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The gender system of Khoekhoegowab

Abstract: According to traditional analysis, Khoekhoe(gowab) makes a tripartite distinction between masculine, feminine, and common gender. Based on a statistical analysis of the comprehensive dictionary by Haacke and Eiseb and the first author's status as a native speaker, the present paper offers new insights into the gender system of Khoekhoe. This concerns in particular the gender specification across the lexicon, including the status of transnumeral nouns, which leads to a partly revised analysis of the gender system.

Keywords: common gender; Khoekhoe(gowab); multiple-gender noun; neuter gender; transnumeral

1 Introduction

Khoekhoegowab (='Khoekhoe speech', henceforth just Khoekhoe, ISO 639-3 NAQ) is a standardized official language of Namibia formerly known as Nama or Nama/Damara. Namibian Khoekhoe, with small pockets of dialect speakers in neighboring South Africa and Botswana, is the only remaining member of the Khoekhoe branch of the Khoe-Kwadi language family (Güldemann 2014).

Khoekhoe has lexical tone on vowels and syllabic nasals. Readers are referred to Haacke (1999) and Brugman (2009) for certain tonal changes, which are not explained here. For the sake of uniformity, we mark tone according to the conventions in Brugman (2009) rather than the original sources. We mostly follow the official writing system with a couple of adjustments. For ease of tone marking, long vowels are written with double vowels rather than a macron over a simple vowel. A tilde replaces the circumflex to indicate nasality on vowels.

While the traditional analysis of the gender system of Khoekhoe is straightforward for the two major genders, masculine and feminine, the nature of the common gender and the behavior of transnumeral nouns are not well understood yet. The functional load of the different genders in the lexicon also remains

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unknown. The present paper aims to provide insights into these issues. Our data are from the most up-to-date Khoekhoe dictionary (Haacke and Eiseb 2002) as well as the native speaker expertise and field notes of the first author; the latter source remains unmarked. In order to increase the coherence of the corpus, we omitted duplicate lexemes and forms unknown to the first author, which resulted in a set of 5,214 nominal stems. These were classified exhaustively according to their agreement behavior, taking into account the variety of the central parts of Namibia spoken by the first author. After filtering out nouns belonging to multiple genders (see Section 3.5) and grammatically productive formations like deverbal nominalizations and compounds based on head nouns with derivational functions, we arrived at a data set of 1,944 nouns with a lexicalized gender which allowed us to assess the functional load of each gender.

2 Nominal forms and agreement

2.1 PGNs as agreement classes

In Khoekhoe, agreement is expressed by means of portmanteau morphemes that attach to a variety of hosts. These morphemes convey the features of person, gender, and number and are therefore traditionally called **P**erson-**G**ender-**N**umber (PGN) markers (see, e.g., Güldemann 2004; Voßen 1997).[1] Agreement between controllers and targets involving these PGNs is most conspicuous between nouns and postposed modifiers. This pattern is shown in the schema in (1) and is exemplified in (2)–(5).

(1)   [N-PGNx]   [MODIFIER-PGNx]

(2)   *tíí*   *lhòò.sà-kha*   *lgám-kha*
         1SG.POSSR   friend.?-M.DU   two-M.DU
         'my two (male) friends'   [Hagman 1974: 91]

(3)   *llnáã́*   *àò̱-b*   *lgű́i-b*
         that   man-M.SG   only-M.SG
         'only that man'

(4)   *mã́ã́*   *tàra-s*   *hòà-s*
         which   woman-F.SG   all-F.SG
         'every woman (~each and every woman)'

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1 A typologically interesting feature of the language is that 1st- and 2nd-person PGNs can also occur on nouns. This falls outside the present topic (see Haacke (1977) for more discussion).

(5)   khòe-i   n̈ee-i
       person-c.sg   this-c.sg
       'this person (~the person, this one)'

The above examples illustrate agreement on a numeral in (2), a focus-sensitive restrictive marker in (3), a universal quantifier in (4), and a demonstrative in (5). The first three examples also show that prenominal attributive modifiers do not agree.

