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Gender meets the Usage-Based Model: Four principles of rule interaction in gender assignment

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Abstract

Exploring four principles of gender assignment from the perspective of Langacker's [Langacker, 1991, Langacker, 1999] Usage-Based Model, the present article has important implications both for theories of the way gender is assigned and for the Usage-Based Model itself. The model simultaneously facilitates the implementation of principles of rule ordering and ''rule counting'' and thus provides a unified account of these approaches, which have generally been held to be antagonistic. However, in addition to discussing the implementation and interaction of principles proposed by other students of gender assignment, the present study also introduces the *Core Semantic Override Principle*. While in general the proposed analysis lends support to the Usage-Based Model, the discussion of the Core Semantic Override Principle motivates certain amendments.

Keywords: Gender assignment; Usage-Based Model; Cognitive linguistics

While the category of gender has been widely discussed among linguists in recent years, the relationship between theories of gender assignment and contemporary linguistic theories is an area that has received less attention in scholarly literature. In the present paper I relate the problem of rule interaction in gender assignment to the Usage-Based Model, a model proposed by Langacker (1991, 1999) within the broader

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framework of cognitive linguistics. The purpose of the present study is not to analyze new data or to provide full-fledged analyses of particular gender systems. Instead, I shall explore the implementation in the Usage-Based Model of four principles, viz. Gender Tally (Steinmetz, 1986, see also Doleschal, 2000), Elsewhere Condition (Kiparsky, 1982), default hierarchies (Steinmetz, 1986, this volume and Rice, this volume) and what I shall refer to as the ''Core Semantic Override Principle''. My contribution can be summarized as follows:

- Gender Tally falls out as an automatic consequence of the architecture of the Usage-Based Model.
- In the same way, ordering of rules by the Elsewhere Condition comes for free in the Usage-Based Model.
- The Usage-Based Model offers a unified account of ''rule counting'' and rule ordering since Gender Tally and the Elsewhere Condition derive from the same principle in the model.
- While it is technically possible to implement default hierarchies in the model, the approach is at variance with the model's strong emphasis on low-level schemas.
- Corbett and Fraser's (2000a) claim that semantic rules take precedence universally in gender assignment appears to be too strong. As an alternative, I advance the Core Semantic Override Principle.
- Since the Core Semantic Override Principle arguably does not follow from the architecture of the model, it is suggested that the model must be supplemented with substantial principles of rule ordering.

On a more general level, the application of the Usage-Based Model to the field of gender assignment seems fruitful both for the model and the field. The Usage-Based Model brings together principles that have hitherto been considered independent stipulations. This lends additional support to the principles as such, while at the same time providing support for the model. However, as a result of the application of the Usage-Based Model to gender assignment, the need for certain extensions of the model also become apparent.

After a brief introduction of the Usage-Based Model in Section 1, Section 2 discusses the relationship between the model and ''rule counting''. I then address formal principles of rule ordering in terms of the Elsewhere Condition (Section 3) and default hierarchies (Section 4). Section 5 explores substantial principles of rule ordering, in particular the Core Semantic Override Principle, before the contribution of the paper is summarized in Section 6.

1. Cognitive linguistics and the Usage-Based Model

Cognitive linguistics is a family of broadly compatible theoretical approaches that share the fundamental assumption that analyses of language should reflect research in other cognitive activities. Well-known versions of cognitive linguistics are found in the work on metaphor by George Lakoff and his associates (cf. e.g. Lakoff and Johnson, 1981, 1999). In the following, however, we shall be concerned with Ronald Langacker's version of cognitive linguistics, more specifically with what he calls the Usage-Based Model