



Original article

Gender in English and Kurdish: A Contrastive Study with Implications for Teaching

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Received: 30 September 2025

Accepted: 24 December 2025

Published: 01 February 2026

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol22.Iss1.1383>



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Cite:

Omer, J. I., & Al Bajalani, F. R. H. (2026). Gender in English and Kurdish: A Contrastive Study with Implications for Teaching. *Wasit Journal for Human Sciences*, 22(1).

<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol22.Iss1.1383>

ABSTRACT

This research presents a contrastive analysis of gender in English and Kurdish, aiming to provide a clearer understanding of gender usage in both languages. The study examines key linguistic differences and similarities to offer insights that may enhance readers' comprehension of the topic.

The paper examines grammatical gender in both languages using morphological, semantic, and syntactic frameworks, highlighting key similarities and differences and their pedagogical implications for learners. It explores how each language encodes gender. The results clarify gender systems in both languages and inform effective approaches to teaching grammatical gender.

This analysis highlights notable distinctions and parallels in gender representation between two languages. The findings emphasize the value of incorporating linguistic gender awareness into teaching practices. By integrating these insights into curriculum design, educators foster a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and promote inclusivity. Ultimately, the study advocates for a more nuanced approach to language education across linguistic contexts.

Keywords: Gender in language, Contrastive linguistics, Language teaching, Cross-linguistic comparison

النوع النحوي في اللغتين الإنجليزية والكردية: دراسة مقارنة وتطبيقاتها في التدريس

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المُستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث دراسة مقارنة للنوع النحوي في كل من اللغة الإنجليزية والكردية، ويهدف إلى تقديم فهم أوضح لاستخدام الجندر في اللغتين. تستكشف الدراسة الفروقات والتشابهات اللغوية الرئيسية لتقديم رؤى من شأنها تعزيز فهم القارئ للموضوع. يتكون البحث من ستة أقسام: مقدمة تتناول المشكلة وأهداف الدراسة وأهميتها والمنهجية؛ خلفية تاريخية عن الجندر في اللغة الإنجليزية؛ دراسة للجندر في الكردية؛ تحليل مقارنة يبين أوجه التشابه والاختلاف؛ قسم مخصص للتقنيات التربوية الخاصة بتعليم الجندر؛ وأخيراً، الخاتمة.

يسلط هذا التحليل الضوء على الفروقات والتشابهات البارزة في تمثيل الجندر بين اللغتين. وتؤكد النتائج على أهمية دمج الوعي بالجندر اللغوي في الممارسات التعليمية. من خلال إدماج هذه الرؤى في تصميم المناهج، يمكن للمعلمين تعزيز فهم الطلاب لديناميكيات الجندر وتعزيز الشمولية. في نهاية المطاف، تدعو الدراسة إلى اتباع نهج أكثر دقة في تعليم اللغات يأخذ في الاعتبار تعقيدات الجندر في السياقات اللغوية المتنوعة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النوع النحوي في اللغة، اللسانيات المقارنة، تدريس اللغة، المقارنة بين اللغات.

1. Introduction

In most languages, the genders of nouns differ according to the ending of the word or another sign or characteristic. In Latin, for example, nouns have three genders; 'male, female, and neutral' and they differ from each other in terms of their meaning, the ending of the word or the suffix.

Genders had regular rules and obvious role in morphology (Awrehmany, 1979, p.163).

Unlike Modern English, Old English assigned gender to nouns, meaning masculine nouns can take a feminine form. For instance, the masculine word "bæcere" (baker) becomes "bæcestre" in the feminine form. Additionally, in Old English, adjectives and pronouns align with the subject's gender and number (Martin, 2023).

On the other hand, nouns in Kurdish, also known as Sorani, have largely lost grammatical gender in nouns (Haig, 2008, p. 5-6). Unlike Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), which retains a two-way gender distinction (masculine and feminine), Kurdish does not typically mark nouns for gender (Kurdipedia, 2014). While most nouns in Kurdish are gender-neutral, there are instances where semantic gender (the actual sex of the referent) is clear from the context or the noun itself, especially when referring to people or animals. For example, the word for *woman* - ژن inherently refers to a female, and the word for *man* - پيارو refers to a male. However, these nouns are not grammatically marked as feminine or masculine in the same way they would be in a language with grammatical gender. According to Thackston (2006), these gendered terms are lexical rather than grammatical, they indicate the biological sex but do not affect how verbs or adjectives behave grammatically.

The most striking contrast lies in the pronoun system. English retains gendered third-person singular pronouns, while Kurdish uses a single gender-neutral pronoun. Both languages primarily rely on semantic gender in nouns, where the meaning of the word indicates the sex of the referent.

Grammatically, neither language exhibits a robust system of gender marking on nouns or widespread gender agreement. This contrast highlights the different evolutionary paths in the grammatical structures of the two languages regarding the category of gender.

Ultimately, for understanding and tackling gender bias, it is necessary to consider gendered language structures, frameworks, and pronoun usage (Abdul Aziz, 2025).

