

Denis Bertet — NCW2019, DDL, Lyon (France) — April 18, 2019

The discourse dynamics of agreement class assignment in Tikuna narratives (isolate, Western Amazonia)



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Thanks!

Tikuna friends and collaborators

Especially Javier Sánchez Gregorio (*picture*), Loida Ángel Ruiz, Darío Sánchez Gregorio, James Gregorio Sánchez, and Eulalia Ángel Ruiz!

Colleague researchers

Especially Thiago Chacon, Amalia Skilton, and Jean-Pierre Goulard!



Introduction

ngēmà
ANAPH.**NS**

téré
parrot(**F**)

ná = tá
3**NS**.SBJ=be.big

‘The parrot is big.’

*(typically a random parrot,
e.g. a wild one I am hunting)*

ngémà
ANAPH.**F**

téré
parrot(**F**)

ī = tá
3**F**.SBJ=be.big

‘The parrot is big.’

(unspecified)

yĩèmá
ANAPH.**S**

téré
parrot(**F**)

tá = tá
3**S**.SBJ=be.big

‘The parrot is big.’

*(typically a special parrot,
e.g. a pet or a character
in a story)*

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Discursive or 'dynamic' effects
of agreement class
(re)assignment

*(typically a random parrot,
e.g. a wild one I am hunting)*

(unspecified)

*(typically a special parrot,
e.g. a pet or a character
in a story)*

Semantic or 'local' effects
of agreement class
assignment

Introduction

Question

Most San Martín de Amacayacu Tikuna (SMAT) nouns can alternatively trigger agreement according to various agreement classes.

This flexibility is made use of with various *semantic* effects (e.g. specification of sex, affective connotations, etc.).

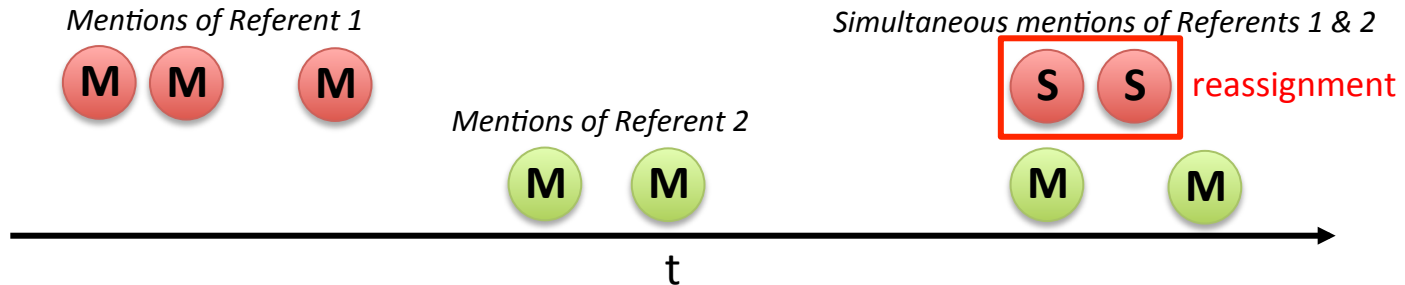
Is it also made use of for primarily *discursive* purposes, and how?

A lot of work, no strong results, work in progress...

Introduction

Main finding

In contexts where reference tracking is blurred (*e.g.* when two major referents have been initially assigned to the same agreement class based on lexical-semantic grounds), clarity can be restored through the *reassignment* of one of the referents to a distinct agreement class.



Agreement class reassignment in discourse for ease of reference tracking

Language and data

Morphosyntactic overview of the agreement classes

Overview of the semantic effects of agreement class assignment

Corpus and methodology for this study

Discourse functions of agreement class *reassignment*

Conclusion

Language and data

Tikuna: Amazonian language with most speakers (> 48 500 (Ethnologue) in Brazil, Colombia, and Peru)?

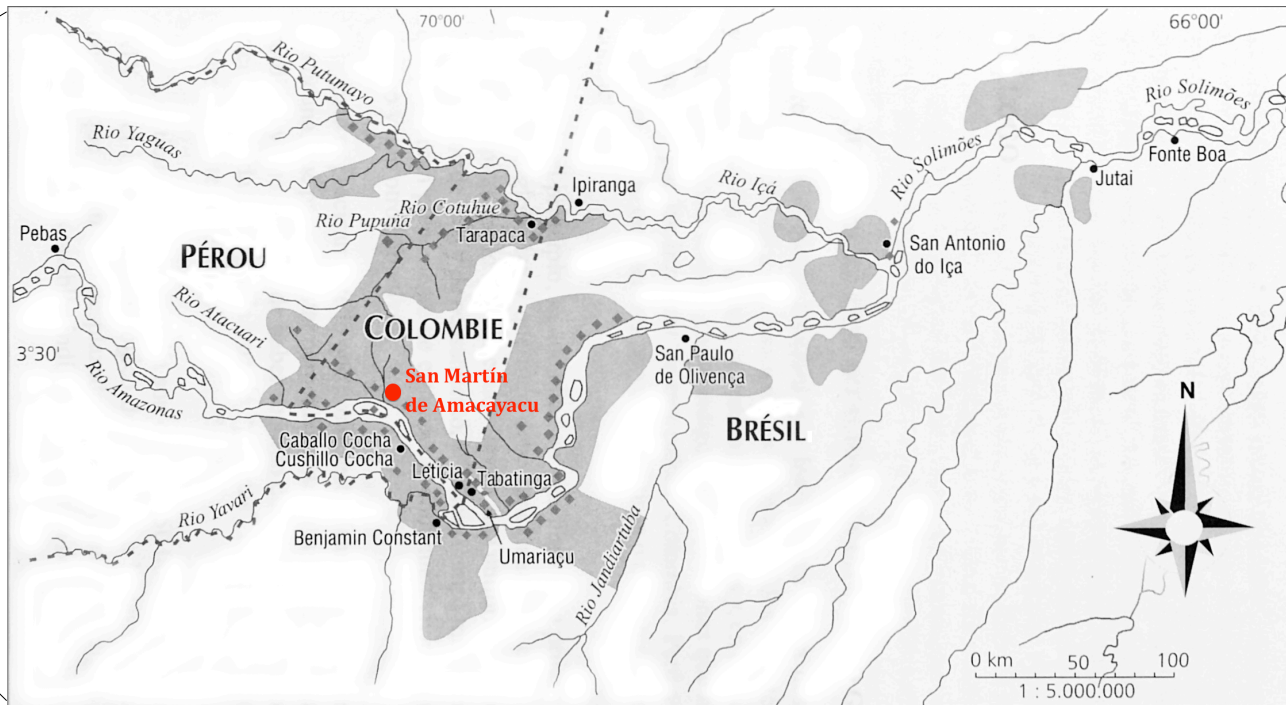
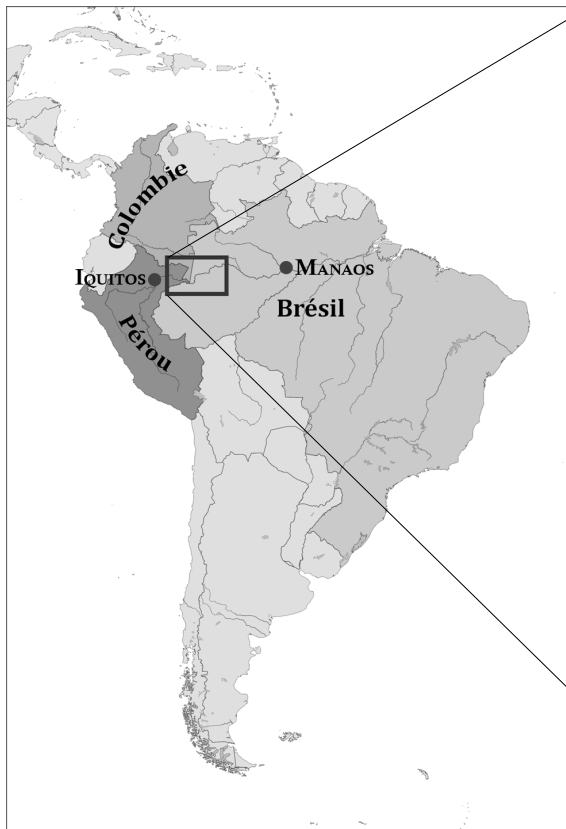
Relatively vital