　　Example (6) displays an instance of agreement between the anaphoric subject pronoun *ǀǀî̃ĩ* 'they' in the main clause and its antecedent *(nǎu) khòè-n* '(other) people' modified by an equally agreeing relative clause.

(6)   nǎu   khòè-n   [hî̃ã̌   gò̀   khòe-s   ǃǎromà gò-rò
       other   person-c.pl   REL   PR.PST   person-F.SG for   PR.PST-IPFV
       ǀhúwǔ]=n-ǎ̀,   ǀǀî̃ĩ-n   tsî̃ĩn   gè   ǀǀàra-ǂǔi-è   tàma   hǎ̀ǎ̀
       toil=c.pl-TOP 3-c.pl   also   DECL   cut-out-PASS NEG   RELV
       'The other people who had (equally) toiled for (getting) the woman (in marriage), they are also not excluded.'

Generally, all postposed apposition-like modifiers show agreement with the head. In (7), we see a different, more complex, pattern in a conjoined noun phrase (see Haacke 1992). The phrase-final connector *tsî̃ĩ* 'and' agrees semantically with the gender and cumulatively with the overall number of the two conjoined singular nouns. Since both conjuncts are female, the phrase final connector is in the feminine dual form.

(7)   tárǎ-s   tsî̃ĩ   lgǒ̃ã-s   tsî̃ĩ=ra
       wife-F.SG   and   child-F.SG   and=F.DU
       'the wife and the daughter.'

It can be observed that agreement is alliterative in two ways: a) it is identical across all targets, and b) targets are marked with the same form as the controller itself (see Corbett 1991: 117–119). As mentioned above, PGNs encode person, gender, and number. Table 1 presents the subset of this larger paradigm relevant in this context, namely all 3rd-person forms. There are eight such PGNs conveying three number values: singular, dual, and plural (the singular exponents also apply to trans-numeral nouns), as well as gender, details of which are discussed in Section 3.

　　Table 1 shows that *-b* has an allomorph *-Ci*. It applies when the host ends in a closed syllable, copying its final consonant, as with *som-* 'shadow' in (8).[2] Such a case

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2 The allomorphy ultimately originates in the Proto-Khoe form *bi*, which diverged in Namibian Khoekhoe into the inherited plosive form *b* that lost the original vowel and an assimilated nasal form *mi* that maintained it (see Güldemann 2004).

where the controller ends in *-mi* while the target, in (8) the following possessor pronoun, ends in *-b* is not an exception to alliteration. This is confirmed by (9) where the reverse situation holds, namely the agreement target 'small' has *-mi* as opposed to the controller 'sibling' (and an additional modifier) with *-b*.

Table 1: 3rd person agreement exponents of Khoekhoe.

No.	Number	Class exponent
1	SG + TN	*-b* (allomorph: *-Ci*)
2	DU	*-kha*
3	PL	*-gu*
4	SG + TN	*-s*
5	DU	*-ra*
6	PL	*-di*
7	SG + TN	*-i* ([ʔi])[a]
8	PL	*-n*

[a]In slow speech, this PGN starts with a glottal stop. In the practical orthography, this is represented by a hyphen preceding the morpheme, thus distinguishing it from *-Ci*, the allomorph of *-b*.

(8) *sóm-mi*   *hǎì-s*   *dì-b*
     shadow-M.SG   tree-F.SG   POSSM-M.SG
     'the shadow of the tree (lit. the shadow, the tree's one)'

(9) *tíí*   *!gǎ̃ã.sà̀-b*   *‡khárí́-b*   *‡khá́m-mi*
     1SG.POSSR   sibling.?-M.SG   little-M.SG   small-M.SG
     'my brother, the small one, the younger one'   [Hagman 1974: 90]

While originally this allomorph only occurred with native words ending in a nasal (Haacke 2013: 142), today there are many more items with a final consonant, specifically loans, especially from Afrikaans.