1.1 The Problem

Undoubtedly, English is gaining more ground in Kurdistan now and more students are learning it than before. Thus, the teaching of English to Kurdish speakers poses problems that are inherent in the nature of both languages. Many problematic areas arise in the process of teaching this language.

Regarding Kurdish learners of English, they experience various difficulties in learning English as a foreign language. These difficulties include:

- 1- The main issue is the fundamental difference in how gender is expressed (or not expressed grammatically) in the two languages. English relies heavily on semantic gender and pronoun distinctions, while Kurdish relies on semantic gender and a gender-neutral pronoun.
- 2- Language teachers need to emphasize how both languages convey the sex of individuals and animals through the meanings of words. Direct vocabulary instruction focusing on male/female pairs is crucial.
- 3- Another problem that Kurdish students face is that sometimes English speakers use *it*, to refer to babies and assign feminine gender to nonliving nouns such as cars, ships, and countries.
- 4- Kurdish speakers might initially struggle with choosing the correct gendered pronoun in English, potentially leading to errors like using *he* for a woman or *she* for a man.
- 5- Another issue which is a common area of error for L2 learners is in using the pronouns *he*, *she*, and *it*. As in Kurdish the single pronoun ئێه is used instead of these pronouns.
- 6- The problem that teachers should be aware of is cultural distinctions related to gender in both societies, as language and culture are intertwined.

In conclusion, a contrastive study must acknowledge the fundamental asymmetry in grammatical gender. The research and teaching should then focus on how semantic gender is expressed in both languages and, most importantly, the significant differences in their pronoun systems, as this is the area where the most learning challenges are likely to arise.

1.2 The Aim of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Provide a detailed description of the specific and generic functions of gender in both English and Kurdish.
2. Point out the main similarities and differences of gender in English and Kurdish.
3. Suggest ways to teach and enable (Kurdish) learners of English to generate the correct choice of English gender in a given context.

1.3 The Value of the Study

The value of the study lies in being a contrastive study between Kurdish and English. Since the Kurdish library lacks resources, it is hoped that this study will fill one of the gaps. It is also hoped that the findings of this study will serve as a useful resource for pedagogical purposes and be of value to teachers, students and learners of English in general and Kurdish learners in particular, and also for researchers and anyone who is interested in learning more about gender.

1.4 Definitions of Gender

1. Quirk defines it as a grammatical classification of nouns, pronouns, or other words in the noun phrase, according to certain meaning-related distinctions, especially a distinction related to the sex of the referent (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 314).

2. Audesh states that gender is the relation between the biological category sex and the grammatical phenomenon gender (Audesh, 1986, p. 2).
3. In his definition, Mohammed views gender as a grammatical category that deals with the classification of nouns according to three bases; morphological, syntactic and semantic (Mohammed, 1987, p. 6).
4. It is also defined by Zubin (1984, p. 41), as a pragmatic instance of the arbitrariness of language (cited in Mohammed, 1987, p.1).
5. In addition to the previous definitions, gender is defined by Trask as a grammatical term that refers to the difference between male and female pronouns such as *he* and *she*. In grammar, the masculine and feminine are often used instead of male and female (Trask, 1995, p.42).
6. And finally, gender is a grammatical category used for the analysis of word-classes displaying such contrasts as masculine, feminine and neuter, animate and inanimate (Crystal, 2003 a, p. 197).

What is concluded from the above definitions is that all of them share the view that gender is a secondary grammatical category in which nouns and pronouns are divided into different classes (masculine, feminine, and neuter) based on the sex of the noun or pronoun they refer to.

2. Gender in English

2.1 Historical Background

The word gender comes from the Middle English Gender, a loanword from Norman-Conquest-era Middle French. This, in turn, came from Latin *genus* which originally meant kind or race. It derives ultimately from a widely attested Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root *gen-*, which is also the source of *kin*, *kind*, *king* and many other English words (New World Encyclopedia, cited in Harper, 2020).

Robins (1967, p. 25, cited in Mohammed, 1987, p. 9) points out that the Greeks were the first to study languages and to classify nouns according to their genders. It is reported that those who distinguished three genders; masculine, feminine and neuter were Protagoras and Aristotle (Robins, 1967, p. 25).

Gender is rarely a basis for marked linguistic differences. It is recognized in a language as a grammatical category. The gender distinction depends on the type of gender, whether grammatical or natural, if it ever exists in a given language (Hudson, 2000, p. 464).

Sweet and Sambrook point out that Old English passed through many changes; nouns were inflected for gender in regard to sex, which means that sexless things might be assigned any gender. For instance, the word stan 'stone' was masculine, bok 'book' was feminine, whereas wifmann 'woman' was neuter, and magden 'girl' was neuter. Hence, gender in Old English was an arbitrary assignment of nouns to different classes i.e. it was not based on a systematic principle. The relation between the gender of a noun in Old English and sex was arbitrary and thus is still referred to as grammatical gender, unlike the present system of gender in Modern English which is mostly natural, and is normally described as lacking grammatical gender (Sweet, 2023, p. 257, 266).

The three genders of nouns in Old English, were also and most clearly shown by the accompanying definite article 'the', that is for [masculine 'se', feminine 'sēo', and neuter 'pœt'] are used (Sweet, 2023, p. 266, 287).