Isolate (? , *cf.* Yuri-Tikuna-Caraballo hypothesis), little dialectal divergence

Heavily tonal

Fieldwork in San Martín de Amacayacu community (2015–2018, >6 months altogether) as part of PhD project

Ca. 35.000-word diversified corpus (>20 speakers) transcribed and translated with speakers



- Légende**
- villes
 - ▨ territoire tikuna
 - ◆ principaux établissements tikuna

Dessin : D. Kergosien 2007
Source : Acosta Muñoz 1999
In Goulard 2009

Morphosyntactic overview of the agreement classes

Morphological paradigms of morphemes inflecting for agreement class

	Deictics			LK		NMLZ	Pronominal forms (3 rd person)				Deictic verb (3SBJ)		Miscellaneous	
	PROX	MED	DIST	[-PST]	[+PST]		PRON	POSS	SBJ.IT1	SBJ.IT2	IT1	IT2	'other'	'who/what?'
S	<i>dá'è-</i>	<i>yí'è-</i>	<i>gû'è-</i>	<i>yà</i>	<i>gà</i>	<i>-'è</i>	<i>tû-/ (tûmă-)</i>	<i>(tûmă-)</i>	<i>tá=</i>	<i>tà=</i>	<i>ñã-tá-</i>	<i>ñã-tà(gù)-</i>	<i>tògû'è</i>	<i>tè'ě</i>
M	<i>dă-</i>	<i>yĩ-</i>	<i>gũ-</i>	<i>yá</i>	<i>gá</i>	<i>-kũ</i>	<i>nû-/nò-</i>	<i>nă-</i>	<i>ná=</i>	–	<i>ñâ-ná-</i>	<i>ñâ-Ø-</i>	<i>nài</i>	<i>tè'è</i>
N	<i>dâ-</i>	<i>yî-</i>	<i>gû-</i>	<i>yà</i>	<i>gà</i>	<i>-(^ũ)nè</i>	<i>nû-/nò-</i>	<i>ná-/nâ-</i>	<i>ná=</i>	–	<i>?ñâ-ná-?</i>	<i>?ñâ-Ø-?</i>	<i>nãi</i>	<i>???</i>
NS	<i>ñã-</i>	<i>ngē-</i>	<i>yě-</i>	<i>ì</i>	<i>gá</i>	<i>-'ũ</i>	<i>nû-/nò-</i>	<i>ná-/nâ-</i>	<i>ná=</i>	–	<i>ñâ-ná-</i>	<i>ñâ-Ø-</i>	<i>tò</i>	<i>ãkũ</i>
F	<i>ñá-</i>	<i>ngé-</i>	<i>yé-</i>	<i>í</i>	<i>gá</i>	<i>-kũ [-ʊ]</i>	<i>ngí-</i>	<i>ngí-/ngí-</i>	<i>ĩ=</i>	<i>– [-↓]</i>	<i>ngí(rũ)-</i>	<i>ngí- [-ʊ]?</i>	<i>nài</i>	<i>tè'è</i>

Paradigms slightly simplified for clarity. S=Salientive; M=Masculine; N=Neuter; NS=Non-Salientive; F=Feminine.

A good deal of inflectional morphology (not agglutinative with *e.g.* a single marker for a given agreement class across all categories) => ≠ from other Western Amazonian languages, more Indo-European-like

The five agreement classes behave rather homogeneously from a morphological standpoint (although heterogeneous functions)

Morphological paradigms of morphemes inflecting for agreement class

	Deictics			LK		NMLZ	Pronominal forms (3 rd person)				Deictic verb (3SBJ)		Miscellaneous	
	PROX	MED	DIST	[-PST]	[+PST]		PRON	POSS	SBJ.IT1	SBJ.IT2	IT1	IT2	'other'	'who/what?'
S	<i>dâ'è-</i>	<i>yí'è-</i>	<i>gû'è-</i>	<i>yà</i>	<i>gà</i>	<i>-'è</i>	<i>tû-/ (tûmǎ-)</i>	<i>(tûmǎ-)</i>	<i>tá=</i>	<i>tà=</i>	<i>ñǎ-tá-</i>	<i>ñǎ-tà(gù)-</i>	<i>tògû'è</i>	<i>tè'ě</i>
M	<i>dǎ-</i>	<i>yǐ-</i>	<i>gǔ-</i>	<i>yá</i>	<i>gá</i>	<i>-kū</i>	<i>nû-/nò-</i>	<i>nǎ-</i>	<i>ná=</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>ñâ-ná-</i>	<i>ñâ-∅-</i>	<i>nài</i>	<i>tè'è</i>
N	<i>dâ-</i>	<i>yí-</i>	<i>gû-</i>	<i>yà</i>	<i>gà</i>	<i>-(^ǎú)nè</i>	<i>nû-/nò-</i>	<i>ná-/nâ-</i>	<i>ná=</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>?ñâ-ná-?</i>	<i>?ñâ-∅-?</i>	<i>nǎi</i>	<i>???</i>
NS	<i>ñǎ-</i>	<i>ngē-</i>	<i>yě-</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>gá</i>	<i>-'ú</i>	<i>nû-/nò-</i>	<i>ná-/nâ-</i>	<i>ná=</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>ñâ-ná-</i>	<i>ñâ-∅-</i>	<i>tò</i>	<i>ǎkú</i>
F	<i>ñá-</i>	<i>ngé-</i>	<i>yé-</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>gá</i>	<i>-kū [-∪]</i>	<i>ngí-</i>	<i>ngí-/ngí-</i>	<i>ī=</i>	<i>- [-↓]</i>	<i>ngí(rū)-</i>	<i>ngí- [-∪]?</i>	<i>nài</i>	<i>tè'è</i>

Paradigms slightly simplified for clarity. S=Salientive; M=Masculine; N=Neuter; NS=Non-Salientive; F=Feminine.

(Near-)mergers => ambiguity for reference tracking

Example

(1)

<i>Nũ-mà</i>	<i>ì</i>	<i>ngē-mà</i>	<i>kǒwǔ = rǔ</i>	<i>tũ-mà-kà</i>	<i>ní = iūkù.</i>
PRON.M/N/ NS -ANAPH	LK. NS	MED. NS -ANAPH	deer(M)=TOP	PRON.S-ANAPH-to	3M/N/ NS .SBJ=go.in (ní= < ná= /_i)

‘The_{NS} deer_(M), as for it_{NS}, would go in_{NS} to see her_S.’

[FW_IGS_Cuentos_M303]

Example

(1)

<i>Nũ-mà</i>	<i>ì</i>	<i>ngē-mà</i>	<i>kǒwǔ = rǔ</i>	<i>tũ-mà-ka</i>	<i>ní = iūkù.</i>
PRON.M/N/ NS -ANAPH	LK. NS	MED. NS -ANAPH	deer(M)=TOP	PRON.S-ANAPH-to	3M/N/ NS .SBJ=go.in (ní= < ná= /_i)

‘The_{NS} deer_(M), as for it_{NS}, would go in_{NS} to see her_S.’