2.2 PGNs as nominal form classes

In Section 2.2, we take a closer look at the PGN marking on nouns themselves. In line with the nature of the PGN concept itself and as foreshadowed by the discussion revolving around the allomorphy of *-b* and *-Ci*, the PGN forms on nouns are identical with the agreement exponents given in Table 1. This means there is no real difference between nominal form classes and agreement classes. This synchronic fact can be motivated historically in that the PGNs on both nominal controllers and agreement targets are likely to be derived from earlier pronominal elements (see Güldemann 2004: 298–299).

While nouns with a PGN represent the default case, there are some contexts where such PGN marking is absent. Some of these exceptions are morphological, as non-final nominal lexemes in compounds and other complex word formations lack their lexicalized PGN (see Sections 2.2.2/3). Other exceptions are syntactic, notably constructions with nominal predicates. In (10), *áo-* 'man' is used in its default meaning, but it does not get an appropriate PGN because it serves as a generic nominal predicate.

(10) *sáā̋-ts*   *gè*   *à*   *àȍ.*
      2-2M.SG   DECL   STAT   man
      'You are a man.'   [Hagman 1974: 165]

Our corpus contains three morphological types of lexemes that involve PGN marking. These are simplex nouns, complex nouns, and compounds. Before discussing them in that order, we report about the relative frequency of the PGNs as markers that are lexicalized for items in our dictionary corpus. It is sufficient to consider only the three markers on singular and transnumeral nouns, as these predict the corresponding dual and plural forms. Table 2 presents our statistical results across the three morphological types. As explained in more detail below, these counts exclude any grammatically productive collocation of a PGN and a nominal expression.

Table 2: Lexicalized PGNs across the Khoekhoe lexicon.

PGN-form	Simplex nouns	Complex nouns	Compounds	Total	%
-b/-Ci	357/86	54/0	461/23	872/109	50
-s	416	49	449	914	47
-i	41	4	4	49	3
Total	900	107	937	1,944	100

2.2.1 Simplex nouns

Simplex nouns consist of a single root with a PGN marker, as in (11) and (12).

(11) *áo-b*
      man-M.SG
      'man/husband'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 12]

(12) *tárā̋-s*
      woman-F.SG
      'woman/wife'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 129]

Simplex nouns can also be derived productively from other parts of speech by suffixing a PGN to such a lexeme. In (13), a noun is derived from a stative verb by means of *-b*, while a deverbal noun with *-s* is seen in (14). All such nominals represent cases of grammatical noun derivation and were not counted in our statistics in Table 2 on lexicalized PGN marking.

(13)   *!kháí̃-b*
       be.cold-M.SG
       'the cold, chill (abstract noun)'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 343]

(14)   *síí̃-s*
       arrive-F.SG
       'arrival (gerund)'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 117]

Table 2 above records 900 simplex noun roots, which represents the second most frequent nominal type. Within this group, the PGN *-b/-Ci* is the most frequent, followed closely by *-s*, while *-i* is relatively rare.

2.2.2 Complex nouns

Complex nouns are nominals made up of a root and at least one suffix.

(15)   *xǎu-**bè̃-s***
       feces-?-F.SG
       'smelly shepherd's tree (Bosica foetida)'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 152]

In (15), a suffix *-bè̃* attaches to the root of the simplex noun *xǎǘ-b* 'dung/feces'.[3] The use of this morpheme is lexicalized; its meaning is thus synchronically not fully transparent. It roughly conveys 'associated with/belonging to X', X being a derivational base. The derivational process in (15) renders the reference to a smelly tree species. This meaning determines the PGN of the complex noun because trees in Khoekhoe take by default *-s* (cf. *hǎì-s* 'tree', Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 46).

Complex nouns also arise from the suffixation of more productive derivational elements, which were not counted in Table 2 above. In (16), a nominal root gets the diminutive suffix *-rò*.

(16)   *ání̃-rò-b*
       bird-DIM-M.SG
       'chick (lit. little bird)'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 10]

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3 This suffix triggers a tone change on the root called flip-flop by Haacke (1999: 145).

Other such productive Khoekhoe suffixes are *-llĩ̀* and *-nĩ̀*,[4] both primarily used for group affiliation of human nouns, and *-sì*, for abstract nouns mostly with the PGN *-b*.

Table 3: Unproductive suffixes of complex nouns.

