

Grammatical Gender

Languages

What gender is in grammar, and why it usually has nothing to do with sex.

A system that sorts nouns into classes, requiring articles, adjectives and sometimes verbs to agree. The classes correlate only loosely with anything in the world.

WITH GENDER
~half

GERMAN
3 classes

SOME BANTU
10+

- Around half of all languages have some gender system.
- Two classes is common; three is common; some Bantu languages have more than ten.
- German 'Mädchen' — girl — is grammatically neuter.
- Assignment is largely arbitrary and must be memorised.
- English lost gender on nouns between 1100 and 1300.
- Its function is agreement, which aids parsing and reference.

LOOK FOR IT

Sun and moon are masculine and feminine in French, and the other way round in German.

Learn the article with the noun from the first day. Retrofitting gender to known vocabulary is much harder.