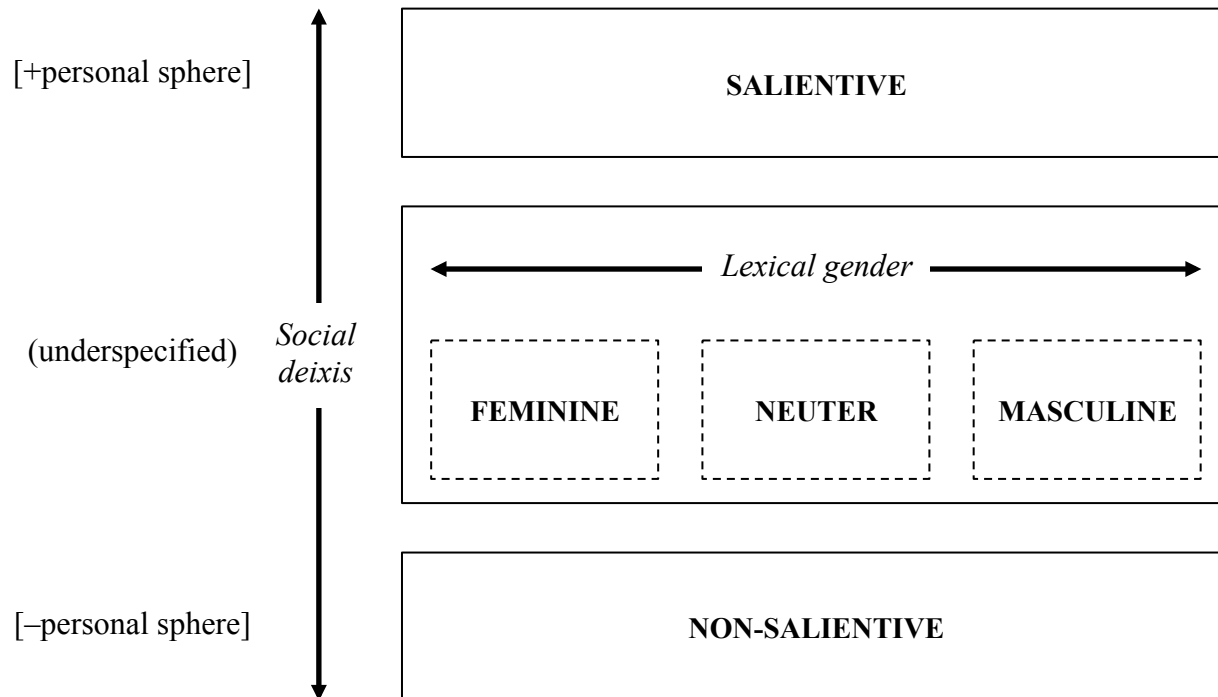
[FW_IGS_Cuentos_M303]

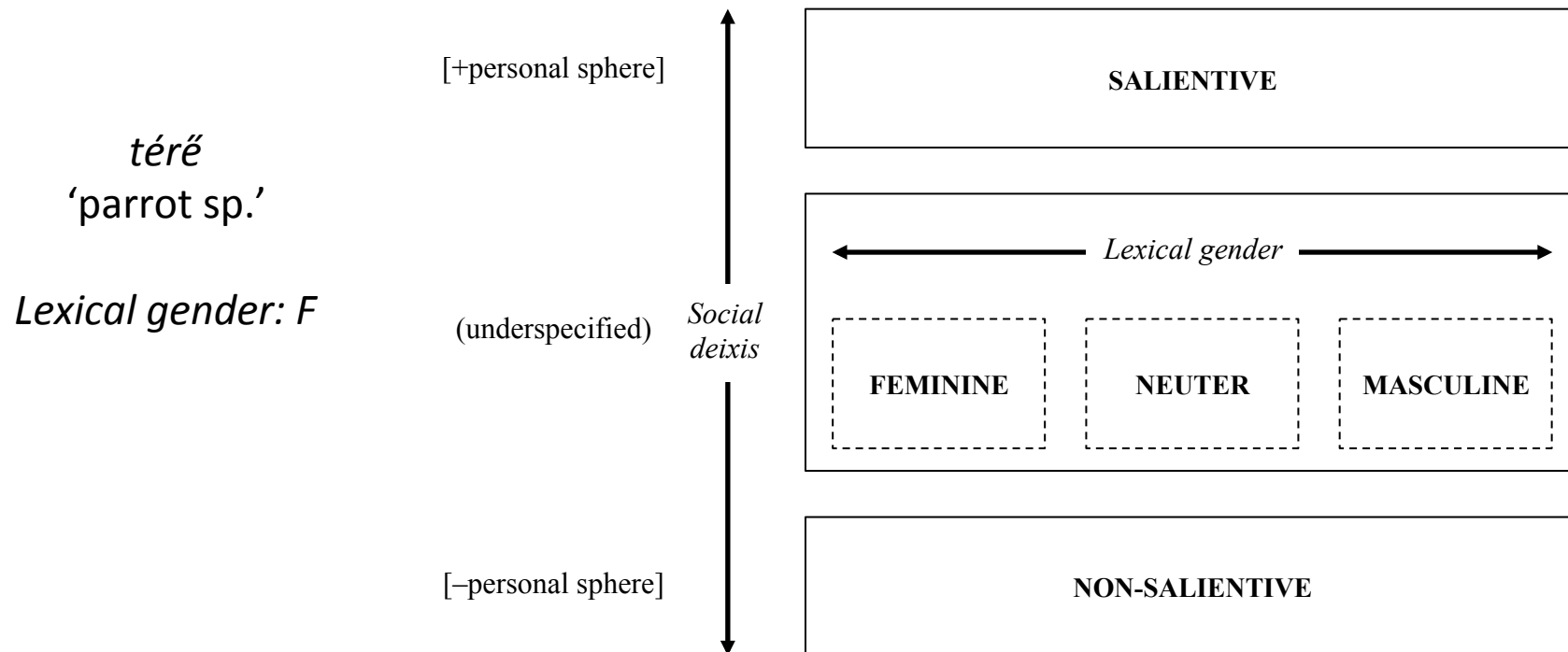
The agreement class of nouns is covert

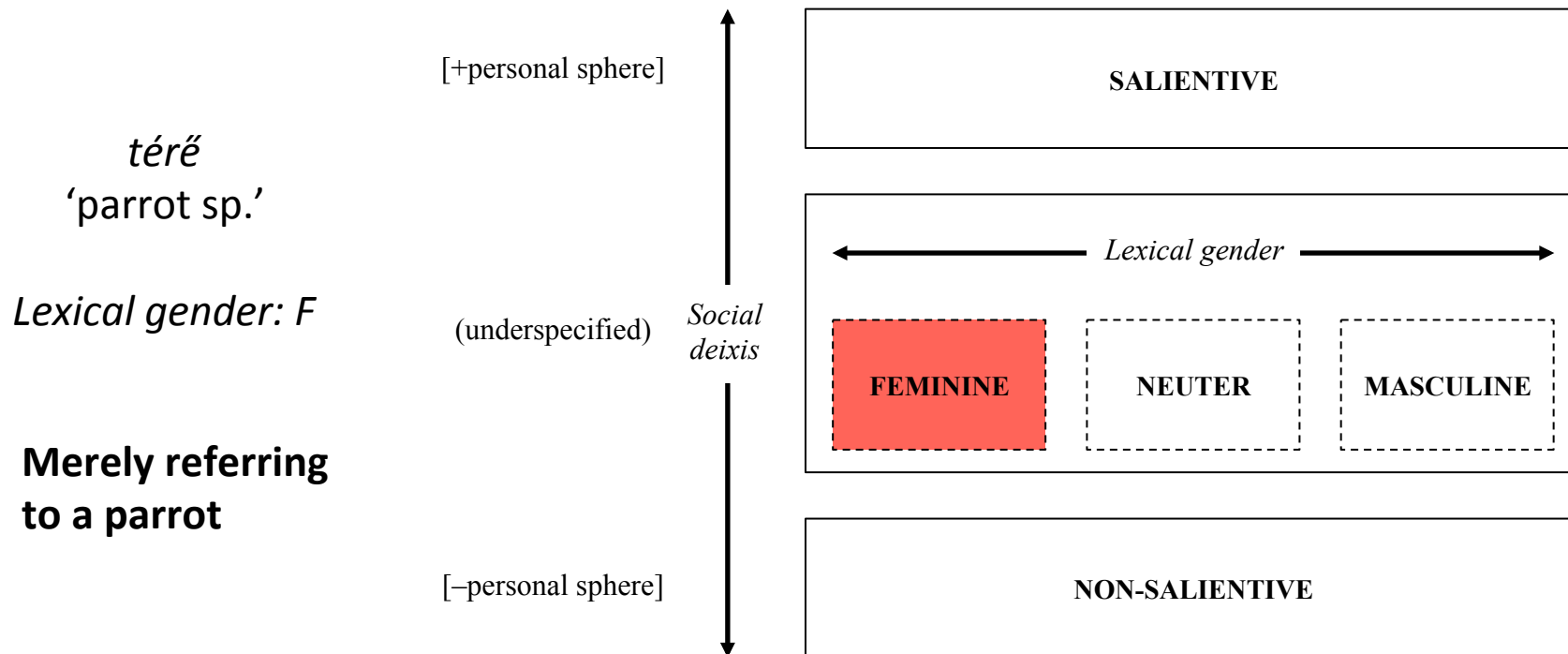
Once a given agreement class is assigned (not necessarily the lexical one), agreement is rigid throughout the clause, otherwise agrammatical

Agreement marking is obligatory and pervasive => again, rather Indo-European-like

Overview of the semantic effects of agreement class assignment







téré
'parrot sp.'