Suffix	Frequency	Example (page number in Haacke and Eiseb 2002)
-bè	23	*ŏro-bè-b* 'sand shark' (104)
-dà	13	*ǀgáni-dà-b* 'stick-insect, of fam. *Phasmidae*' (184)
-nǎ	11	*ǀgȉ̃ȉ̃-nǎ-s* '(house)fly' (189)
-rà	7	*ǀkhȅ́e-rà-s* 'castor bean' (213)
-rò	7	*tsǎma-rò-s* 'snow' (135)
-rȅ́	6	*ǃgŏa-rȅ́-b* 'zebra' (321)
-rì	5	*ǁȁū-rì-bȉ̃́* 'baobab tree' (235)
-rŏ́	4	*lùu-rŏ́-s* 'riddle' (178)
-rǔ́	3	*lȉ́i-rǔ́-b* 'mopane worm' (170)
-sȅ	3	*ǃkháe-sȅ-b* 'black mamba' (342)
-ȅ	3	*ǂgǎ̃ū-ȅ-b* 'agama' (392)
-khȅ	2	*kér-khȅ-b* 'church' (<Afr. *kerk*) (63)
-ȍ	2	*hȉ̀i-ȍ-s* 'ancient times/olden days' (50)
-rǎ́	2	*ǁgǎ́wa-rǎ́-b* 'caul' (252)

Apart from the productive nominal suffixes, our lexical corpus contains 30 unproductive suffixes in complex nouns, 16 of which occur only with a single root. The remaining 14 suffixes are listed exhaustively in Table 3 including their numbers in our lexical corpus; none of them correlates consistently with a specific PGN paradigm.[5]

Table 2 shows that lexicalized complex nouns are the least frequent type in Khoekhoe with only 107 items in our corpus. The overall frequency hierarchy of the respective PGNs is the same as that with simplex nouns.

2.2.3 Compound nouns

The third and final morphological type of Khoekhoe nouns are compounds whose final lexical head normally determines the PGN of the complex constituent. In (17),

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4 According to (Haacke p.c.), an alternative analysis is to view these elements as lexical which would make these formations compounds (see Section 2.2.3).

5 It is in fact possible that some of these elements are not really suffixes but are due to borrowing. Canonical lexical roots in Khoekhoe can only be bimoraic and segments of integrated loans not complying with native phonotactics can be reinterpreted as a pseudo-suffix as, for example, *-khȅ* in *kér-khȅ-b* (<Afrikaans *kerk* 'church').

for example, the compound is made up of *ǂóa-b* 'air/wind' and *kűnì̀-s* 'wagon', the latter inheriting its PGN to the new noun 'airplane'.

(17)   *ǂóa-kúnì̀-s*
         air-wagon-F.SG
         'airplane'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 378]

Not all compounds ending in a noun are necessarily nominal, however. Example (18) illustrates a case of noun incorporation (see Haacke 1995 for details) where *ǂai* 'foot' is part of a verbal predicate (*ǎ* is indeterminate and is glossed by?). Such verb compounds can be nominalized to render abstract nouns, as in (19), where a deverbal noun is derived by final -*b*, the PGN dedicated to denoting illnesses. Such formations are productive and are not included in the lexical statistics of Table 2.

(18)   … *rà*   *ǀkhári-ǎ-ǂàì*
            IPFV   be.sore-?-foot
         '… become footsore'   [Haacke 1995: 344, glossing adjusted, tone added]

(19)   *tsǚ̃-ǎ-ǃnǎ̀-b*
         pain-?-belly-M.SG
         'stomach-ache, stomach cramps'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 144]

Equally productive are compounds based on frequent head nouns that form semantically coherent sets. For example, the lexeme *áo-b* 'man' is the basis of agent noun derivation, as in (20), whose PGN is no longer determined by the lexically determined suffix of the nominal head but by the sex of the referent.

(20)   *gòwa-àö̀-b/s*
         speak-AGENT-M.SG/F.SG
         'speaker (male/female)'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 43]

Other frequent head nouns, albeit less so than *áo-b*, are *tárǎ-s* 'woman' (21), *tsée-s* 'day' (22), *ǁǎe-b* 'time' (23), and *ǁóő-b* 'illness/death' (24), all largely retaining their lexical PGN in the compound.

