

## Gender without Sex: the semantic exploitation of the masculine/feminine opposition in the history of Spanish

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

In Pountain (2000a:295) I hypothesised that some linguistic changes might be seen as the product of a process I labelled ‘capitalisation’; by which ‘a linguistic feature which already exists in a language comes to be substantially exploited for wider purposes, sometimes simply making overt distinctions which were previously covert, but sometimes apparently creating new expressive possibilities.’ In this paper I want to examine the history of gender contrasts in Spanish in this light, and to suggest that capitalisation is responsible, at least in part, for some of the developments observable in this area. It would surely not be surprising *prima facie* if this were so. Grammatical gender in Indo-European languages is often held to be a functionally redundant morphological category except insofar as it correlates with reference to the sex of animate beings, masculine gender corresponding to male sex and feminine gender to female sex. Yet in Spanish, as in many other languages, all nouns obligatorily belong to one of the genders. From the point of view of cost-effectiveness, it would clearly pay to put gender to other uses — gender, that is to say, for other reasons apart from sex. And since grammatical gender has some very obvious morphological exponents (in Spanish the inflections *-o* and *-a* are the clearest examples), one particular way in which gender might be exploited economically would be to use the same noun stem with different gender inflections. At the same time, it is also possible that productive use of this device might lead to new coinings and hence the ‘new expressive possibilities’ which I have seen as a feature of capitalisation.

Gender is also interesting to me because of another theme I have been concerned with in connection with historical syntax, that is, the importance of

pragmatic factors in linguistic change. In Pountain (2000b) I argued (in simple terms and amongst other things) that the extensive use of the reflexive in the Romance languages is facilitated by the impossibility of its being understood literally when the subject of a verb is inanimate. In a similar way, we might expect that gender can be used in nouns which inherently refer to inanimates to encode semantic contrasts relating to features other than sex precisely because there is no risk of such nouns having an animate reading.

Gender has been the subject of many copiously-exemplified studies by Spanish historical linguists, and it may seem otiose to be pursuing it once again. Yet to my mind, although much of the basic data is well known, scholars have not looked sufficiently at the chronological trajectory of the changes which can be observed with a view to explaining why the chronology is as it is, and what it might tell us about the nature of language change.<sup>1</sup> That is my aim in the present rather preliminary article, the preparation of which has often been frustrated by the many gaps in the information available for such research. For example, while the Corominas and Pascual (1980–91) etymological dictionary is thorough on the first textual attestations of words, it often does not chart in the same detail the appearance of new, or different, meanings of words; dictionaries in general are often indiscriminating about the currency of particular meanings, and do not provide the statistical information which might help trace the diffusion of new words and their meanings; finding out if and how a language expresses a particular notion (as opposed to finding out which words were used and with what meaning) is a wellnigh impossible task before the existence of glossaries and (especially) bilingual dictionaries.

## 2.1 TREES AND FRUITS

I will begin with what I think is a very clear example of the utilisation of gender opposition in a non-animate area of reference, the distinction between the names of trees and their fruits. This is an opposition which was embryonic, in type if not in detail, in Classical Latin, where we have the following clearly attested relations, a tree typically being a feminine noun of the second declension and its fruit a corresponding neuter noun of the second declension:

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<sup>1</sup> Malkiel (1983:171) sets this as an important agenda for the resolution of the 'augmentative feminine' problem.



	tree	fruit
apple	MĀLUS (f.)	MĀLUM (n.)
pear	PIRUS (f.)	PIRUM (n.)
cherry	CERĀSUS (f.)	CERĀSUM (n.)
plum	PRŪNUS (f.)	PRŪNUM (n.)

However, it would seem that the contrast was far from systematic or clearcut. According to Lewis & Short (1879), though PŌMUS (f.) has the primary meaning 'fruit tree' and PŌMUM (n.) that of 'fruit', there are also attested examples of each word also having the other meaning. Both ĀMYGDĀLA (f.) and ĀMYGDĀLUM (n.) are glossed as both 'almond' and 'almond tree', though ĀMYGDĀLUS (f.) was exclusively 'almond-tree.' OLĪVA (f.) had the meaning of 'olive' or 'olive-tree' (OLĪVUM (n.) is 'olive oil'); FĪCUS (f.) was similarly 'fig' or 'fig tree'. Another kind of opposition (the one which eventually prospered in Romance with the analogical change of gender of nouns in -US from feminine to masculine) can be observed between SPĪNA (f.) 'blackthorn, sloe' and SPĪNUS (f.) 'blackthorn (tree)' (cf. *espino* (m.) 'hawthorn' in modern Spanish). In a number of Romance languages, including Castilian, the fruit/tree distinction is now marked in a significant number of cases by feminine/masculine formal counterparts: Sp. *manzana/manzano* and It. *mela/melo*, 'apple'/'apple tree', Rom. *cireașă/cireș* 'sweet cherry'/'sweet cherry tree', so preserving the gender basis of the opposition whilst adapting the detail to associate the tree with the masculine and the fruit with the feminine and encoding this with a more transparent match between gender and gender-inflection.<sup>2</sup> In Castilian, this pattern has become very highly productive, and there can be no doubt that this gender-based contrast is systematic. Latin adjectives have provided a source of such oppositions, e.g. CĒREOLUS, a diminutive form of CĒREUS 'wax-coloured', originally qualifying PRŪNUS/-UM, yielded *ciruela/ciruelo* 'plum'/'plum tree'; another adjective, ATRĪNUS 'blackish', also used to qualify \*PRŪNUS/-UM,