The different subclasses that each of the nominal genders had were related to different sets of inflectional endings. The adjectives and verbs were also divided into classes and required different inflectional endings. Therefore, the loss of nearly all of these nominal, adjectival, and verbal endings was one of the most significant changes between Old English and Modern English (Akmajian et al, 1995, p. 323-325).

2.2 Grammatical Gender vs. Natural Gender:

Historically, two types of gender have been identified in languages; natural and grammatical gender. Natural gender is a semantic system that is based on biological sex. In contrast, grammatical

gender is characterized by a formal system (Konishi, 1993, p. 520), where each noun belongs to a certain grammatical class (Lyons 1968, p. 283). In this system, there is gender agreement between a noun, the adjectives and articles that modify it, and any pronoun used to refer to it (Eckert, 1990, p. 60). There may or may not be agreement between a given word's natural gender and its grammatical gender, since a word's grammatical gender is logically independent from the meaning of the word (Lyons, 1968, p. 284).

Quirk et al (1985, p.187) state that in the same way as we have time in nature and tense in the grammar of the verb, we have a similar relation between sex and the gender of the noun.

Natural or biological gender relates to the logical categories of sex which are [male, female and sexless] and correspond to the grammatical terms; [masculine, feminine and neuter] respectively through the use of special inflectional endings. That is grammatical gender uses certain grammatical means to classify nouns into genders (Mohammed, 1987, p. 5-8).

2.3 The Main Characteristics of Gender in English:

According to Trask (1995, p. 42), gender is one of the strongest grammatical categories, and it is important in human languages. Gender is also thought to be a misunderstood category.

He believes that "gender is not a simple reflection of reality; rather it is to some extent a matter of convention and speaker choice".

He argues that the languages that have gender are only a minority and that such languages classify all their nouns into two or more gender classes, in which the nouns have noticeable differences in the grammatical behavior (Trask, 1995, p.42).

Ibrahim (1973, p. 36) cited in (Mohammed, 1987, p. 73), point out that English lost its grammatical gender during the Middle English period according to which nouns are classified into masculine, feminine and neuter. That is, English has lost its gender markers and the inflections that marked agreement between nouns and other word classes.

Based on what has been mentioned above, the main characteristics of gender in English can be summarized in the following points:

1. Gender in English is 'notional' or 'covert'. Nouns are classified semantically according to their co-referential relations with personal and reflexive pronouns (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 314).
2. English does not have grammatical gender; however, it has ways of identifying natural gender. Animate beings can be distinguished from in-animate entities, personal from non-personal beings and male from female individuals (Crystal, 2003 a, p. 209).
3. In English, only singular nouns have gender classification, while all plural nouns function alike and the pronoun 'they' is used for them (Mohammed, 1987, p. 75).
4. English gender as an inherent feature can be designated for animate nouns which are either male or female according to sex while all other nouns are neuter (Baugh, 1971, p. 11). Verschueren (1999, p. 62) explains that English language grammatically classifies all lifeless things as neuter. But when in-animate or lifeless nouns are personified, such a distinction of gender fails in nouns such as 'ship', which is considered female and referred to by 'she' or 'sun' which is referred to by 'he' (Mohammed, 1987, p. 73).

2.4 English Gender Classes

Grammatical genders are sometimes called noun classes in linguistics. These classes of nouns are reflected in the behavior of associated words, that is every noun must belong to one of the classes, and very few of them belong to several classes at one time (Audring, 2016, p.1).

According to Leech & Svartvik, (1994, p. 275) nouns, adjectives and articles have gender differences, and among the pronouns, there is a natural distinction among *he*, *she* and *it* and the choice between he and she depends on whether the person is male or female, since nouns as Trask (1995, p. 6, 45) mentions have no grammatical gender in English. He further argues that English has some words that inherently indicate males or females, such as *cow* and *duchess*.

Biber et al. (1999, p. 311) state that English does have gender but it is a less important category than in many other languages.

Consequently, some languages classify nouns into different classes. The term gender is somehow confusing, because in most cases there is no connection between the gender of the noun and the biological sex of the object it refers to, because many objects, for example, *pen, spoons*, have no biological sex (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 314).

2.4.1 Personal Male/Female Nouns or Personal Masculine/Feminine Nouns:

The terms masculine and feminine are often used instead of male and female in grammar (Leech et al, 2001, p. 176).

Animate nouns are divided into personal and non-personal types. Personal animate nouns refer to males and females, with pronouns *he/she* for each one of them. However, sometimes the noun ending such as *-ess* makes the gender clear, like in words *actor/actress, prince/princess ...etc.* (Crystal, 2003 b, p. 209). But in most nouns that refer to people, the reference applies to both sexes, as in the words *author, manager ...etc.* Thus, it is unknown whether the noun refers to male or female until the pronoun is mentioned (Alexander, 1990, p. 9, 38).

Some people claim that female is the feminine form of male, but it is not. It came into English from the Latin word femina with the same morpheme *fe-* that occurs in Latin fecunduss which means fertile. (Fromkin et al., 2003, p. 484).