(21)   *ǃòa-tàrǎ̀-s*
         grieve-woman-F.SG
         'widow'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 299]

(22)   *ǁóő-tsèë̀-s*
         death-day-F.SG
         'day of (s.os) death'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 241]

(23)   *llóm-llàǟ-b*
        sleep-time-M.SG
        'bedtime'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 240]

(24)   *ǂnὺbi-llòǒ-b*
        spleen-illness-M.SG
        'anthrax'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 422]

On the other extreme of productivity, there are lexicalized formations whose components are today no longer semantically interpretable, like in the noun *ǟm.lnée-i* 'game (wild meat)' (Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 9).

As recorded in Table 2 above, lexicalized compounds contribute 937 lexemes to our corpus, which show the same frequency hierarchy regarding the PGN assignment as simplex and complex nouns.

3 Nominal lexemes and the gender system

3.1 Structural gender overview

Since agreement as conveyed in Khoekhoe by 3rd-person PGNs encodes gender **and** number, establishing the genders requires one to "subtract" the number component from the agreement system as a whole by identifying the classes of noun lexemes that have the same agreement behavior across the relevant number values: singular, dual, and plural. Table 4 shows how the eight PGNs can map over number. There are seven different structural patterns whose lexical frequency in our dictionary-based corpus is given to the extent relevant. On account of sharing the singular PGN, we classify the seven patterns into three principal patterns, numbered with Roman numerals. They are discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections.

Table 4: Agreement patterns in Khoekhoe across the lexicon.

Pattern		SG	DU	PL	Subtotal	%	Total	%
Ia	Count	-b/-Ci	-kha	-gu	937	48.2	981	50.4
Ib	Transnumeral	-b/-Ci	–	–	44	2.2	–	–
IIa	Count	-s	-ra	-di	908	46.7	914	47.0
IIb	Transnumeral	-s	–	–	6	0.3	–	–
IIIa	Count	-i	–	−n	7	0.4	49	2.6
IIIb	Transnumeral	-i	–	–	42	2.2	–	–
IIIc	Count	-i	-ra	-n	0	0	–	–
Total					1,944	100	1,944	100

3.2 Pattern I: masculine gender

The numerically largest agreement pattern comprises nouns that take agreement *-b/-Ci* in the singular, *-kha* in the dual, and *-gu* in the plural (Pattern Ia). This set of Khoekhoe nouns is the traditional masculine gender, which harbors, with almost 950 lexemes, close to 50% of all items in our corpus. To the extent there is transparent semantic assignment, this gender hosts animate nouns of male sex (e.g. *áo-b* 'man') as well as nouns referring to (largely inanimate) objects which are either big or tall in size, or elongated and slender in shape (e.g. *!ǎo-b* 'neck'). The last set of semantic features is exploited for rendering other meanings by means of gender switch (cf. Aikhenvald 2012 for typological discussion). Thus, compare the masculine *hǎì-b* 'stick or tall, slender tree' derived from feminine *hǎì-s* 'tree' (Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 47), or the masculine *ǂǎre-b* 'tail' related to feminine *ǂǎre-s* 'buttock (of especially human body)' (Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 373).

A set of 44 transnumeral nouns with a single number value shares its agreement with the singular class *-b/-Ci* of masculine count nouns (Pattern Ib). This group is comprised of lexemes that mostly refer to bodily excretions, e.g. *xáǘ-b* 'dung, feces', *lárǘ.b* 'dry and pulverized manure', *ǂáá-b* 'saliva', *láo-b* 'blood', and *lùu-b* 'urine'. Nouns denoting various odors are also assigned to this gender including the noun for 'odor' itself, e.g. *lláma-b* 'odor', *lhǜǜ.b* 'stench of male goat', *lhǒa-b* '(foul) body odor (esp. of armpit)'. Nouns for grass (collective), fat, and sand generally go into another class of transnumeral nouns (see Section 3.4). However, the present set also hosts a handful of nouns denoting specific types of grass, fat, sand, and sediment accumulating in liquids, for example, *lkhúru-b* 'sourgrass', *lhǎu-b* 'subcutaneous fat', *ǂgòma-b* 'sediment in drinking water/tea etc.', and *ɵ̀mà-b* 'sediment (e.g. from beer during brewing)'. Other nouns that fall into this group are *lán-ni* 'smoke', *tsǎo-b* 'ash', and *tsǎ̀rà-b* 'dust'. While all these nouns are not straightforwardly singular in semantic terms, on account of their agreement, we subsume them under the masculine gender as singularia tantum. In terms of Corbett (1991: 175–176), they are "defective nouns" that only require a lexical specification for their aberrant number behavior.