<sup>2</sup> Italian and Romanian appear to be like Spanish in this respect: cf. It. *arancia/arancio*, *banana/banano*, *cilegia/cilegio*, *oliva/olivo*, *pera/pero*, *pesca/pesco*, *prugna/prugno*, *prugnola/prugnolo*, *susina/susino*; Rom. *banana/banan*, *cireașă/cireș*, *goldană/goldan*, *măslină/măslin*, *pară/păr*, *piersică/piersic*, *portocală/portocal*, *prună/prun*. But other discriminatory strategies are adopted by Romance: French and Portuguese use the formerly adjectival -ĀRIŪ inflection to distinguish the tree: Fr. *pomme/pommier*, Ptg. *maçã/macieira*, 'apple'/'apple-tree'. This suffix is also used in Spanish, though less systematically than gender: *albaricoquero* (m.) 'apricot-tree', *higuera* (f.) 'fig-tree', *limero* (m.) 'lime-tree', *limonero* (m.) 'lemon-tree'.

yielded *endrina/endrino* 'sloe'/'blackthorn'. A significant measure of the productivity of the gender opposition in Castilian is that foreign borrowings have also followed this model: from Arabic, we have *aceituna/aceituno* 'olive'/'olive-tree' and *algarroba/algarrobo* 'carob bean'/'carob tree'; from Amerindian languages *lúcuma/lúcumo* 'eggfruit'/'eggfruit tree'. *palta/palto* (in parts of the Southern Cone) 'avocado'/'avocado tree'; from French *frambuesa/frambueso* 'raspberry'/'raspberry cane'; from an Indian source *chirimoya/chirimoyo* 'custard apple'/'custard apple tree'. In this case, then, the evidence that Spanish and other Romance languages have capitalised on gender oppositions for the purpose of encoding a distinction which is nothing to do semantically with sex seems overwhelming.

## 2.2 'ACCIDENTAL' GENDER PAIRINGS

Let us contrast this situation with what we might call 'accidental' gender pairings. By this I mean gender pairs which have evolved through etymological coincidence. One example of the very many in Spanish is *acera* 'pavement' / *acero* 'steel'. The latter derives from the Latin adjective \*ACIĀRIU(M) (from ACIĒS 'sharp point') as applied to FERRUM 'iron'. since steel was the iron-based alloy from which sharp blades were made. The former is from *facera*, a derivative of *faz* 'face', which underwent a number of metonymic developments: 'façade' → 'row of houses' → 'pavement in front of houses'. So while *acero* and *acera* conveniently occupy parallel gender 'slots', it is impossible to see in this state of affairs any principled exploitation of the gender contrast, since there is no semantic relatedness of any kind between the two words, either synchronically or historically.

The absence of synchronic semantic relatedness in the modern language, however, is not necessarily a diagnostic of such 'accidental' gender pairing, since pairs which were once semantically related may have evolved in meaning subsequently; a clear example of this is *braza* 'fathom; breaststroke', originally 'two arms' length' and hence historically related to *brazo* 'arm'.

## 2.3 SEMI-PRODUCTIVE PAIRINGS

Between these two extremes are a number of intriguing cases in which the semantic basis for gender distinction appears to be principled, though not as productive or thoroughgoing as either the male/female or the tree/fruit distinction. It is these that for our present purposes need to be analysed in more detail.

The Latin opposition between singular -UM and plural -A in neuter nouns of the second declension appears to have been reanalysed in Romance to provide the basis for two kinds of semantic distinction encoded by gender: first, that



between an individual and a collective notion, and, secondly, distinctions based on size.

### 2.3.1 INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

The first is much less extensive than the second. We can see direct descendants of Latin nouns in the following Spanish pairs:<sup>3</sup>

INDIVIDUAL	COLLECTIVE
<i>fruto</i> 'piece of fruit' < Lat. FRŪCTU(M) (past participle of FRŪOR 'to enjoy')	<i>fruta</i> 'fruit (in general)'
<i>huevo</i> 'egg' < Lat. OVU(M) 'egg'	<i>hueva</i> 'spawn'
<i>leño</i> 'log' < Lat. LIGNU(M) 'wood that is gathered'	<i>leña</i> '(fire)wood'

We might add to these the feminine *grana* 'cochineal', which perhaps passed through the stage of 'seed (collective)' corresponding to *grano* 'seed (individual)' < Lat. GRĀNU(M), and the pair *labio* 'lip' / *labia* 'gift of the gab' < Lat. LABIU(M) (the plural LABIA was already used in Latin to denote the lips as a pair). Spanish *tormento* 'torment' and *tormenta* 'storm', though in all probability learned words, perhaps reflect an early stage of this process (Lat. TORMENTA was already used as a singular in post-Classical Latin according to Cor. V, 554). By what we might perhaps regard as an analogical development in Spanish, we have the following. On the basis of *madera* 'timber' < Lat. MĀTERIA (sg.) 'matter, timber' we also have *madero* 'piece of timber'. *Grito* 'cry', a postverbal derivative of *gritar* 'to cry', has a (now infrequent) counterpart in *grita* 'shouting' which could be regarded as a collective notion, and similarly *grado* < Lat. GRĀDU(M) (4th declension) 'step, position' has a corresponding *grada*, two of the meanings of which given by the *DRAE* are 'conjunto de asientos [a manera de escalón corrido] en los teatros y otros lugares públicos' and 'conjunto de escalones que suelen tener los grandes edificios delante de su pórtico o fachada', though *gradería* and *gradas* are more common representations of these concepts today. On the basis of *corcho* 'cork (individual object or substance)' the feminine noun *corcha* 'cork (substance)' is attested in

<sup>3</sup> Corominas and Pascual (1980–91: II, 967) derive *fruto* from the post-Classical noun FRŪCTUM (the Classical form was the 4th declension noun FRŪCTUS, the plural of which was FRŪCTŪS), but the past participle FRŪCTUS would have provided a plausible model.

the Nebrija dictionary and continues to be included with the mass meaning of 'corcho arrancado del alcornoque y en disposición de labrarse' in the *DRAE*. There are also one or two cases of what we might call inverse analogy: the masculine *guijo* 'gravel, shingle' has a collective meaning by comparison with *guija* 'pebble' (the *DRAE* glosses it as 'conjunto de guijas'), and formerly *mato* was 'conjunto de matas' (*mata* 'bush, shrub').