The male terms are called unmarked, since they serve as general terms, as do the male pronouns. For example, the brotherhood of man includes women, while the term sisterhood does not include men (Fromkin et al., 2003, p. 485).

2.4.2 Personal Dual Gender

There are some male/female pairs that have dual gender terms, for instance, the term *parent* can be used to refer to nouns *father* and *mother*, or sibling for brother and sister.

There are also some dual gender forms such as poet, author that replace some optional female forms which are no longer in normal use, such as poetess and authoress (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 315).

In case one gives information on the sex of the person, a gender marker can be added such as male teacher/ female teacher. (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 315)

The use of dual-gender class is increasing. However, no clear rules can be given for whether a noun should have a dual-gender distinction or not. It seems, arbitrary that guest and servant should be dual in contrast to host~ hostess and waiter~ waitress (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 16, 315).

Nouns that are morphologically marked for gender, especially where the sex of the referent is irrelevant, often tend to be avoided, for example, dual gender nouns like *author, poet, supervisor...etc.* are preferred to *authoress, poetess, foreman...etc.* (Greenbaum & Quirk, 2001, p. 101).

2.4.3 Common Gender:

Common gender is a much smaller and much less important class for which he, she and it may all be suitable, such as the word child. In spite of the fact that the context usually decides this choice for the speaker, for instance, "That baby next door! It screams all night" (Rivers & Temperley, 1978, p. 112).

Common gender nouns are neither personal nor non-personal i.e. (they are intermediate between personal and non-personal). The wide selection of pronouns *he/ she/ it* does not mean that all these are possible for all nouns in all contexts. Non-personal reference pronoun, such as it for a child may be used by somebody who is emotionally unrelated to the child, or may be used for generalizing sex distinctions in scientific contexts, for example, *A child learns to speak the language of its environment.* So, it depends on the situation. However, a mother is not likely to refer to her baby or child as it. (Alexander, 1990, p. 38-39, Leech, 2001, p.465)

When animals are personified or treated as pets including 'black bird, cat, rabbit...etc.' they belong to this class (Thomson and Martinet, 1990, p. 9, Quirk et al, 1985, p. 316).

2.4.4 Collective Gender

In British English collective nouns are different from other nouns in taking pronouns, as they may take either singular *it* or plural, *they* without change of number in the noun (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 316). Some of the collective nouns occur in singular only with the definite article like; the clergy, the public, etc., while some other collectives are proper names such as Vatican, Parliament, etc. (Greenbaum & Quirk, 2001, p. 101).

In consequent, a singular noun may be followed by a plural verb. In spite of the fact that plural forms are far less common in American English, i.e. in American English, a collective noun may almost always take a singular verb (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 316).

2.4.5 Higher Animals

Most of the non-personal animate nouns that refer to animals take the pronoun *it* as if they were things (Audesh, 1986, p. 1). However, familiar animals are distinguished from less familiar animals. The former includes the range of animals and birds that are of interest to human society in farming or domestic pets and have a noticeable effect on familiar experience. The pronoun *he/ she* is used with them and they have distinct male/female forms such as; *ewe/ ram, stallion / mare, hen / cock, bull/cow*. Others are pairs that are morphologically marked, such as *lion~ lioness, tiger~ tigress* (Celce-Murcia, Larsen-Freeman, & Howard, 1999, p. 55).

2.4.6 Lower Animals and In-animate Things

The majority of creatures in the animate world consist of lower or less familiar animals (Greenbaum & Quirk, 2001, p. 101), namely ant, cod, and, cricket that do not normally take *he/she* and are mainly treated as if they were inanimate.

The pronoun *it* is used with both; lower animals including *butterfly, snake, and ant* and inanimate nouns among others *box, car, and table* (Alexander, 1990, p.12).

However, lower animals may be considered as higher animals (Greenbaum, S., & Quirk, R., 2001, p. 101), and take the pronouns *he* or *she* when their activities are regarded with interest, as in the sentence; Look at the frog! Look at the way he jumps! (Alexander, 1990, p.55).

2.4.7 Names of Countries, Ships, and Cars

Depending on their use, names of countries have different genders. They are treated as an inanimate class when they are referred to as geographical units (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 18, 317).

On the other hand, the teams that represent their countries in sports can be referred to by the name of the country used as a personal collective noun (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 18, 317).

However, countries when referred to by name, as political and economic units, are often considered feminine (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 318, Thomson and Martinet, 1986, p. 24)

In addition, some writers refer to a country as 'she' when they are thinking of it as a person.

On the other hand, inanimate entities, such as ships, cars, motorbikes and other machines are often treated as female, when regarded with affection or respect, i.e. when we have an intense and close personal relationship with them, but otherwise they are treated as non-personal or inanimate entities (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990, p. 102, Thomson and Martinet, 1986, p. 24, and Alexander, 1990, p. 55).

2.5 Lexical Expression of Gender

There are lexical means of making gender explicit, although there is nothing in the grammatical form of a noun which reveals its gender (Biber et al., 1999, p. 314).