3.3 Pattern II: feminine gender

A second large group of nouns accommodating, with a little more than 900 items, about 47% of our corpus, takes agreement *-s* in the singular, *-ra* in the dual, and *-di*

in the plural (Pattern IIa). This pattern corresponds to the other major gender recognized traditionally in Khoekhoe, called feminine. In terms of transparent semantics, this gender hosts nouns of feminine natural sex, for example, *tárǎ-s* 'woman/wife', and nouns denoting objects that are small, short, wide, thick, or roundish, for example, *!áḿ-s* 'bead, pearl'. An example of gender shift is feminine *!áa-s* 'settlement, residential site' derived from *!áa-b* 'river' (Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 292).

Like the masculine gender, the feminine gender also comprises trans-numeral nouns sharing the relevant singular agreement in *-s* (Pattern IIb). The much smaller set of these singularia tantum is given fully in Table 5. They refer to various types of precipitation with the exception of the last word, which is odd in this group as most nouns with such semantics are in the masculine gender.

Table 5: Transnumeral nouns with default agreement *-s* (sɢ).

Noun	Translation
Inánǘ-s	rain; cloud, rain-cloud
Iȟòm-s	fine drizzle
hǐǔ-s	(inland) mist/fog
tsǎntǒo-s	(coastal) mist/fog
tsǎmarò-s	snow (biblical)
Igòro-s	lees, dregs (in a container)

3.4 Pattern III: neuter ~ common gender

The third major agreement pattern is the most complex in Khoekhoe in comprising three subsets. Nouns that are comparable to canonical masculine and feminine nouns with lexicalized agreement and multiple number values display agreement in *-i* for the singular and *-n* for the plural but lack dual number (Pattern IIIa). In contrast to masculine and feminine, however, there are few such count nouns. Table 6 presents the full set including five native and two borrowed lexemes. This pattern corresponds roughly to what Hagman (1974: 46ff.) calls 'indefinite' and Haacke (2013: 142) 'neuter'. We adopt the last term as all nouns refer to non-specific or generic entities. The fact that the first three nouns are productive as heads of compounds leads to the expansion of this lexical gender pattern way beyond the few basic nouns.

Table 6: Neuter nouns with default agreement *-i* (SG) and *-n* (PL).

Noun	Translation
xúu-i	thing; object, item; matter, element
ǂűū.i	Food
!nàre-i	type/sort of person
àmĺnée-i	game (like springbok and larger; excl. birds & fish)
xóoxòö-i	creepy-crawly animal, insect
kĺm-i	germ, bacterium (<Afrikaans *kiem*)
spőok-i	ghost, apparition (<Afrikaans *spook*)

A group of lexemes that only take singular agreement *-i* (Pattern IIIb) is compa-rable to the masculine and feminine transnumeral classes. Transnumeral neuter nouns refer to generic liquids and masses, for example, *ǁgáḿ-i* 'water', *ǁgàn̄-i* 'meat', *ǀhnùi-i* 'fat', and *sáā.i* 'buchu powder'. Owing to its relatively clear semantic assignment principle, this class of nouns can recruit other nouns that fit the profile and may thus be viewed as an open set. For example, borrowings such as *reisi-i* 'rice' (<Afrikaans *rys*), and *oli-i* 'oil' (<Afrikaans *olie*) ended up in this class. With 42 items in our corpus, the neuter singularia tantum are more numerous than the group of neuter count nouns.