### 2.3.2 SIZE

It is natural to think that association of the feminine with larger dimensions than a corresponding masculine was an extension of the plural or collective notion encoded by the reanalysed Latin neuter plural -A just discussed. It indeed seems impossible to trace any such gender pairs of this kind back to Classical Latin. The use of gender to encode differences in size must have been a peculiarly Romance development, and can certainly be viewed as an important instance of capitalisation on gender contrast. There are examples both of the creation of feminines on the basis of masculines and of the converse process. On the basis of *huerto* < Lat. HORTU(M) 'garden', the feminine form *huerta* '(large) garden, market garden' is formed (note that HORTUS in Latin was masculine and its plural was therefore HORTĪ, not HORTA); similarly *ramo* < Lat. RĀMU(M) 'branch' has given rise to *rama* 'branch, bough'. *Cesta* '(large) hand basket' < Lat. CISTA now has the parallel masculine *cesto* '(smaller) basket', and *cuenco* 'bowl, hollow', is formed from *cuenca* '(geographical) basin' < Lat. CONCHA.

Again, the productivity of this opposition can be measured by the sheer number of examples and the fact that there are similar creations on the basis of non-Latin sources. From *jarra* 'pitcher, jug with two handles' < Ar. *yārra* there develops the masculine *jarro* 'jug with one handle'. What is in all probability an onomatopoeic creation *tiritar* 'to shiver, tremble' has two morphological derivatives, *tiritón* '(single) shiver', and *tiritona* 'fit of shivering'. Sometimes in these cases it is of course difficult to establish which is the primary term and which the secondary. The source of the pair *charco* 'pool, puddle' / *charca* 'basin, pond' is unknown, possibly pre-Latin; similarly *gorro* 'cap, bonnet' / *gorra* 'peaked cap' and (though more widely adopted in Romance) *zapato* 'shoe' / *zapata* 'half boot' (cf. It. *ciabatta*).

It is interesting to note that the number of size-based gender distinctions available in Spanish is much increased if regional varieties and different diachronic stages of the language are taken into account. That is to say, those pairs which are actively known by most speakers of modern Spanish represent only a part of the overall creativity of the device; though conversely that might also suggest that the structural importance of the opposition is not so great as might at first be thought. To *dedo* 'finger, toe' (< Lat. DIGITU(M)) there



corresponds a form *deda* 'big toe' in Asturias and León (Kahane and Kahane 1948-9:150); *guitarra* 'guitar' (< Ar. *kīāra*, from Gk. *κιθάρα*) has a corresponding *guitarro* 'small guitar'. The form *mosco*, corresponding to *mosca* 'fly' (< Lat. MUSCA), is defined as 'mosquito, insecto' in one of its meanings by the *DRAE* (cf. Bergen 1980:53, Kahane 1948-49:151), yet this use seems to be not at all general, and in some areas it even substitutes *mosca*. *Lora* is recorded as denoting a large species of parrot (*loro*) in Honduras (Bergen 1980:53, Kahane and Kahane 1948-49:151).

So far we have been considering cases in which the feminine member of the pair represents a 'larger' notion than the masculine, whether because a masculine is created on the basis of the feminine or the feminine on the basis of the masculine; but the size distinction can also be reversed, with the masculine representing a larger notion than the feminine. On the basis of *barca* < Lat. BARCA 'small boat' (contrasting with Lat. NĀVIS 'boat, ship') a corresponding masculine *barco* visibly comes into play, first also with the meaning of 'small boat' in opposition to *navío*, but then broadening in meaning to be the generic word for boat, not restricted in size. *Mampara* 'screen, partition', and presumably the older word, is a less substantial notion than *mamparo* 'bulkhead, partition on a ship', which according to Cor. IV, 395 first appeared in use only in the late 17th century.

It seems not implausible to regard such a movement, which is subsequent to the general association of feminine with 'large' and masculine with 'small', as a further exploitation of gender as an icon of difference in meaning, even though in so doing the definition of the opposition is blurred.

#### 2.4 UNPRINCIPLED DISCRIMINATIVE DIFFERENCE IN MEANING

A further step in the use of gender oppositions seems to take place with their exploitation for what are apparently 'unprincipled', that is, simply discriminative, differences in meaning between masculine and feminine (though note we are still examining cases in which there is common semantic ground and where one gender form seems to have been created on the basis of the other).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kahane and Kahane (1948-49:175) regard the development of a purely discriminative meaning as crucial to the vitality of the *-a* inflection generally, the diminutive value of *-a* being only one of its many functions (a position followed by Bergen 1980:54). García (1986:20) is also of the opinion that the meaning of gender is primarily contrastive: 'the "switch" in gender [from primitive to derivative] may serve to counterbalance the identity of the root, and point up the specialisation of the derivative in its reference to a diverse kind of object.'

Sometimes what has in later stages of the language become a purely discriminative meaning distinction has been produced by the metonymic extension of one of the members of an existing 'principled' gender pair (in this, the greater strength of the tree/fruit contrast is again revealed, since there are very few, if any, movements away from that opposition). Thus from *caña* (< Lat. CANNA 'reed') the masculine *caño* is formed; this has a variety of meanings in Old Castilian ('tube (of a wind instrument)', 'underground passage', 'drain, sewer') which pre-date the modern general meaning of 'pipe' (Cor. I, 821). *Caño* is clearly related to *caña* in that both represent long, hollow objects, *caño* generally denoting larger concepts than *caña*: we may suspect that it was precisely this that motivated the coining of the word in the first place. However, the semantic link between *caña* and *caño* in Old Castilian has already moved a long way towards being 'unprincipled'. The same kind of situation is observable in the development of *cuchilla*, a feminine formation from *cuchillo* < Lat. CULTELLU(M) 'knife': the most common Peninsular meaning is '(razor) blade' (originally a 'smaller' notion than 'knife?'), but the 'larger' meaning of 'cleaver', 'kitchen knife', 'blade (of a machine)' is also attested in the modern language; in Latin America, there has been metonymic extension to such meanings as 'ridge (of mountains)', 'slavedriver', 'old hag', the semantic relation of which to 'knife' is far from transparent.