The masculine-feminine distinction can be made explicit by formal markers, such as gender-specific pre-modification, eg. female officer. Compounding with a gender-specific element, eg. policeman. The use of a gender-specific derivational eg. ending, *actor John* but *actress Vanessa*. In addition, there are lexical pairs with male and female denotation, chiefly among words for family

relationships (father- mother, uncle- aunt, etc...), social roles (king-queen, lord-lady, etc...), and animals (bull- cow, cock-hen, etc...). The suffix -ess is a feminine marker, however, -or, -er is not always clearly a masculine-only marker, especially when there is no corresponding -ess form in common use; as in (sailor, teacher), however, such words have strong masculine overtones (Fuertes et al., 2003, p. 72).

2.6 Gender and the Genitive

English nouns have only two cases which are the unmarked common case and the marked genitive. The latter is called the possessive as in this phrase, *The child's coat*, which means that the coat belongs to the child (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990, p.102). Thus, the negative in English is marked by 's at the end of the possessing noun (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990, p. 102).

The genitive is associated with nouns of animate gender, especially with those that have personal reference. It is not used with all nouns equally, for example, *The dog's name*.

Inanimate nouns take gender inflection when they are used with special relevance to human activity or concern (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990, p.104). The genitive is preferred for personal nouns and collective nouns with personal gender characteristics (Quirk et al, 1985, p. 322-323).

2.7 English Pronouns and Gender

Pro-forms play an important role in grammar. The categories of pro-forms that are associated with noun phrases are called pronouns (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990, p. 108).

In English, gender involves basic grammatical components like pronouns, rules like pronoun agreement and basic words like male and female (Faragher, 1998).

Pronouns are words that stand either for a noun, a whole noun phrase, or several noun phrases (Faragher, 1998).

In English, pronouns are classified as first, second, and third person (Bodine, 1975, p. 5-6), but only the third person singular pronouns *he* and *she* can show the difference in sex between male and female (Leech et al, 2001, p. 465).

Whereas, the first and second personal pronouns for both number (singular and plural) and the plural pronoun *they*, do not show gender distinction which means that the genders of *I* and *you* can be masculine or feminine and they are not indicated by any syntactic function (Mohammed, 1987, p. 91).

3. Gender in Kurdish

3.1 Gender of Noun in Kurdish

In the Kurdish dialect, especially in Suleymania and some other areas, the genders of noun do not play an important role anymore and disappeared years ago. So, there is no such special sign in the normal case to differentiate between the genders of noun in Southern Kurdish dialect, however, we can refer to it depending on meaning:

1- Male Nouns

A male noun is a noun that is originally used for male gender.

Male nouns consist of the following categories in Kurdish language:

A- Names of Male Individuals, Such as:

[... , پیاو Man, باوک Father, کور Son, زاوا Son-in-law, مێرد Husband]

B- Proper Nouns

[... , شێرکۆ Sherko , هێرۆ Hero , نازاد Azad , سەردار Sardar]

C- Names of Male Animals

[... , ئەسپ Horse, بەران Buck, نێر Male , گا Bull]

D- Nouns of Some Occupations that Refer to Males

[... , ناسنگەر blacksmith, چووتیار farmer, سەپان guard, شوان shepherd]

2- Female Nouns

A female noun is a noun that is originally used for female gender. In Kurdish, female nouns consist of the following categories:

A- Proper Nouns:

[Gulalala گولاله , Prshang پرشەنگ , Shirin شیرین , Nasrin نەسرین, ...]

B- Nouns of Female Individuals:

[... , Woman ژن , Mother دایک , Girl کچ , Bride بوک , Mother-in-law خەسو]

C- Nouns of Female Animals:

[... , Hen مریشک , Mare ماین , Goat بز , Sheep مەر]

D- Nouns of Some Occupations That Refer to Females

[... , Baker نانکەر , Laundry worker چلشۆر , Lay Midwife مامانی , Wedding attendant بەربوک]

If we look at some male and female Kurdish nouns, we see that:

A- Those words that have the meanings of bravery, freedom, leadership are nouns of boys, like:

[... , Strong Person پۆلا , Leader پێشەوا , Commander سەردار , Brave نەبەز , Noble Knight شاسوار , دلێر Courageous]

B- Names of mountains that also have the meaning of leadership and height, names of places and rivers are used for masculine nouns.

B- Names of flowers, trees, stars, light, birds and any other nouns that indicate beauty, delicacy and attractiveness are used for female nouns, such as:

[... , Night-blooming flower شەبوۆ , Spring flower هێرۆ , Tulip هەلالە , Anemone/Wild flower گولاله , Plane tree flower چنار , Delicate flower ناسک , Graceful flower نازەنین ...]

3- Dual Gender Nouns: These are nouns that are used for both male and female; such as: [Dove کۆتر , Duck مرادی , Enemy دوژمن , Friend هاوڕێ , Teacher مامۆستا , Student قوتابی ...]

By adding affixes to one part of the dual gender nouns, the gender of the noun can be clarified. [... , Male chukar , Male lamb بەرخی نێر , Female chukar , Female lamb بەرخی مێ] are examples of such nouns.