There is no reason for viewing neuter nouns as establishing an inquorate gender (see Corbett 1991: 170–175), despite their relatively small number, as their agreement forms are distinct from those of both masculine and feminine nouns. There is yet another equally important reason for this analysis: the PGNs associated with neuter nouns are actually much more frequent than expected from their purely lexically triggered occurrence. That is, they are also used for so-called "multiple-gender nouns", such as *khòe-* 'person' (see Section 3.5 below), as soon as their reference is semantically either generic or underspecified, because, in the relevant context, the speaker deems the specific nature of the referent irrelevant, undesired, or does not know it (Pattern IIIc). In most previous descriptions of Khoekhoe, this set of assign-ment rules has been called "common gender", especially in the case of plural refer-ence, so that we add this term to the overall gender label.

Since common gender applies to nouns that can be either masculine or feminine, the agreement pattern does not have an associated set of genuine lexical items (cf. Table 4). Only one exceptional compound noun is arguably dedicated to common gender: example (25) gives the duale tantum '(cohabiting/married) couple', which is a deverbal nominalization of the reciprocal form of *óm* 'to build (a house)'.

(25)   *khòe-òm̄-**gu-ra***
         person-build.house-**RCPR-C.DU**
         'a (married) couple (lit. a group of persons who are in a house-(forming)
         relation to each other)'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 72]

As shown in Table 4 above, the PGN pattern of the common gender shares the dual form *-ra* with the feminine gender discussed in Section 3.3. This syncretism means that this dual marker generally has the feature [+feminine], in that it implies at least one female entity in the relevant pair of referents. This is confirmed by its absence in contexts where dual meaning is required but feminine semantics is to be avoided. Consider in this respect (26) – the preferred utterance in a classroom scenario where a teacher returns tests and wants to effectively keep the sex of the two students who have passed unspecified.

(26) *ǀGám   khòě̃-n   ǀgű̃i-n   gè   !ã̃̃-s-ẵ   gò   !khàru.*
      two   person-**c.PL**   only-**3c.PL**   DECL   test-3F.SG-OBJ   PR.PST   pass
      'Only two people passed the test.'

In spite of the reference to two people, only the common plural form *-n* on the head noun *khòe-* (and its following dependent), rather than the dual, allows the speaker to make a generic statement that avoids any hint to one of the two major genders. That is, for using common dual agreement, the speaker needs to know **and** wants to communicate that at least one of the referents/nouns is [+feminine]. Due to this nature, common gender in Khoekhoe in general only implies that a referent is not consistently masculine or feminine. The feminine bias of *-ra* also provides an explanation for the fact that lexicalized neuter nouns avoid this form. Accordingly, the dual in the neuter~common gender is a defective number value.

3.5 Multiple-gender nouns

The discussion of nouns that can be used with common gender agreement provides a convenient transition to briefly dealing with the phenomenon of multiple-gender nouns in terms of Corbett (1991: 67, 181–183). Such lexemes are not dedicated to an agreement pattern of a single gender, rather they use different ones according to the meaning of the referent in a particular context.

According to our description above, numerous Khoekhoe nouns can indeed be used in all three genders. This applies in particular to animate multiple-gender nouns, both simplex (like *khòe-* 'person') and compound (see (20) in Section 2.2.3 above). However, it holds for many inanimate nouns, too, to the extent that they can be manipulated semantically, like, for example, *òm-s* 'hut, house' whose default is feminine but which can be masculine *òm-mi*, when referring to a (larger) building, or *òm-i*, when generic reference is made.
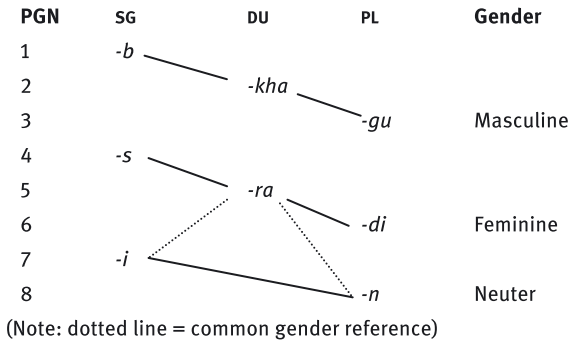
For the record, multiple gender assignment also applies to a small but semantically interesting set of compounds that are best viewed as nominalized kinship verbs with the reciprocal marker *-gu* and are thus inherently pluralia/ dualia tantum. One such dual noun was already discussed in connection with common gender in (25) above. The majority of such nouns can be used in at least two genders, as that in (27a), or in all three genders, as those in (27b–d).