The availability of 'unprincipled' discriminative gender oppositions is therefore not inconsistent with 'principled' discriminative oppositions. There is some evidence that Latin already a number of instances of the former. A well-known example is the distinction between Lat. ANIMA 'wind, breath (physical)' and ANIMUS 'life, soul (spiritual and intellectual)'; another is PORTA 'gate' and PORTUS 'harbour'. The latter pair survive popularly in Spanish as *puerta/puerto* with broadly the same meanings as in Latin (*puerto* has extended its meaning to that of 'mountain pass') and the former have been taken into Spanish as a result of learned borrowing, with *ánima* a high register equivalent for *alma* 'soul' and *ánimo* undergoing downwards diffusion as 'courage, encouragement, intention'. We can also see some movements towards the exploitation of such 'unprincipled' gender distinctions in post-classical Latin: CŪPUS 'bucket' is formed on the basis of CŪPA 'tub, cask', perhaps because a bucket, originally made in the same way as a cask (Cor. II, 261–2), is conceived of as a smaller kind of cask; from these sources we have Sp. *cuba/cubo*. Another pair which are both nominalised forms of the past participle of PUNGO 'to prick, puncture' are PUNCTUS 'point (in time)' and PUNCTA 'prick, puncture'. In the Classical language PUNCTA is rare, but we may surmise that it gained currency to yield Spanish *punta* 'tip, point, sharp extremity' as opposed to *punto* 'point, dot'. However, it is easy to overstate the productivity of such gender neologisms within Latin itself on the



basis of later Romance descendants. In Spanish we have the pair *cinta* 'ribbon, tape' and *cinto* 'belt', which Cor. II, 87 derives from Lat. CINCTA 'that which is bound', the past participle of CINGO, and CINCTUS (a fourth declension noun postclassically attested as the second declension neuter CINCTUM) 'girdle, belt'. From this, however, it will be seen that there was no gender opposition as such in Latin itself; in fact, *cinto* is attested relatively late in Spanish (1490) and may well be a learned borrowing. A similar story might be told about CONDUCTA, the feminine past participle of CONDŪCO 'to conduct, lead forth' (amongst many other meanings), and the fourth declension verbal noun CONDUCTUS: Spanish *conducta* 'conduct, behaviour' and *conducto* 'duct', with their specific meanings, are learned borrowings which do not demonstrate the existence of such a gender pair previously. We shall return to the importance of such postverbal derivations shortly.

We must look carefully at cases of apparently simple 'discriminative' gender distinctions in Spanish, because, as we have seen, the role of semantic evolution from the 'principled' distinction based on size is important, and we do not always have ready access to the intermediate stages of such evolutionary processes. The difference between *cabeza* 'head' and *cabezo* 'hillock; reef' might at first sight seem to be nothing to do with a 'principled' distinction. However, though we cannot be certain about these stages, the semantic trajectory through which \*CAPITIA passed is most likely to have involved, as a plural of CAPITIUM, the collective notion of 'head(-count)', while CAPITIUM, originally 'covering for the head' or 'opening in a garment for the head', reached the meanings of 'hillock' and 'reef' by metaphorical association. The discriminative difference observable from early in the textual record of Castilian is therefore likely to have been a collective/individual difference in origin.

In fact, sources of 'unprincipled' gender pairs in Spanish seem to fall into a number of categories. Some are the result of calques or borrowings which the availability of a gender distinction seems to propitiate. *Modo* 'way, manner' is a learned borrowing from Lat. MODU(M) (same meaning), while *moda* 'manner of dress, fashion' is in fact the result of a later borrowing from French *mode* (f.); *banca* 'banking (system)' as opposed to *banco* 'bank', is probably a borrowing from It. *banca* or Fr. *banque*, although *banca* and *banco* existed previously in Spanish with contrasting meanings, *banco* as 'bench' and *banca* as the later discriminated meaning of 'seat without a back'. It is interesting, however, that in both these cases the feminine noun does in a certain way represent a collective notion: *moda* as a cumulative set of 'ways' and *banca* as the collectivity of individual banks.

Spanish has also exploited learned borrowings in making discriminative gender distinctions. Amongst such cases is *acto* 'act' as opposed to *acta*

'minutes, certificate, agreement', the latter corresponding well to Lat. ACTA but not sharing its plurality. Furthermore, there are a number of examples of discriminative gender distinction of learned words without concomitant suffixal marking, presumably in order to achieve finer semantic nuances. *Cólera* (f.) 'bile', later 'rage', adds as a masculine the more technical meaning 'cholera' in the 19th century. *Margen* (Lat. MARGO varied in gender as masculine or feminine) developed the discriminated meanings of 'bank of a river' (feminine) and 'margin of page' (masculine); this distinction is relatively recent, since it is still treated as a feminine in both meanings down to the 18th century.<sup>5</sup> *Orden* (Lat. ŌRDO was masculine in all its meanings) is discriminated between 'order, arrangement' (masculine) and 'order, command' (feminine).