4- Neutral Nouns: They are those nouns that originally do not have male or female genders, like: [... , Room ژوور , Tree دار , Pomegranate هەنار , Blood خوین]. However, in Southern Kurdish dialect of today, male and female nouns have been disappeared. While in very few cases such signs that indicate the differences in gender appear.

A- In Case of Adding:

In the Southern Kurdish dialect, adding the suffix (l) comes with female nouns. For example: [Shyness refines a woman, but it weakens a man — ژنا شەرم بە شارەکی , زەلامی شەرم بە جەرمەکی] (Mukriyani & Fexri, 1982, p. 43)

B- In Indirect Case:

In the Southern Kurdish dialect (y) is added to the noun in indirect cases if it is masculine, but if it is feminine (e) is added for it, as it is clear in sentences: [Shah Abbas's لەشکری شاه عباسی تیکشکینرا , army was defeated , خانزادە ژنی سوران فریندرا , Khanzada, the wife of Soran, was thrown.] (Muzhefferye, 1979, p.181).

C- In Vocative Cases:

In the Southern Kurdish dialect, the vocative case differentiates between male and female nouns. Specifically, an (o) is appended to the end of male nouns, as in [study son ئەمی بابە , ئەمی نوری نەزەر , Oh father , O light of my eyes (Zêwer p.91), and (e) is added to the end of female nouns as in the sentence, [study girl کچی بخوینە , My son's wife , بووکی لەگەڵ تۆمە]

While in the plural case, the suffix (ine) is added to the noun without making any difference between genders, as in, [Study sons , کورینە بخوینن , Study girls کچینە بخوینن , O Kurds ئەمی کوردینە] (Zêwer p.91).

5. Grammatical Genders:

Nouns, whose genders are originally unknown, can be classified according to grammatical morphemes into masculine and feminine.

In the Southern Kirmanjî dialect, gender of nouns is identified by means of word combinations:

Combining free morphemes:

1. Combining two words by means of the rule (modifier + modified noun), as in words *ژنبرا* Wife's brother, *ژنخوشک* Wife's sister. The gender of the phrase is decided by the modified noun (Rasheed, 2001, p. 45).
2. Combining two words by the letters (و, ئ), that are added to masculine and feminine genders in the Southern Kirmanjî dialect, using the rule (modified noun + و, ئ + modifier) as in the words *ماموژن* Uncle's wife, *پیریژن* Elderly woman.
3. Combining two parts or two words by conjunctions (و, ی), this is done via the rule (modified noun + و, ی + modifier), which mostly appear by adding affixes as in, *خوشکی ژن* / *خوشکمزڼ* Wife's sister, *گسکی نیر* / *گسکه نیر* Male goat.
- b- By means of the rule (modifier + و + modified noun) as in, *نیرمکه* Male chukar, *دیله وړچ* Female bear.

6. Gender Morphemes:

First group:

- | | |
|------|------------------------|
| (ی) | singular male |
| (ئ) | singular female |
| (ان) | plural male and female |

Noun of the morphemes of this group is added to the subject if the noun functions as a singular subject, however, (ان) is added to it if it is used for plural. For instance, *ئهحمادی دهبینم* — I see Ahmed, the suffix (ی) is added to the object since the gender is male. Or, *شیرنی دهبینم* — I see Shirin, the suffix (ئ) is added to the object since the gender is female (Al-Sayyab, B. S., 1958)

Second Group:

The main function of these morphemes (ئ, ی) is to combine the modifier with the modified noun. That's, they do not have the function of gender and number, they are just added to some of the common nouns whose modifier is *male or female* by which they are linked together and identify the gender of the modified noun. Common nouns such as, *بهرخ* Lamb, *گورگ* Wolf, *وړچ* Bear, are used for both genders, as in the sentence, *وړچی نیر له وړچی می قههتره* — A male bear is bigger than a female bear.

Thus, (ئ, ی) are added to the noun without gender distinctions. The annexation of 'ئ, ی' depends on the morphological environment of the word.

1. 'ه' is added to the modified noun if the definite article 'eke' is added to the modifier, such as, *بهرخه نیرمکه* — The male lamb.
2. 'ه' is added to the modified noun if the pronoun precedes the modified noun, as in, *نهم بهرخه نیره بفر وشه*, Sell this male lamb.
3. 'ئ' is attached to the modified noun if the indefinite article 'یک' is added to the modified noun, for example, *بهرخیکی نیر* A male lamb.
4. If no definite or indefinite article is added to the modifier or modified noun and the modifier is not preceded by the pronoun, each of 'm, i, e' has this function.

Apposition:

It is especially considered as a modifier. The position of apposition in the compound modifier noun either comes before or after the modified noun.

Masculine:

Some proper nouns are used with words like *کاکه* respectful title for a man, *مامه* Paternal uncle, *خاله* Maternal uncle, ... , for masculine that denote relationship and respect such as; *کاکه ناکار* Sir Akār, *مامه جوامیر* uncle Jwamer, *خاله رهجیب* uncle Rajab.