Lexical gender: F

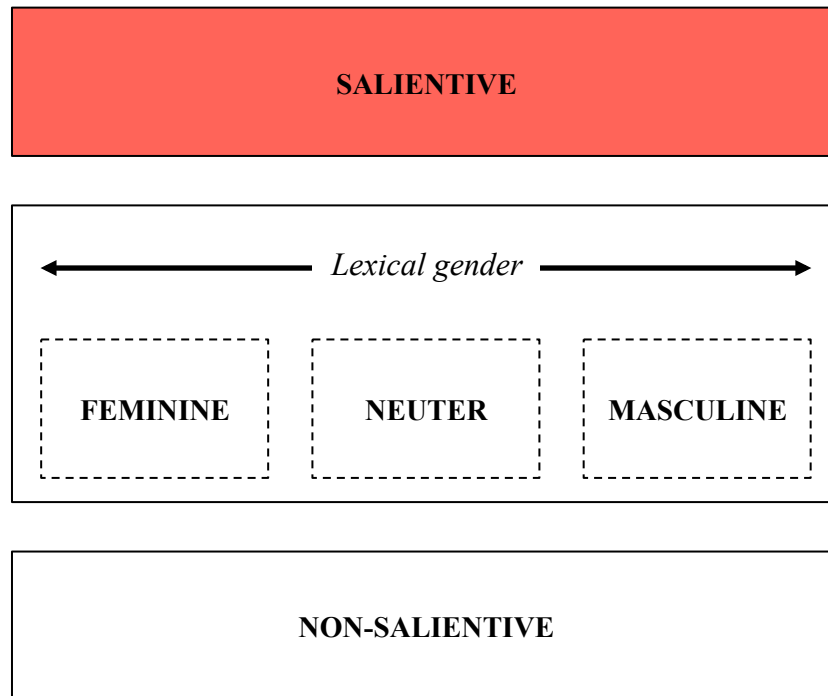
**Referring to a
special parrot, e.g.
a pet or a mythical
parrot**

[+personal sphere]

(underspecified)

[-personal sphere]

*Social
deixis*



téré
'parrot sp.'

Lexical gender: F

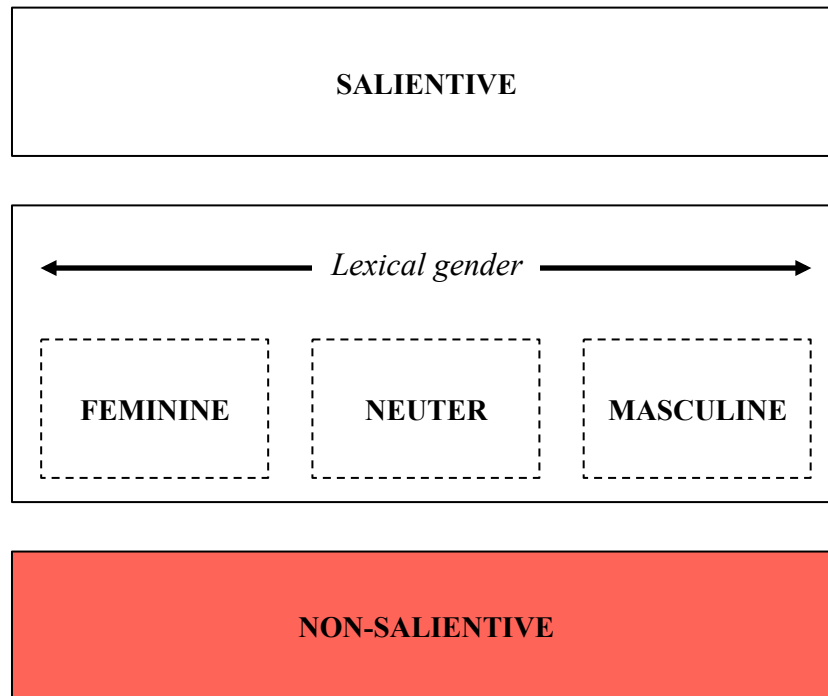
**Referring to a
random parrot, e.g.
a wild one in the
jungle**

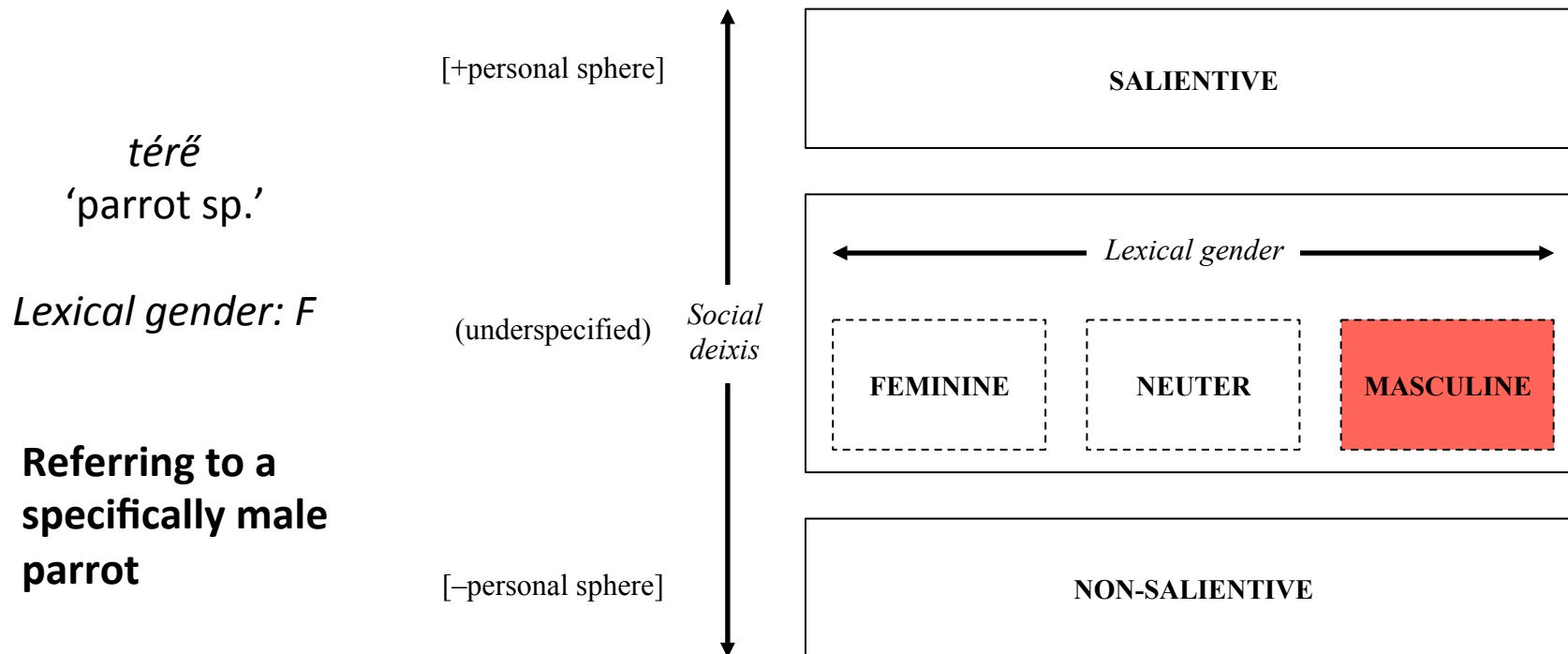
[+personal sphere]

(underspecified)

[-personal sphere]