## 2.5 MORE TRANSPARENT MOTIVATIONS

### FOR GENDER OPPOSITIONS:

#### ELLIPSIS AND METONYMY

The stock of gender distinctions is further increased by a rather different creative means from the ones we have been examining so far, namely, through ellipsis and metonymy. Ellipsis of a noun with an originally adjectival form creates such nominal pairs as *derecho* 'law, right' / (*mano/ala*) *derecha* 'right (hand/wing)' and *capital* (m.) 'capital (monetary)' / (*ciudad*) *capital* (f.) 'capital (city)' (Rosenblat 1952:2). An interesting case of reanalysis of a noun as an adjective can be seen in *mayo* 'May' / (*canción*) *maya* 'May song'. Metonymy accounts for such creations as *mañana* (f.) 'morning' / *mañana* (m.) 'tomorrow, the future', *caza* (f.) 'hunt' / (*avión de*) *caza* (m.) 'fighter plane', and, we may note in passing, many figurative usages of (usually feminine) concrete nouns with reference to (male) humans: *bala* (f.) 'bullet' / *bala (perdida)* (m.) 'wastrel', *cura* (f.) 'cure' / *cura* (m.) 'parish priest, one who has the cure of souls'. It is worth pointing out again that these are Romance creations and that, so far as we can tell, Latin did not exploit gender extensively in this way. Even the most obvious case of ellipsis which is paralleled in Latin, (MĀNUS) DEXTERA 'right hand', does not have a corresponding noun DEXTER or DEXTERUM. At the very least we must conclude that the ellipsis and metonymy we observe in Romance were compatible with, and were very possibly encouraged by, the more systematic exploitation of gender pairs for semantic distinctions other than sexual.

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<sup>5</sup> It is still treated as feminine in the *Diccionario de autoridades*, where there are 17th-century examples.



## 2.6 SUFFIXAL GENDER OPPOSITIONS

Another area of gender opposition which merits attention is that of suffixal derivation. I have looked at a number of suffixes for their productivity in this respect. While what we might regard as the primary semantic opposition is the animate-referring one of male/female, there is at the same time a more limited range of oppositions based on non-sexual, or only partly sexual, distinctions. One typical pattern is that the masculine form is animate-referring while the feminine form is not; historically, no doubt, this is because of the absence of female counterparts to a noun which typically denoted a job or function most frequently carried out by a male, e.g. *cazador* '(male) hunter' but *cazadora* 'jacket' (also 'female hunter'), *cartero* 'postman' but *cartera* 'wallet' (now also 'postlady'). But this is not the only basis for such gender distinctions: we also find examples such as *planeador* 'glider' / *planeadora* 'speedboat'; *partido* 'party (political)'; 'match (one game)'; 'advantage' / *partida* 'departure', 'quantity', 'certificate', 'match (several games)', 'detachment, e.g. of troops'; *pago* 'payment' / *paga* 'pay, instalment of salary or wage'. I will examine each of these suffixes in turn.

### 2.6.1 -DOR/-DORA<sup>6</sup>

The most productive source of gender oppositions is clearly based on the male/female animate contrast. However, there is a very strong association between the feminine *-dora* suffix and the names of machines, no doubt originally because of the ellipsis of *máquina* and the substantivisation of the adjectival *-dora* form, e.g. *fotocopiadora*. Most of these words are relatively recent creations in the language, the consequence of the Industrial Revolution and the plethora of modern gadgets and gizmos: (*silla*) *mecedora* 'rocking chair', *cosedora* 'sewing machine', *calculadora* 'calculator', *fotocopiadora* 'photocopier' give a fair chronological range. However, the *-dor* suffix is also used for a number of instrumental devices over a rather more general semantic range, a number of examples of which are of longer standing in the language than the *-dora* forms: tools such as *soldador* 'soldering iron' and *desatascador* 'plunger'; rooms designated for certain functions, e.g. *comedor* 'dining room', *probador* 'fitting room', *tocador* 'powder room', *cambiador* 'changing mat; dressing table', devices such as *amplificador* 'amplifier', *remolcador* 'tugboat', *radiador* 'radiator', *andador* 'zimmer frame'; materials such as *bronceador* 'suncream', *moldeador* 'perm', *betabloqueador* 'beta-blocker'; more abstract

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<sup>6</sup> The behaviour of nouns in *-dor(a)* is examined in greater detail in Pountain (forthcoming).

functions such as *cuantificador* 'quantifier', *multiplicador* 'multiplier'.

We can surely hypothesise a pragmatically-based diachronic trajectory for these developments. The agentive suffix *-dor* is available to indicate a notion associated with agentive functions (device, location, substance) in precisely those cases where there is normally no human agent. (Note my use of the word 'normally': it is not that there could not be occupations associated with the functions just illustrated, but such functions as powdering, trying on clothes, changing babies, etc., are not under normal circumstances trades or professions, because they are too specific or too personal. In a very few cases, ambiguity is encountered, such as *soldador* 'soldering iron; solderer', and I would suggest the appearance of *soldador* in the sense of 'solderer' is due to relatively recent specialisation of trades.) The suffix *-dora*, motivated more recently by ellipsis, originally distinguished machine and operator at a time when the operator was most likely to be male: thus *segador* 'reaper, one who reaps' as opposed to *segadora* 'harvester (machine)'. This is where the first basis for a productive gender contrast between *-dor* and *-dora* which is not based exclusively on sex originates, although in the modern language multivalency of the *-dora* form is much more possible; for example, *segadora* also means 'female reaper'. Since it is possible for nouns in both *-dor* and *-dora* to refer to inanimates, it is in principle possible to have a gender contrast which involves no reference to sex at all, although this seems to happen in relatively few cases, and again perhaps for pragmatic reasons: a particular function, if not carried out by a person, is either associated with a tool, location or substance (masculine) or carried out by a piece of machinery (increasingly feminine); it is difficult to imagine two different inanimate agentive functions for stapling, sewing, silencing, etc. In the light of this, the opposition mentioned at the outset, *planeador* 'glider' / *planeadora* 'speedboat', is actually atypical, though it does seem to be an example of the use of gender to carry out semantic discrimination of vehicles which operate in a similar way, i.e. by the action of *planear* 'to glide, to plane'. Another contrast of a similar kind is the Peninsular Spanish distinction between *secador* 'hairdryer' and *secadora* 'tumble-dryer', which is consistent with the general notions of 'tool' and 'machine' respectively.

