an underlying notion throughout this thesis was introduced. Markedness was then used to explain why nouns borrowed into Czech adopted a particular gender. English being a language with a semantic assignment system was easily explained by semantic assignment rules accompanied by the concept of semantic association. In other words, when looking at the examples of borrowing into English and into Czech, it seems that semantic criteria proposed by Corbett as the most salient ones in gender assignment of the borrowings are satisfactory when a language with a semantic assignment system, such as English is considered. However, formal gender assignment languages need to be looked at with a consideration of the markedness.

In the following section, the notion of double and multiple gender was discussed. Cases of synonymy and polysemy were ruled out of consideration and two groups of

multiple gender nouns were established. It has been noted that the nouns that require a complete set of agreement of two distinct genders are of two types. The first group are nouns animates whose only distinguishing feature is the sex of their referent according to which they take agreement of one or the other gender. The second group consists of nouns which are formally ambivalent and thus can take agreement of more than one gender. It has been noted that even though Corbett believes that there must necessarily be a stylistic difference between the two variants of the noun, it does not seem to be so in several of the Czech examples listed. The English cases, however, comply with Corbett's assertions.

The following section was devoted to the assignment of gender in hybrid nouns. Since the nouns that show such behaviour are invariably nouns with animate referent, it seems that Corbett's Agreement Hierarchy that has been discussed can account for most of them. Some cases that did not seem to comply were commented upon. However, they were proven to be cases of a different assignment conflict. A conclusion that this thesis has come up with was that although it is semantic criteria that guide the assignment of gender in syntactically further elements, the reason why it is so is that semantic criteria actually propose the less marked gender and thus are followed.

The final part of the thesis further developed this notion. According to the behaviour of nouns that are used as insults in Czech, it seems that whilst originally feminine nouns seem to adopt the gender that is associated with the sex of the referent, masculine nouns do not behave in such a way. This supports the theory that it is actually the least marked gender that is assigned. A puzzling concept then, are the originally neuter nouns which do not behave as expected. A further investigation might be useful. In this thesis, the form of the noun is considered as a decisive factor. To sum up, this thesis was looking at the special cases of gender assignment with the aim to find whether or not they are actually accountable for by the rules that govern gender assignment in the rest of the nouns of the language. It seems to be so. With the aid of markedness special cases of gender assignment in Czech and English seem to be possible to explain.

## 10. Works Cited

Corbett, Greville G. 1991. *Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Corbett, Greville G. 2006. 'Gender, grammatical.' In *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* 2nd Edition, edited by Keith Brown, 749-756. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Corbett, Greville G. 2013. 'Sex-based and Non-sex-based Gender Systems.' In *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*, edited by Matthew S. Dryer and Martin Haspelmath. Available online at <http://wals.info/chapter/31> , accessed on 22.03.2016.
- Croft, William. 1990. *Typology and Universals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dahl, Östen. 2000. 'Animacy and the Notion of Semantic Gender.' In *Gender in Grammar and Cognition: I: Approaches to Gender*, edited by Barbara Unterbeck, Matti Rissanen, Terttu Nevalainen and Mirja Saari, 99-115. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Ferguson, Chantelle. 2004. 'Sexist Language Persists in the Classroom.' *English Teaching Forum* 42 (1). 36-41.
- Fraser, Norman M. and Corbett, Greville G. 1994. 'Gender, Animacy, and Declensional Class Assignment: A Unified Account for Russian.' in *Yearbook of Morphology 1994*, edited by Geert Booij and Jaap van Marle, 123-150. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Grossman, John, ed. 2003. *The Chicago Manual Style* (15 ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1978. 'How Does Language Acquire Gender Markers' in *Universals of Human Language 3 Word Structure*, edited by Joseph H. Greenberg, Charles A. Ferguson and Edith A. Moravcsik, 47-82. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Gunter, Thomas C., Friederici, Angela D. and Schriefers, Herbert. 2000. 'Syntactic Gender and Semantic Expectancy: ETPs Reveal Early Autonomy and Late Interaction.' *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 12 (4), 557-568.
- Hockett, Charles, F. 1958. *A Course in Modern Linguistics*. New York: Macmillan.
- Lehečková, Helena. 2000. 'Use and Misuse of Gender in Czech.' In *Gender in Grammar and Cognition: I: Approaches to Gender*, edited by Barbara Unterbeck, Matti Rissanen, Terttu Nevalainen and Mirja Saari, 749-770. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Levelt, W. J. M., Roelofs, A. and Meyer, A. S. 1999. 'A Theory of Lexical Access in Speech Production.' *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 22, 1-75.
- Rice, Curt. 2006. 'Optimizing Gender.' *Lingua* 116, 1394-1417.

Schiller, N.O., Münte, T.F., Horemans I., Jasma, B.M. 2003. 'The Influence of Semantic and Phonological Factors on Syntactic Decisions: an Event-Related Brain Potential Study.' *Psychophysiology* 40 (6), 869-877.

Schwichtenberg, Beate and Schiller, Niels O. 2004. 'Semantic Gender Assignment Regularities in German.' *Brain and Language* 90 (1-3), 326-337.