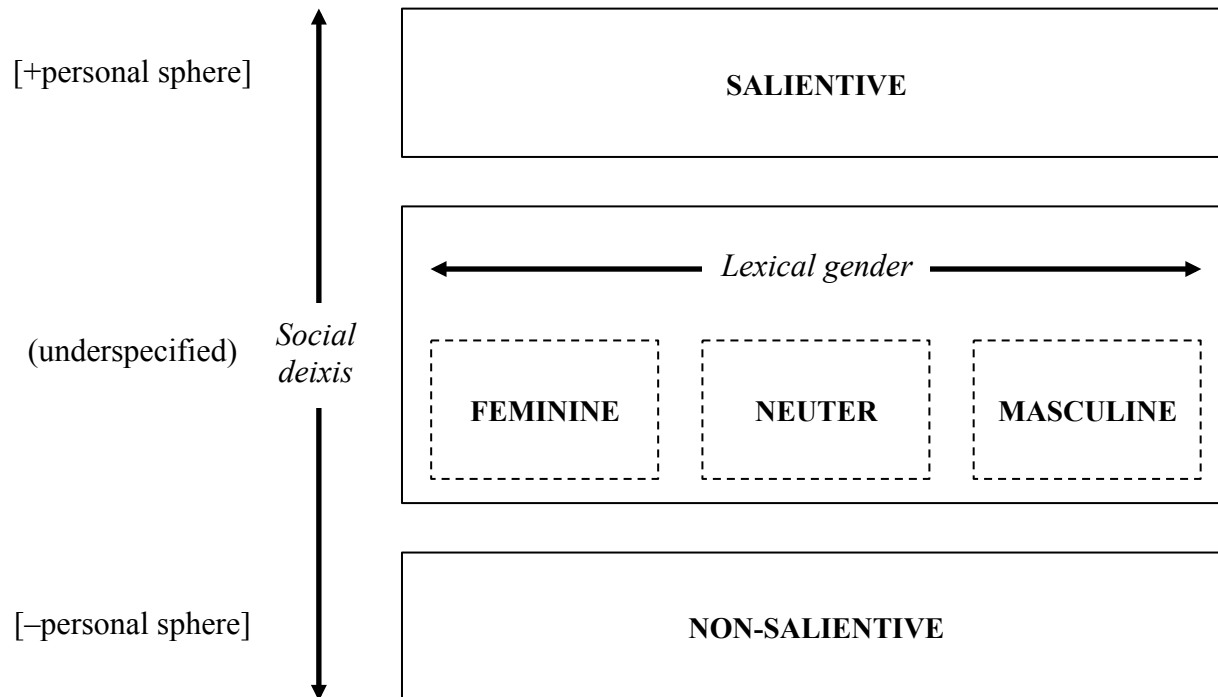
*Social
deixis*





témā
'morange palm tree/fruit'

Lexical gender: M



témā
'morange palm tree/fruit'

Lexical gender: M

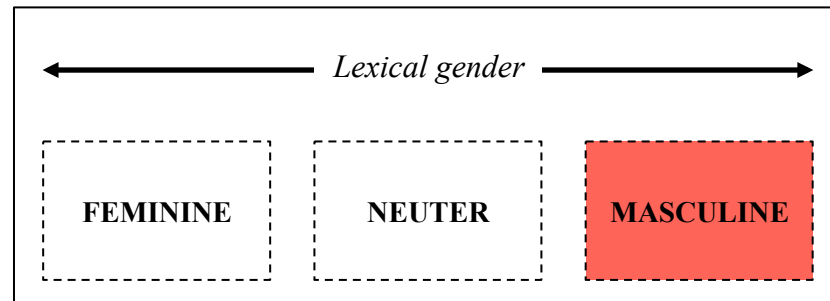
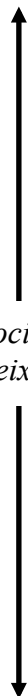
**Merely referring
to a moriche palm**

[+personal sphere]

(underspecified)

[-personal sphere]

*Social
deixis*



témā
'morange palm tree/fruit'

Lexical gender: M

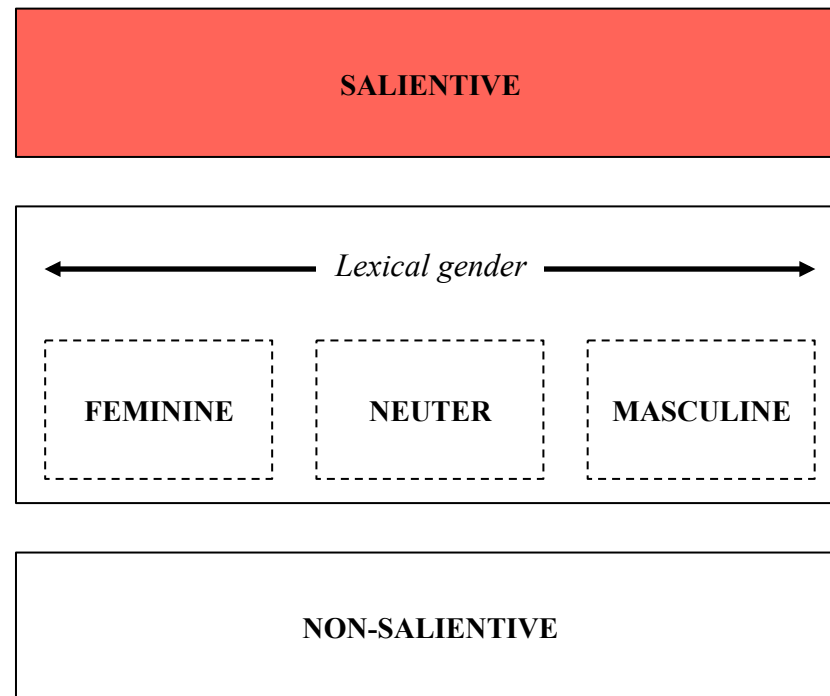
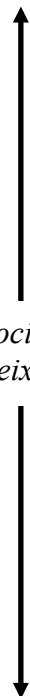
Referring to a
special moriche
palm, e.g. one I
planted or a
mythical one

[+personal sphere]

(underspecified)

[-personal sphere]

*Social
deixis*



témā
'morange palm tree/fruit'

Lexical gender: M

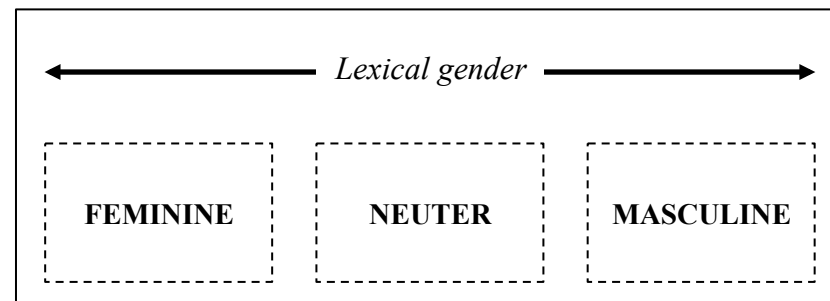
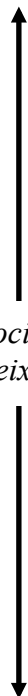
**Referring to a
random moriche
palm, e.g. one far
away in the jungle**

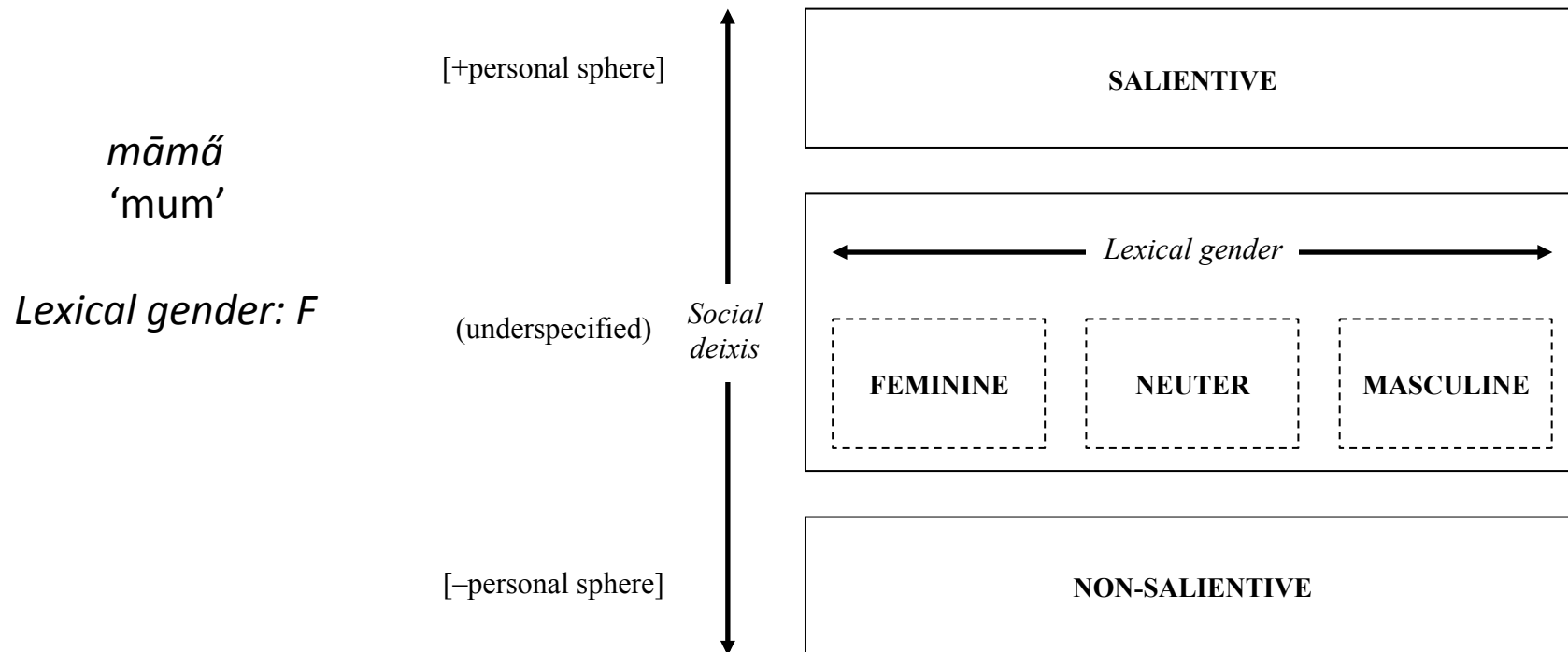
[+personal sphere]