### 2.6.2 -ERO/-ERA

The same kind of interaction between animate reference on the one hand and reference to a range of related inanimate functions on the other is evident also in this suffixal pair. However, in this case both the masculine and feminine forms are associated with characteristic inanimate meanings. The Latin postnominal suffix *-ĀRIUM* was associated with the notion of 'store', 'container', e.g. *GRĀNĀRIUM* 'granary', *PLANTĀRIUM* 'nursery garden', and this is continued



quite productively in Romance (cf. *azucarero* 'sugar bowl', *escobero* 'broom cupboard', *cenicero* 'ashtray', the latter appearing as late as the early 17th century). Simultaneously, the *-ero* suffix was also the inheritor of Latin *-ŌRU(M)*, which was associated with the postverbal notion of 'place where something happens', e.g. *LĀVĀTŌRIUM* 'place for washing' (cf. Spanish *lavadero*), a use which was also highly productive: *invernadero* 'greenhouse, place where plants spend the winter (*invernar*)', *embarcadero* 'jetty, place of embarkation (*embarcar*)', *secadero* 'drying (*secar*) shed'. The *-era* suffix owes some of its functions to the elliptical use of Latin adjectives in *-ĀRIA* evident in what are now independent nouns: *ribera* 'river-bank' < *RĪPĀRIA* 'frequenting the banks of rivers', *carrera* < *VĪA \*CARRĀRIA* 'road for carts'; in more recent times the same process may be observable in such creations as (*parte*) *delantera* 'front (part)' and in a number of garments worn for a particular purpose, e.g. (*chaqueta*) *guerrera* 'army jacket', (*zapatilla*) *playera* 'beach shoe', as well as *rinconera* 'cornerpiece' and *enredadera* 'climbing plant' (for which however there are no corresponding adjectives *\*rinconero* and *\*enredadero*). *-era* has developed a number of more specific values in postnominal formations: 'container, receptacle' (*cafetera* 'coffee-pot', *carbonera* 'coal bunker', *cartelera* 'billboard'), 'garment covering a particular part of the body' (*rodillera* 'knee bandage', *pechera* 'front of shirt', *espinillera* 'shinpad'), 'place where an animal is kept' (*leonera* 'lion's cage', *pecera* 'goldfish bowl', *aguilera* 'eyrie'). It also has a collective or augmentative value (which may be the result of occasional derivation from a Latin plural, cf. *escalera* < Lat. *SCALĀRIA* (neuter plural) 'a flight of stairs'): *cabellera* 'hair, flowing locks', *ladera* 'hillside', *pradera* 'large meadow'. We have already noted its occasional use as the designation of a tree name. In postverbal formations it has the meaning of 'instrument', and in this function in fact complements the *-dor* suffix: *abrazadera* 'clamp', *bañera* 'bathtub', *regadera* 'watering can'. In derivations from adjectives it serves as a nominalisation: *sordera* 'deafness', *borrachera* 'drunkenness', *cojera* 'limp'.

Here again, and no doubt for similar reasons, despite the more varied semantic range of these suffixes, contrasts between *-ero* and *-era* are largely restricted to cases where the *-ero* suffix denotes a person and the *-era* suffix an inanimate notion and more recently the corresponding female reference. Thus *crystalero* is '(male) glazier' but *crystalera* 'window pane, glass case' (as well as '(female) glazier'). The specific meanings of the postnominal suffixes are also largely pragmatically predictable on the basis of the stem noun. However, there is an interesting area of semantic overlap between *-ero* and *-era* in their function of 'container'. This seems to be permitted by the fact that if a noun in *-ero* could be construed as animate-referring (e.g. *papelero* 'worker in the paper industry'), then the receptacle is feminine rather than masculine (*papelera* 'waste paper

basket'); this perhaps is what encourages the use of *-era* in this function in the first place. Another case in which we find gender contrast is when the *-ero* suffix denotes a container and the *-era* suffix an establishment (maybe an ellipsis with *fábrica*): thus *salero* 'salt cellar' / *salera* 'salt mine', *azucarero* 'sugar bowl' / *azucarera* 'sugar refinery'.

On the whole, however, this is an ill-defined contrast in semantic terms, and perhaps this is reflected in the greater possibility of synonymy: thus both *mosquitero* and *mosquitera* are used for 'mosquito net', *cabecero* and *cabecera* for 'headboard'.

### 2.6.3 *-DO / -DA*

The various functions of these suffixes in Old Castilian are summarised in Pattison (1975:29–40). They are characteristic of past participles, though *-da* is also used postnominally. I shall not be interested in their substantivised adjectival use as past participles but in their function as a semiproductive nominalising suffix with a lexical meaning that is different from that of the past participle. As a postverbal, *-do* denotes the result of the verbal action rather than the action in progress: *moldeado* 'moulding', *decorado* 'decoration', *teclado* 'keyboarding'; as a postnominal, it expresses an office (*papado* 'papacy', *principado* 'principality') and very occasionally a 'load' (*puñado* 'handful'). *-da* can also denote as a postverbal the result of an action (*nevada* 'snowfall', *callada* 'silence', *herida* 'wound'), or the action itself (*llegada* 'arrival', *acogida* 'welcome'); what distinguishes the two genders here, interestingly, appears to be that the feminine is associated principally with verbs which are inherently punctual in lexical aspect. As a postnominal, *-da* bears the meanings of 'blow' (*puñada* 'blow with the fist', *martillada* 'blow with a hammer') and 'load' (*camionada* 'lorryload', *hornada* 'batch (of baking)'). As with the other suffixes we have examined, some gender contrasts involve animate / inanimate distinctions, such as *parado* 'unemployed man' / *parada* 'stop (for bus, etc.); unemployed woman'. But in this case there are quite a number of gender oppositions which do not involve animates at all. The postverbal possibilities of both suffixes are often exploited: thus *planchado* 'ironing (as task)' / *planchada* 'a single application of the iron', *peinado* 'hairstyle' / *peinada* 'quick combing', *pisado* 'treading (of grapes)' / *pisada* 'footstep, footprint'. As in the last example, the feminine may render a more concrete notion: *picada* 'bite, sting' (as opposed to *picado* 'act of grinding, mincing or chopping'), *tostada* 'slice of toast' (as opposed to *tostado* 'toasting'), although there are also converse examples: *puesto* 'position, stall' / *puesta* 'act of placing'. And there are more idiosyncratic distinctions: *pasado* 'past' / *pasada* 'wipe (effect of passing a cloth over something)'. This surely is an area in which gender contrasts have come to