Feminine:

Meanwhile, some proper nouns are used with words like, تاته Grandmother, خوشکه Sister, پوری aunt, مه لائڤن Mullah's wife..., for feminine nouns that also denote relationship and respect such as, خوشکه Sister Rûnak, تاته هممين Grandmother Hamin, پلکه عايشه Aunt Aisha.

Collective:

There are some appositions that precede proper nouns and are used with both genders male and female, especially with those nouns that refer to occupation, authority, power, and religious status, as it is clear in the phrase: ماموستا نازاد Teacher Azad, Teacher Gulala ماموستا گولاله.

4. Similarities and Differences in Gender between English and Kurdish

4.1 Similarities in Gender between English and Kurdish

The similarities in gender Between English and Kurdish are:

- 1- In English, the genders of nouns can be differentiated depending on their meaning. For example, there are nouns that are originally used for male or female. Most of which are family members. Just as in the southern Kurdish dialect, there are nouns that are only specialized for male or female.
- 2- Both languages differentiate between the proper nouns that are used for males and females.
- 3- In both languages, nouns of some occupations that refer to males differ from those that are specialized for females.
- 4- Dual gender nouns – nouns that might refer in the same way to both male and female genders – can be found in both languages.
- 5- The gender of the noun can be clarified in both languages by adding affixes to it.
- 6- Both languages have neutral nouns that originally do not have male or female genders.
- 7- Words that are used with proper nouns to indicate relationship or respect, can be found in both languages.

4.2 Differences in Gender between English and Kurdish

English gender differs from Kurdish gender in the following aspects:

- 1- Unlike English, Kurdish does not distinguish gender in its third-person singular pronoun. The word *ئهو* serves as a gender-neutral term for *he, she, or it*.
- 2- There is no vocative case in English; while in Kurdish, male and female genders can be differentiated in the vocative case by adding (ی) to the end of male nouns and (ی) to female nouns.
- 3- In English, one of the pronouns *he, she* or *it* is used to refer to common nouns such as *child*, depending on the situation. But in Kurdish there are not such cases, since there are no such pronouns, *he, she, it*, instead *ئهو* 'third person singular pronoun in Kurdish' is used.
- 4- In English, names of countries are either treated as inanimate nouns or as persons, referred to by the pronoun *she* specially by writers. While in Kurdish, countries are treated as they are, and do not have different genders.
- 5- In English, personal pronouns are used for higher animals, especially domestic pets and are distinguished from lower animals, such as insects. While in Kurdish, there is no such difference.

In summary, both English and Kurdish utilize semantic gender in certain nouns that refer to males and females, but they differ significantly in how they handle grammatical gender. English primarily shows grammatical gender through its pronouns, whereas Kurdish has entirely eliminated grammatical gender as a linguistic feature. This results in Kurdish being grammatically simpler in this regard compared to many other Indo-European languages that still maintain more complex grammatical gender systems.

5. Implications for Teaching Gender

5.1 Techniques Used in Teaching Gender:

In English grammar, gender means classifying nouns as 'masculine', 'feminine', 'common', or 'neuter'. According to Corbett (1991), gender in linguistics is considered as an abstract property of nouns within a grammatical system.

There are various modern techniques that focus on inclusivity, engagement, and adapting to evolving language norms to improve students' ability to remember and store information for as long as possible. They often emphasize interactive and inclusive methods to engage learners effectively. These include methods that improve attention, increase meaningful learning, and activate practice and repetition. Mnemonic Strategy is believed to be useful in achieving many of these.

According to Arzt (2013, p. 14), the mnemonic keyword method is of a great help for students to learn foreign vocabulary especially gender. In this method a semantic and an orthographic link between the form of a foreign word *referent* and that of a physically similar word *keyword* in one's mother tongue is formed. Thus, the mnemonic keyword method helps in learning grammatical gender along with word meaning (Desrochers et al., 1991).

In other words, the mnemonic keyword method is a memory technique used to help students remember gendered words through stories or by creating associations between the new word and the familiar word (the keyword), and then forming a mental image connecting the keyword with the meaning of the new word. While primarily used for vocabulary acquisition, its principles can be adapted to help learners remember grammatical features like gendered nouns in English (Ridha & Nurdibyanandaru, 2018).

There are other effective techniques in teaching gendered nouns, which involve introducing students to the concept of gendered language and helping them understand its application in grammar and communication. One of the techniques is through definitions and categorization, which begins by explaining the concept of gender nouns, dividing them into categories: masculine, feminine, common, and neuter. For example, masculine nouns like *king*, feminine nouns like *queen*, common nouns like *teacher*, and neuter nouns like *table* (Morgan, 1942, p. 352-353).

Another technique can be through visual aids and multimedia, using materials such as PowerPoint presentations, video clips, charts, and whiteboard activities can effectively illustrate and categorize the masculine, feminine, common, and neuter nouns. These tools make abstract concepts more tangible and provide clarity and support comprehension during lessons (Sudo, 2007, p. 12–19). Other Visual and Interactive Resources can be used such as image association that uses images of male and female individuals or animals alongside their corresponding nouns (e.g., a picture of a king with the word "king," a queen with "queen"). This provides direct associations to visual learners (Vedantu, n.d.). Creating flashcards with gender-specific noun pairs (e.g., king/queen, father/mother) and their corresponding images can also be of great help.