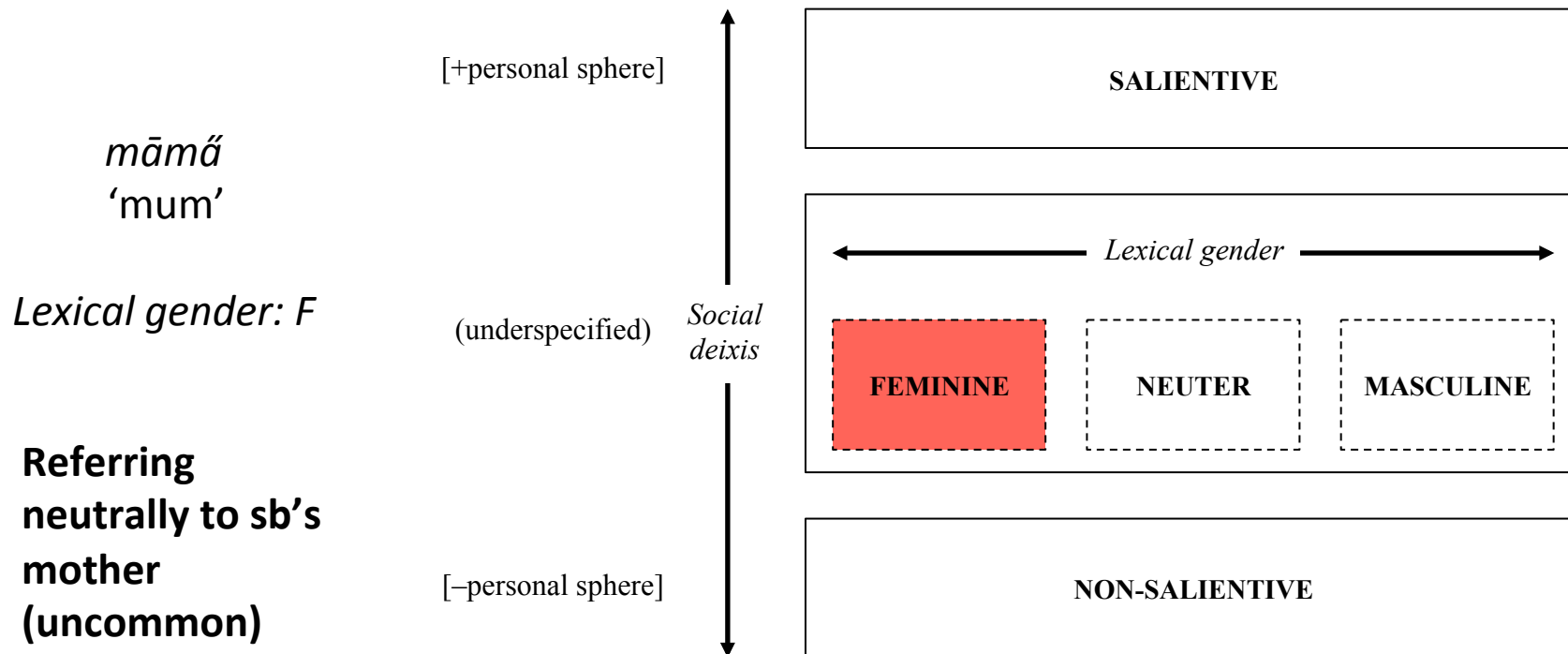
(underspecified)

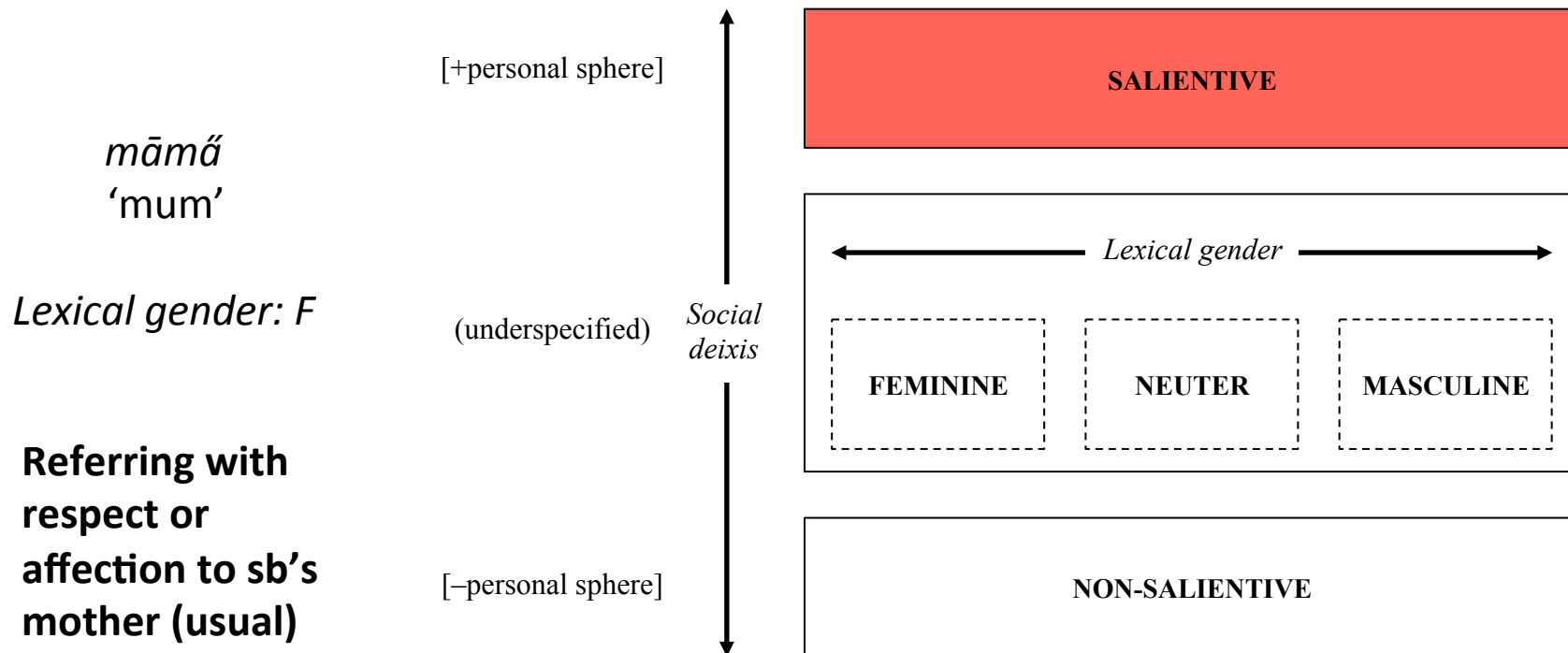
[-personal sphere]