be substantially exploited. It is interesting in this connection that there are few such gender contrasts evidenced in Pattison's glossary: this may be accidental, but it is more likely to indicate that the use of both *-do* and *-da* was not in the first place motivated by the creation of gender oppositions but that such 'slots' came to be exploited more systematically at a later date.

#### 2.6.4 POSTVERBALS IN *-O/-A*

The last area of derivational morphology I want to consider is that of postverbal formations in *-o* and *-a*. The most substantial investigation of this topic is Martín Baldonado (1981), who was struck by the scarcity of such formations in Classical Latin but nevertheless hypothesises that such examples as there were provided an analogical model for the general tendency in early Castilian to create postverbals from simple verb stems in *-a* (on the analogy of *LUCTA*, *PUGNA*, etc.) and postverbals from affixed verb stems in *-o* (on the analogy of *COMPŪTUS*). Although Old Castilian shows some lapses in this pattern (one might surmise because of the opaque nature of such an analogical motivation) and indeed evidences a number of doublet and even triplet creations, the fact is that by the modern language the number of such gender contrasts is extremely limited. One of the few surviving examples is the triplet *costa*, *costo* and *coste*, which appear in that chronological order according to Corominas. *Costa(s)* is nowadays restricted to the notion of 'legal costs', though it had a wider meaning, corresponding to modern *coste* and *costo*, in Old Castilian: even Covarrubias says that *costa* is 'el precio de una cosa... Otros dizen Coste, que es todo uno'. Nowadays, *-o* is the commonest suffix encountered: *abandonar* → *abandono*, *brillar* → *brillo*, etc. But *-a* (and also *-e*) are used in some cases: *hablar* → *habla*, *buscar* → *busca*; *cesar* → *cese*, *cerrar* → *cierre*, etc.<sup>7</sup> Maybe the fact that some infinitives are postnominal derivations provides a reverse analogical model (*brote* → *brotar*, *ansia* → *ansiar*); it may be that homonymic clash in some cases encourages a particular choice (*cortar* yields *corte* because of the existence of *corto* and *corta* as adjectives), or because the pattern was already established in Latin (*habla* < Lat. *FABŪLA*).<sup>8</sup> At any rate, the variation provides at first sight

<sup>7</sup> The topic clearly warrants further study: Alvar and Pottier (1983:42-3), having written off the choice between *-o*, *-a* and *-e* as arbitrary, point to one or two cases of semantic contrast: *roce* (m.) 'rubbing' / *roza* 'clearing of ground', *toque* (m.) 'signal with a bugle or bell' / *toca* 'female garment', *cante* (m.) 'popular song' / *canta* 'copla, refrain' (the latter not in the *DRAE* and apparently limited to Aragón).

<sup>8</sup> It is interesting to note that this variation is constant throughout the history of the language. Despite the clear preference for *-o*, *conserva*, *consulta* and *charla* make their

a gender distinction that in principle might be exploited. In fact, however, on the whole it is not.

Here, then, we have a case of a rich potential source of gender pairs which was not fully exploited, so we must ask the question why. We may surmise that the reason for the absence of gender pairs is the lack of potential semantic distinction in nominalisations of verbal activities, especially since there is a wealth of other nominalising devices available (e.g. the suffixes *-ción*, *-miento*, the *-do/a* forms already mentioned, and indeed the infinitive itself). The various vocalic suffixes are accordingly further variant nominalisers which all have different degrees of productivity. Only in cases where semantic distinctiveness could be established, or was even desirable because of heavy functional load, did gender pairs survive. Martín Baldonado entertains the possibility of a semantic motivation for cases of 'gender-switching' such as the formation of *cuenta* in addition to *cuento*, speaking (p.75) of the meanings respectively of 'story' and 'narrative, account' as having 'enough semantic distance between them to allow for peaceful coexistence'.

### 3 CONCLUSION

What we have seen in the above detailed discussion is evidence that the exploitation of gender when not referring to sex in Spanish has taken place in different degrees during the language's evolution. Such exploitation is not to be confused with, though it is complemented by, the accidental development of gender pairs through coincidental phonetic development (at the same time, the latter might be seen as a useful antidote to potential homonymy). At the top end of the scale we have the masculine/feminine = tree/fruit contrast, which is systematically exploited in a way which suggests that this opposition is still productive today. Gender distinctions based on collectivity and size are also numerous, though less systematic, while what I have called 'unprincipled' gender differences appear to be completely idiosyncratic, as are the many gender contrasts occasioned by ellipsis and metonymy. These distinctions are correspondingly less productive, though there is some evidence that they continue to be exploited from time to time. In Pountain (2001:208) I called attention to cases of neologistic gender contrast to achieve distinction in the rural Chilean use of *puebla* 'worker's dwelling on an estate' and *rancha* 'hovel' as opposed to *pueblo* 'village, settlement' and *rancho* 'ranch, estate'. The data reported in Pountain (forthcoming) suggests that the *-or/-ora* opposition is

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appearance in the late 15th / 16th centuries, according to Cor. II, 178, 180 and 339, and *condena* is first attested in the 1791 Academy Dictionary.



exploited to a greater extent than has hitherto been supposed, and such modern examples as *terminal* (f.) '(transport) terminal' / *terminal* (m.) '(computer) terminal' suggest similarly opportunistic exploitation. It seems that the more clearcut the basis for the gender opposition is, the more propensity it has to undergo analogical extension and therefore to become more systematic and productive. At the same time, however, it is at the less well-defined, and hence less systematic, end of the scale that the rather more random extension of gender oppositions appears to create new kinds of semantic contrast.

