

## Re: Gender in language

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- *From:* Richard Herring <[junk@\[127.0.0.1\]](mailto:junk@[127.0.0.1])>
  - *Date:* Fri, 29 Sep 2006 15:46:59 +0100
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In message <nsanders-DA65E2.08541929092006@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>, Nathan Sanders <nsanders@xxxxxxxxxxxx> writes

In article <CQ\$uDSFIFOHFFwW+@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>, Richard Herring <[junk@\[127.0.0.1\]](mailto:junk@[127.0.0.1])> wrote:

In message <1159501533.800645.21300@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>, willcesium@xxxxxxxx writes  
>First off, having grammatical genders isn't something people chose to  
>do. No one made a conscious decision to divide nouns up into different  
>categories, it just ended up happening that way. Gender is, in fact,  
>hardwired into the language component of the brain.

Don't you find it odd, then, that some languages have no expression of that "hard-wired" feature?

No odder than that some mammals (the males) have no expression of the hard-wired feature of mammary glands.

Much odder. The last time I looked, male mammals do indeed have an expression of mammary glands, just not a fully-developed one. Just add a few hormones...

Moreover we have plenty of evidence for the hard-wiring of the glands and their supporting structures, the hormones that trigger their development, the glands which secrete those hormones, the genes that switch their function, etc. etc.

I don't see any analogous evidence for a structured "language component", still less that any particular features are "hard-wired" into it, rather than (to maintain the computing metaphor) being programmed later, or even being an emergent consequence of some other behaviour (we see plenty of that in computers :-).

Just because some linguistic feature (or more appropriately, the \*potential\* for that feature)

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Now you're changing the subject. Obviously there's a potential, or the thing itself wouldn't be possible at all.

is "hard-wired" doesn't mean every  
language must have that feature.

Wrong mood. ITYM "... \_if it were\_ hard-wired... \_wouldn't\_ mean..."

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Richard Herring

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