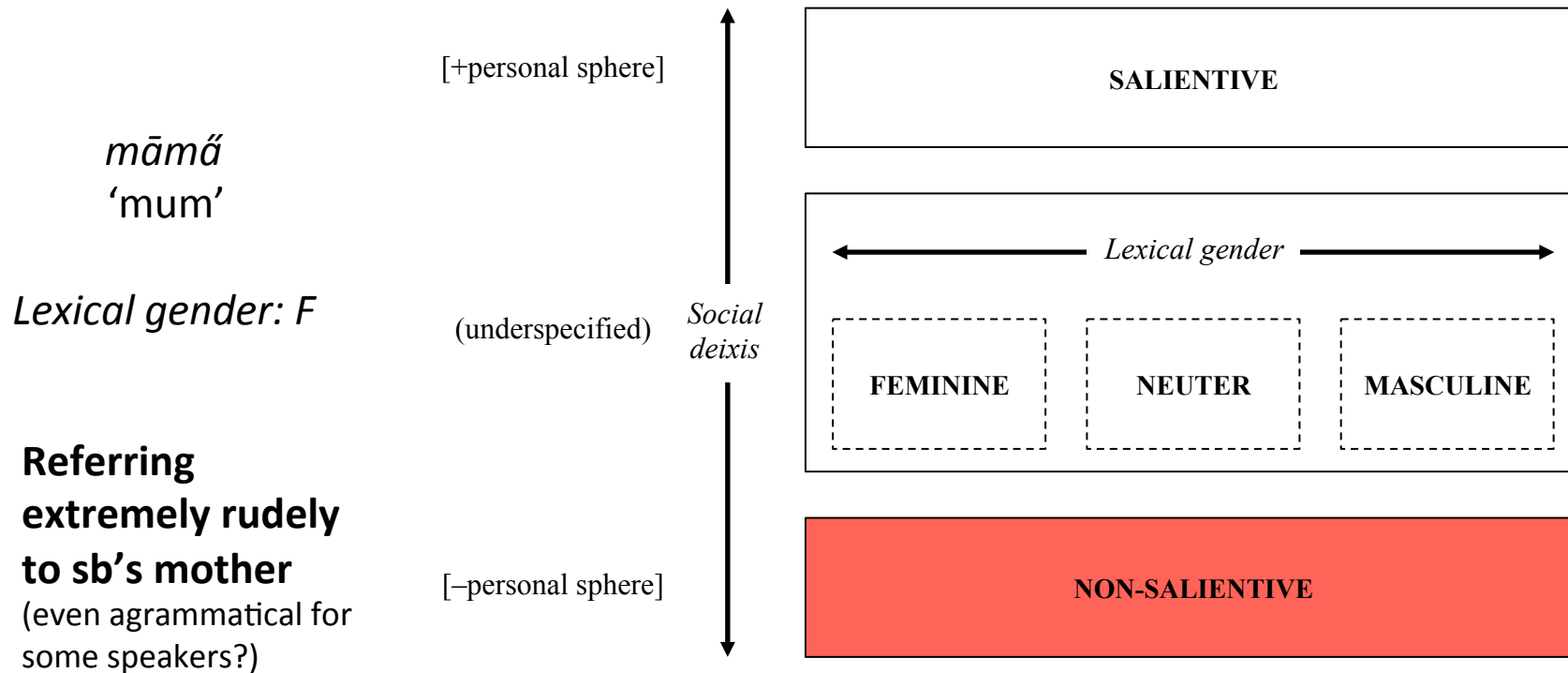
*Social
deixis*





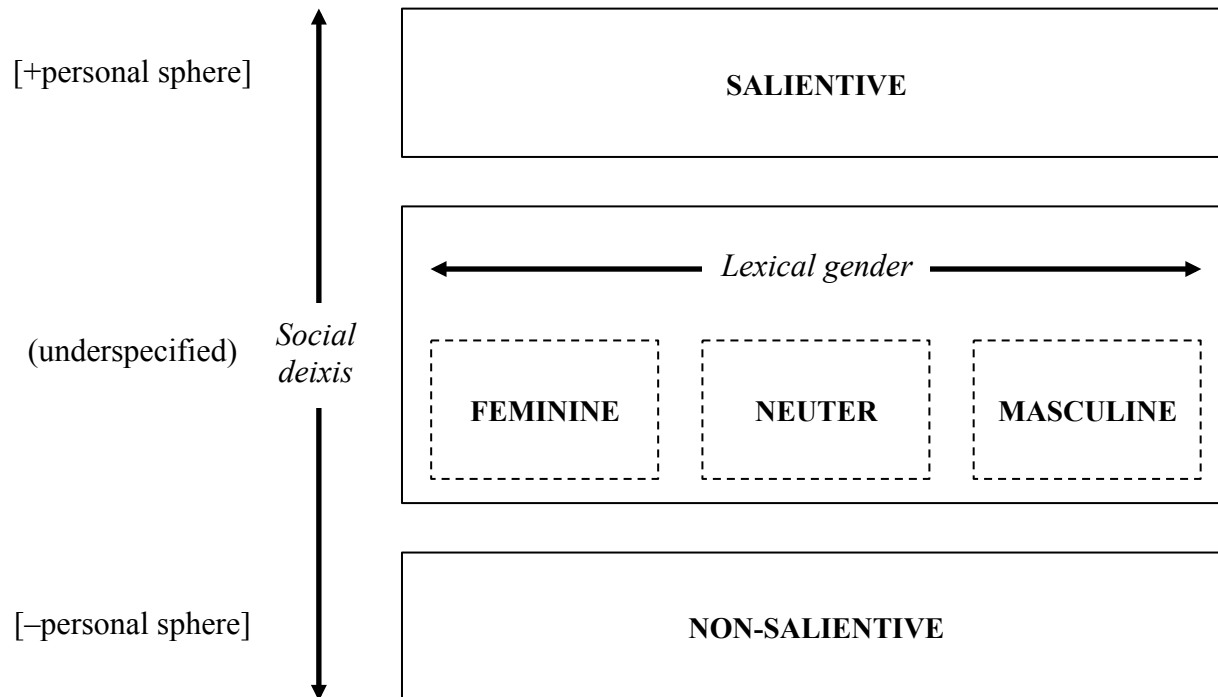






chǐ'nǚ
'pineapple fruit/plant'

Lexical gender: none



chǐ'nǚ
'pineapple fruit/plant'

Lexical gender: none

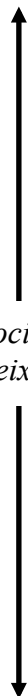
**Referring
neutrally to a
pineapple
fruit/plant**

[+personal sphere]

(underspecified)

[-personal sphere]

*Social
deixis*



SALIENTIVE

Lexical gender

FEMININE

NEUTER

MASCULINE

NON-SALIENTIVE

chǐ'nǚ
'pineapple fruit/plant'

Lexical gender: none

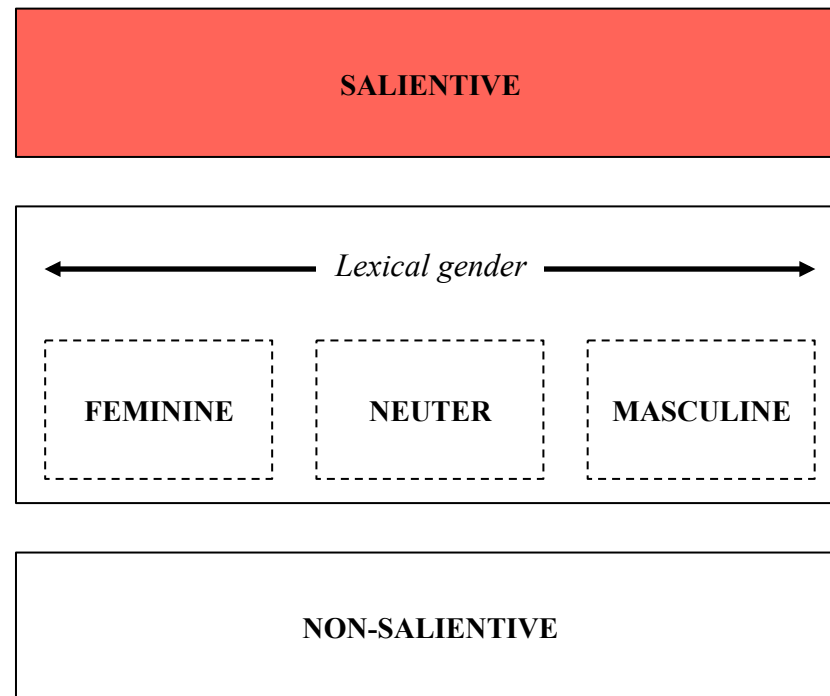
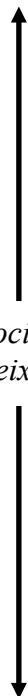
Referring to a very
special pineapple
fruit/plant, e.g.
one I planted with
love