Using language vocabulary games, such as the scrabble word game (Ahmed & Awla, 2024, p.13), in which the students try to make words such as *mother*, *sister*, *brother*, etc, from letters printed on small plastic blocks, and connect them to words that have already been placed on the board, under the supervision of the teacher (James, 2009, p. 102). Technology Integration involves incorporating apps and online platforms that offer quizzes, Kahoot, interactive games, and exercises tailored to gendered noun usage. These tools provide instant feedback and make learning more engaging (Mahmud & Nur, 2018).

Drag-and-Drop Activities, in which digital or physical drag-and-drop exercises allow students categorize nouns into masculine, feminine, and neuter columns can be effective for reinforcement (Puntillo, 2023). Real-life examples and contextualization can also be counted as a great technique. In which examples from everyday life are used to illustrate gendered nouns, particularly in professions and family roles. News articles or short stories can be discussed, and students are asked to identify nouns referring to people and determine their gender based on the context (IDP IELTS, 2024). The teacher may also use real classroom situations and uses the students themselves for

illustrating and demonstrating the words by having them ask about each other's family. E.g. the teacher may write a student's first and second name on the board (Teachy, 2023). Analyzing media and literature is another technique, in which the teacher examines how gender is represented in stories, articles, and other media, and discusses the use of gendered language and its potential impact. This may include analyzing social media posts or online articles that discuss gender and identity (Jahan, 2021). Sentence completion can also provide sentences with blanks where students need to fill in the appropriate gendered noun.

Utilizing a Family Tree is another technique that helps illustrate nouns that have inherent gender based on biological sex or social roles. As Swan (2005) notes, some English nouns, particularly those referring to people, have semantic gender, meaning that their gender is inherent to their meaning. A family terms tree with clear visuals (drawings or pictures) of different family members can present basic gendered nouns like *mother, father, brother, sister,...* etc. and highlight the male and female counterparts (Swan, 2005, p. 73). The family tree can be expanded with terms like *son/daughter, nephew/niece, and cousin* which is gender-neutral (Crystal, 2003 b, p.25). Students then try to understand the relevant words and apply them to their families (Richards et al., 2005). Cameron (2021) found that the sociolinguistic discussions and debates technique can encourage students to analyze how gendered language reflects cultural and societal norms and can foster deeper understanding. Through group discussions, learners explore how gender nouns are changing in English due to societal influences.

Chunking and morphological cue sensitivity is another technique used in teaching gender as part of lexical chunks (e.g., pairing nouns with gender-marked adjectives or articles) rather than in isolation helps learners internalize gender as an inherent property of the noun. This method leverages learners' sensitivity to morphological and phonological cues, which develops with practice and exposure. Presenting nouns in determiner-noun or adjective-noun pairs is shown to facilitate acquisition and reduce cognitive load (Ranjan, 2013).

Input enhancement and color-coding technique can also be used. In which input enhancement strategies, such as color-coding, increase the saliency of gender information. Each gender can be consistently represented by a specific color (e.g., blue for masculine, red for feminine), making it easier for learners to categorize and remember the gender of nouns. Research indicates that such visual cues help learners notice and retain grammatical gender more effectively (Arzt, 2013). Developing targeted exercises can be considered as another technique in which teaching materials should include exercises that specifically address the differences in pronoun usage and the semantic nature of gender in both languages. For example, translation exercises focusing on pronouns, or activities where learners need to identify the referent of *ئهو/ew* – third person singular pronoun in Kurdish – based on context, as well as error correction exercises focusing on pronoun choice for Kurdish speakers learning English. Teachers are not strictly linguistic, they should also be mindful of cultural distinctions related to gender in both societies, and take it into consideration, as language and culture are intertwined.

When teaching Kurdish, instructors must stress the importance of context in understanding the referent of the pronoun *ئهو/ew*. Learners need to rely on the surrounding words and the context to determine if *ئهو/ew* means he, she, or it.

While English grammar primarily uses natural gender (based on biological sex) for nouns referring to people and animals, modern teaching techniques can help learners understand and use these distinctions effectively, and navigate the increasing use of gender-neutral language.

These techniques reflect a shift from rote memorization to more engaging, cognitive, and socially aware strategies in teaching gendered nouns in English and other languages.

By incorporating these modern techniques, educators can move beyond traditional methods and create a more dynamic and relevant learning experience for students' understanding gender nouns

in English. In teaching gender nouns, the focus should not only be on memorizing masculine/feminine pairs but also on understanding the social context and the increasing importance of gender-neutral language.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the contrastive study of gender in English and Kurdish reveals significant differences and similarities that have important implications for language teaching. Understanding how gender is expressed in both languages can enhance pedagogical strategies, allowing educators to address possible biases and promote inclusivity in the classroom. By recognizing the cultural distinctions associated with gendered language use, teachers can better prepare students to manage both languages effectively. Ultimately, this study highlights the necessity of integrating linguistic insights into teaching practices to support learners in becoming more culturally competent communicators in their respective contexts.

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