What is especially interesting about such creativity in the use of gender oppositions is that the process of the creation of new semantic contrasts is constrained by pragmatic and structural need. This, I surmise, is what explains the lack of take up of oppositional possibilities within the derivational morphology of Spanish. From the pragmatic point of view, neologisms do not proliferate beyond conceptual necessity. Lack of pragmatic motivation may also account for a number of cases where we can see that gender contrasts, even if established, have been abandoned. Both *emiendo* and *e(n)mienda* are attested in Berceo, but only *enmienda* survives into modern Spanish; similarly of Old Castilian *quexo* and *quexa*, and of *afruento* and *afruenta*, only the latter of each pair survives today (Martín Baldonado 1981-82:71-72). Although both *cayado* and *cayada* 'crook, crozier' are given in Nebrija and in the *DRAE*, *cayado* is much the commoner term today. From the structural point of view, gender oppositions are not the only source of neologism, and are merely one of the strategies available in Spanish for the labelling of new concepts and the making of finer semantic distinctions. The creation of a gender distinction may possibly be inhibited by homonymic clash (note that I am not thinking of homonymic clash teleologically here, but rather as the preempting of an otherwise potentially available category). It seems possible, for example, that the development of a more distinctive feminine in /a/ in Latin for the names of fruits was inhibited in some cases as a result of preemption by a homonym: *MĀLA* 'cheekbone', *PRŪNA* 'live coal' (though it is ultimately the fruit names which prosper in Romance). The potential distinction based on size between *rata* 'rat' and *rato* 'mouse' which is evidenced in Galician according to Cor. IV, 792 (see also Kahane and Kahane 1948-49: 151) is rendered in Castilian by the use of the otherwise rather odd augmentative suffix *-ón* in the masculine *ratón*, maybe because in Castilian *rato* (< *RAPTU(M)*) was already used as in the meaning it still has of 'short space of time'. Conversely, gender is used to make semantic distinctions in cases of heavy polysemy (e.g. *orden*).

Returning to my own concern about the nature of capitalisation (Pountain 2000a), I have to conclude that the exploitation of gender does not have the same

systematic nature as I claimed for the exploitation of the *ser/estar* distinction. That is surely in the nature of things: in the latter case we are dealing with very generalised syntactic constructions and the grammaticalisation of the individual lexical verbs on which they are based, while gender is essentially a non-lexical nominal feature. Another difference is that while I was able to trace what I called the collateral consequences of the capitalisation on the *ser/estar* distinction (the extension of the range of inceptive verbs of Spanish, with which copulas are closely related semantically, and features of the expression of adjective negation), I cannot perceive any such collateral consequences of capitalisation on gender in Spanish. However, in many other respects there are similarities. The range of the masculine/feminine gender opposition in Spanish quite clearly extends in the course of the historical development of the language without any abandoning of the original meaning-differences which the opposition encoded: thus, as in the case of *ser* and *estar*, we see an expansion, not a transfer, of functions. Another similarity is that gender distinctions sometimes make covert distinctions overt, as we have seen especially in the collective/individual opposition and in the 'aspectual' opposition between *-do* and *-da*. As with the *ser/estar* distinction, expansion in the semantic range of gender tends to go against isomorphism between form and meaning, though this view must be heavily qualified in the case of gender, since, unlike the 'original' values of *ser* and *estar*, 'original' gender in inanimate-referring nouns was largely meaningless. Another similarity with the *ser/estar* contrast is that gender may be exploited to reiconise certain semantic distinctions, the feature noted by the Kahanes and Malkiel.

In looking at the development of *ser* and *estar* I was able to establish that each successive stage of their evolution could be understood in associational terms in much the same way as many changes in lexical meaning. However, in the case of gender, the basis of associational change is far from obvious. Assuming that the fundamental meaning of masculine is 'male' and that of feminine is 'female', there seems to be nothing inherently 'male' about trees: indeed, one would think that the tree as the producer of fruit was more likely to be female; and biologically, trees can be 'male' or 'female', both male and female bearing fruit. The 'psychological' theories which attempted to relate the notion of 'female' to that of relatively larger size are now largely discredited.<sup>9</sup> The picture I have given in the above account of gender in Spanish is rather that

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<sup>9</sup> See Kahane and Kahane (1948-9), Echaide (1969) and Malkiel (1983). The resolution of this interesting question may now be expected to come from comparative evidence of the kind offered by Corbett (1991:32).



of somewhat arbitrary exploitation of the opposition, motivated by semantic differentiation of a number of quite different kinds.

Is the exploitation of gender more likely to be an instance of exaptation, the reutilisation of redundant features in the sense of Lass (1990), a possibility which I was at pains to discount for the history of *ser* and *estar*? I have an ambivalent answer to this question. On the one hand, gender is not a redundant feature as far as discrimination between male and female goes in human-referring nouns. Yet on the other hand, it is strictly speaking semantically redundant in inanimate-referring nouns. This is plainly different from the use of *ser* and *estar* where the question of 'redundant' usage simply does not apply. What we are in fact saying about gender is that it is partly redundant and partly not, and that it (a) retains the functions it already has, extending them further (capitalisation) and (b) utilises some of its redundancy for new purposes. This, then, is a type of change which lies somewhere in between capitalisation and exaptation, or perhaps contains elements of both. However it may be, I think that the further investigation of these two processes may yield interesting insights into some of the traditional areas of investigation of Romance linguistics, on which the last word has surely not yet been spoken.

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