(27) a. *tárǎ́-őã̃-gu-n/di/ra*
          woman-give.birth-RCPR-C.PL/F.PL/F~C.DU
          'family (consisting of woman with children)'

                                                  [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 130]

      b. *khòe-làò-gu-n/di/gu/kha/ra*
          person-be.blood-RCPR-C.PL/F.PL/M.PL/M.DU/F~C.DU
          'blood relatives'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 73]

      c. *khòe-őǎ́-gu-n/di/gu/kha/ra*
          person-give.birth-RCPR-C.PL/F.PL/M.PL/M.DU/F~C.DU
          'members of a core/nuclear family'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 72]

      d. *mǎ̃ã̃-kháo.!gǎ́ã̃-gu-n/di/gu/kha/ra*
          stand-behind-RCPR-C.PL/F.PL/M.PL/M.DU/F~C.DU
          'siblings in immediate succession'   [Haacke and Eiseb 2002: 83]

4 Summary

According to the above information, Khoekhoe has three genders, in line with the traditional analysis. Two major genders, masculine and feminine, constitute almost the entire lexicon of the language to relatively equal parts. The third gender, neuter ~ common, is minor due to the restricted number of genuine neuter nouns in the lexicon. It is important in the grammar, however, as it caters for contexts of non-specific and common reference to nouns when the typical assignment criteria of the masculine and feminine genders like natural sex and shape ~ size are unknown or intentionally demoted. The tripartite gender distinction is confirmed by the fact that each gender contains a group of transnumeral nouns, specifically singularia tantum, each with its own semantic profile.

Figure 1 displays the gender system in a schematic form showing the mapping of the eight PGNs over the three number values and, by means of lines, the three resulting gender patterns of Khoekhoe nouns.

PGN	SG	DU	PL	Gender
1	-b			
2		-kha		
3			-gu	Masculine
4	-s			
5		-ra		
6			-di	Feminine
7	-i			
8			-n	Neuter

(Note: dotted line = common gender reference)

Figure 1: The gender system of Khoekhoe.

Table 7 presents this system alternatively as a list of PGNs each specified according to its possible number value(s) and set against the three gender patterns, which are characterized according to their prominent semantics and illustrated by typical nouns.

Table 7: Khoekhoe genders according to nominal form classes in the 3rd person.

PGN	Number	Core semantics	Typical example lexeme(s)	Gender
-b/	TN	body excretion/odor	*láo-b* 'blood'	Masculine
Ci	SG	natural male; big, high, long, thin	*áo-b/kha/gu* 'man'	
-kha	DU	shape/size; young animal, country,	*!hằū-b/kha/gu*	
		season, month	'thong, strap'	
-gu	PL			
-s	TN	precipitation	*Inánű-s* 'rain/cloud'	Feminine
	SG	natural female; small, short, wide,	*tárǎ-s/ra/di* 'woman'	
-ra	DU	roundish, thick shape/size; city	*!áḿ-s/ra/di* 'bead'	
-di	PL			
-i	TN	liquid, mass	*Ilgáḿ-i* 'water'	Neuter ~ Common
	SG	generic; unspecified or unknown	*xúu-i/n* 'thing'	
-ra	DU	natural sex	*khȍe-i/ra/n* 'person'	
-n	PL			

Abbreviations

Abbreviations follow the Leipzig glossing rules, except the following:

C	common
DIM	diminutive
POSSM	possessum
POSSR	possessor
PR	proximal
RCPR	reciprocal
RELV	current relevance
STAT	stative
TN	transnumeral

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