[+personal sphere]

(underspecified)

[-personal sphere]

*Social
deixis*



Semantic effects of agreement class assignment

- **Along social-deixis axis (vertical)**

Insertion in vs exclusion from the deictic center's personal sphere

(in terms of: affection, respect, care, shared culture, ownership, etc. or the opposite)

No social-deixis effect if agreement according to noun's lexical gender

- **Along lexical gender axis (horizontal)**

Sex specification in very specific cases if non-lexical gender

Non-lexical gender is rare

Corpus and methodology for this study

1. Systematic encoding of agreement class of each occurrence of each referent (and other parameters, such as whether occurrence is in direct speech or not) across whole texts
2. Qualitative examination of all cases of agreement class reassignments to uncover possible patterns

Corpus

Exclusively narratives (5 out of 6 come from traditional repertoire, 1 is staged)

3 texts by LAR (♀, 49y/o)	18'45"
3 texts by JSG (♂, 33y/o)	24'15"
TOTAL	43'00"

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
M	PETA-PETA			PERSONA (=Peta-Peta)		ANCESTROS		PERSONA (≠Peta-Peta)		COXA (=hacha)		HACHA (pētā-pētā/yūēmà)		GENTE (=persona 2 entre otros)
17			NS	DiscDirect										
18			NS	DiscDirect										
19							NS/M/N							
20			(NS/M/N?)	DiscDirect						NS	DiscDirect			
21			NS/M/N	DiscDirect			NS/M/N			NS	DiscDirect			
22							NS/M/N							
23							NS/M/N							
24							NS/M/N							
25							NS/M/N							
26							NS/M/N							
27														
28							NS/M/N							
29														
30			(NS/M/N?)											
31			(NS/M/N?)				NS/M/N							
32							NS/M/N							
33			NS											
34			NS/M/N				M	from Peta-Peta's perspective						
35							M	from Peta-Peta's perspective						
36							M	from Peta-Peta's perspective						
37			NS/M/N				S	perspective? (narrator/Peta-Peta?)						
38			NS/M/N				S	perspective? (narrator/Peta-Peta?)						
39			NS/M/N				S	perspective? (narrator/Peta-Peta?)						
40			NS/M/N											
41			NS/M/N				NS	DiscDirect, from Peta-Peta's perspective						
42			NS/M/N				NS	DiscDirect, from Peta-Peta's perspective						
43			NS/M/N				M	DiscDirect, from Peta-Peta's perspective						
44			NS/M/N				?							
45			NS/M/N				M	DiscDirect, from Peta-Peta's perspective						
46			NS/M/N				(NS/M/N?)							
47			NS/M/N				M	DiscDirect, from Peta-Peta's perspective						
48			NS/M/N				M	DiscDirect, from Peta-Peta's perspective						
49			NS/M/N				S							
50			NS/M/N				S							
51			NS/M/N				M	DiscDirect, from Peta-Peta's perspective						
52														
53							S							
54							S							
55														
56			NS/M/N											
57														

Discourse functions of agreement class *reassignment*

Although hard to quantify accurately, agreement class reassignment is not rare: at least 8 unambiguous cases in this corpus

Unsurprisingly, all cases of reassignment involve a shift along the social-deixis (vertical) axis (not the lexical gender axis)

Among those 8 unambiguous cases, the patterns are:

M > S	4 cases
NS > S	2 cases
NS > M	2 cases

3 of these cases can probably be accounted for as the effect of a “semantic” shift:

- **NS > S [HuntingStory]:** a hunter spots a wild capybara (**wild live animal: NS**), then shoots it and puts it into his bag to take it back home (**owned meat: S**).
- **NS > M [Peta-Peta, direct speech]:** a man reviews a weird feathered thing lying on the path and wonders what it is (**unidentified entity: NS**), and then gradually realizes it is actually a man covered with feathers (**identified man: M**).
- **NS > M [Hunter & Jaguar]:** a hunter spots some wild monkeys (**wild live animal: NS**), then watches them for a long time (**no longer random entities: NS > M?**) waiting for the right moment to shoot them.

But interestingly, the remaining 5 cases of reassignment seem to have **no semantic basis and display a recurring narrative and morphosyntactic pattern:**

- 1) A first referent is introduced with agreement class NS or M (whose paradigms exhibit several mergers); it remains the deictic center for some time
- 2) A second referent is introduced also with agreement class NS or M; it remains the new deictic center for some time
- 3) The two referents start to interfere and are thus now both simultaneously highly salient; their agreement classes do not allow unambiguous reference tracking; the more S-compatible of the two referents is permanently reassigned to S (whose paradigms are unique); unambiguous reference tracking is restored

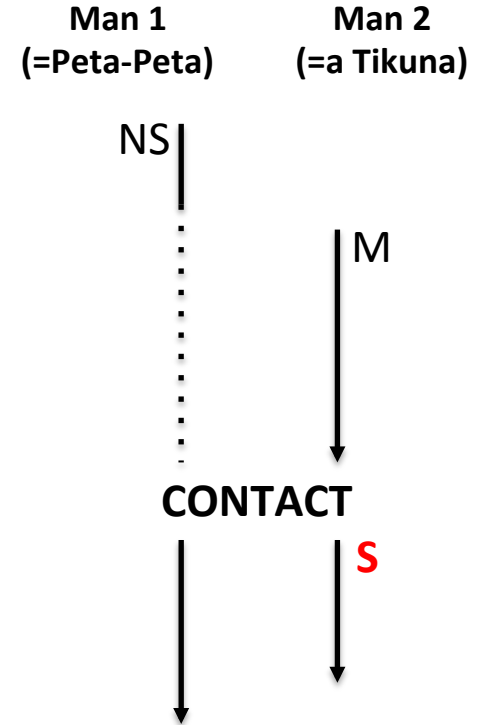
Example 1

1–8 Peta-Peta was a man who made blow noises in the forest

9–32 A Tikuna man went to see what the noise was, saw that it was a man felling trees with the help of an interesting object, and devised a plan to steal that object from the man, covering his body with feathers and lying on the man's way to startle him

33–60 The man (Peta-Peta) arrived, was surprised at that feathered thing, and reviewed it from all sides, until the Tikuna man suddenly farted to startle the man (Peta-Peta) and ran away with the object

61–78 The man (Peta-Peta) ordered the Tikunas to make open fields, since they had stolen his axe, and the Tikuna started to do open field agriculture



*Crucially, Peta-Peta is not a supernatural being and remains a stranger to the Tikunas
=> less S-compatible than the Tikuna man*

Example 2

In Iya-Iya's story, by contrast, it is a Tikuna boy (**assigned M**) who comes to interfere with the stranger Iya-Iya (**assigned NS**). It is then Iya-Iya (not the Tikuna boy) who is **reassigned to S**.

Crucially, Iya-Iya is a supernatural being who ends up living among the Tikunas for some time => more S-compatible than the young boy (ordinary young people are usually not assigned S)

Most likely no semantic effect of these cases of reassignment, only discursive function of restoring unambiguous reference tracking

Interestingly, agreement class reassignments may apparently occur on any kind of morpheme, *i.e.* it is not the case that there are morpheme types that are more apt than others to be the locus of the first occurrence of a new assignment

Conclusion

The flexibility of the SMAT agreement class system allows for its use as a strategy to resolve reference tracking ambiguity caused by widespread morphological mergers between agreement classes NS and M

Reassignment to S, an agreement class originally related to high social and cultural salience, is made use of as a mere strategy to “extract” a referent from ambiguous reference tracking

Much more extensive corpus-based work is needed to confirm or disprove this analysis of one of the functions of the flexibility of the SMAT agreement class system, but I’m relatively confident that these non-semantic reassignment strategies are not an artefact from my corpus