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Definiteness, Gender, and Hybrids: Evidence from Norwegian Dialects

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In some Norwegian dialects, such as older Oslo dialect, the noun *mamma* 'mother' unexpectedly appears to be masculine. The Nordreisa dialect (Northern Norwegian) goes one step further. The word looks like it is masculine, but only in the definite form. This is an unusual "split" because gender mixture is normally based on number, not definiteness (but we find some few corroborative examples in other Norwegian dialects and different, but converging evidence on the Web). The Nordreisa example of *mamma* is unusual also because agreement targets are affected differently. The preference is for masculine agreement within the noun phrase, but for feminine agreement outside it. This is, therefore, an intriguing example since it combines a split based on definiteness with different gender requirements according to different agreement targets. On careful analysis, and given strict adherence to the classical, agreement-based definition of gender, the unusual behavior of *mamma* turns out to conform to the Agreement Hierarchy.*

1. Introduction.

In the last twenty years, there has been extensive research on gender, and Bloomfield's (1933:280) position that "[t]here seems to be no practical criterion by which the gender of a noun in German, French or Latin could be determined" is no longer unanimously accepted (if it ever was;

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see, for example, Corbett 1991:7–69, Köpcke & Zubin 1996, Trosterud 2001, Nesset 2006, Thornton 2009.)

A particularly clear generalization that has emerged in this recent research is that nouns high on the Animacy Hierarchy have their gender assigned semantically (Corbett 1991, Dahl 1999, Nesset 2006). Thus, it is no surprise, against the background of a familiar Germanic three-gender system—that is, masculine/feminine/neuter—that German *Vater* 'father' is masculine, and *Mutter* 'mother' is feminine. There is no noun more typically feminine and animate than that denoting a mother; nor is there any noun more typically masculine and animate than that denoting a father.

1.1. Initial Norwegian Data.

As with German, one is not surprised to learn that in the Sunnhordland dialect of Norwegian, the nouns *mamma* 'mum, mother' in 1 and *pappa* 'dad' in 3 are feminine and masculine, respectively. Genders are "classes of nouns, reflected in the behavior of associated words" (Hockett 1958: 231, Corbett 1991), and in this traditional three-gender dialect of the well-known Germanic type, there is ample evidence from associated words (namely their agreement) showing the gender of these nouns. Examples 1–3 are from the Sunnhordland dialect of Norwegian.[1] Figure 1 shows the locations for this and other dialects in Norway.

(1) a. /ei mama/
INDF.SG.F mum
'a mum'

b. /mam-o mi:/
mum-DEF.SG.{F} my.SG.F
'my mum'[2]

[1] Norwegian examples are given either orthographically (in which case they are italicized), or in a broad phonemic transcription with some IPA signs. The glossing conforms to the Leipzig Glossing Rules, with some minor deviations.

[2] As discussed below, the indication in {} gives the gender which the morphological form is more commonly associated with.

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c. /mam-o di:, hu e kje li:t-o/
mum-DEF.SG.{F} your.SG.F 3SG.F is not small-SG.F
'Your mum, she is not small.'

(2) a. /ei da:ma/
INDF.SG.F woman
'a woman'
b. /da:mo di:/
woman.DEF.SG.{F} your.SG.F
'your woman'

(3) a. /ein pa:pe/
INDF.SG.M dad
'a dad'

b. /pa:p-en di:-n/
dad-DEF.SG.{M} your-SG.M
'your dad'

c. /pa:p-en di:-n, han e kje li:t-en/
dad-DEF.SG.{M} your-SG.M 3SG.M is not small-SG.M
'Your dad, he is not small.'

Like most other Norwegian dialects, this is a three-gender dialect, with masculine, feminine, and neuter. However, in Norwegian, the masculine and feminine have a lot in common and differ from the neuter. The majority of adjectives do not have separate masculine and feminine forms. The adjective *liten* 'small', used for illustra-tion in 1c and 3c above, stands out in this respect. In some dialects, there are many adjectives like *liten*; in some, *liten* may be the only one distinguishing masculine and feminine, while in others, no adjective distinguishes the two. As we show below, the three-gender system may, in at least some varieties, be moving toward a two-gender system where the masculine and feminine have merged, as in written Danish and Swedish (see, for example, Braunmüller 1999).

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Figure 1. Distribution of Norwegian dialects.

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Nouns usually inflect for definiteness and number, so that the standard noun paradigm contains four cells (indefinite singular, definite singular, indefinite plural, definite plural). As is typically the case with grammatical features, morphological marking of definiteness does not fully match definiteness as defined for purposes of information structure.[3]

For simplicity, we leave out the plural in most of this paper. The reason is that in the plural, the gender opposition is neutralized in Norwegian (essentially in the same way as it is in German), and so the plural is irrelevant for present purposes. In the singular, there is an intriguing relation between declension and gender. Some other typical paradigms from Sunnhordland may be helpful for comparison (see 4–6).

(4) Masculine
  a. Indefinite
     /ein bi:l/
     INDF.SG.M car
     'a car'

  b. Definite
     /bi:l-en di:-n/
     car-DEF.SG.{M} your-SG.M
     'your car'

(5) Feminine
  a. Indefinite
     /ei reim/
     INDF.SG.F belt
     'a belt'

  b. Definite
     /reim-o di:/
     belt-DEF.SG.{F} your.SG.F
     'your belt'

[3] For instance, in the phrase *min bil* 'my.M car', the noun *bil* is morphologically indefinite, though the phrase as a whole is definite.

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(6) Neuter

a. Indefinite

/eit hʉ:s/
INDF.SG.N house
'a house'

b. Definite

/hʉs-e di-t/
house-DEF.SG.{N} your-SG.N
'your house'

The glossing in 1–6 needs a comment, as it involves a vexed analytical issue, namely, should the suffix in the definite singular (for example, /o/ in /mamo/) also be taken as an exponent of gender? Strictly speaking, it is not an exponent of gender, since it is not found on associated words but only on the noun itself. At the same time, the suffix does, in this dialect as in many other varieties of Scandinavian, correlate 100% with gender, so it is perhaps unsurprising that different opinions have been voiced in the literature. In the Norwegian reference grammar, Faarlund et al. (1997) treat the suffix as an exponent of gender, without much discussion. Wurzel (1986) claims that, in general, exponents on the word itself should count. Dahl (1999) argues that one should simply rephrase Hockett's (1958) definition as reflected in the behavior of associated morphemes.

In this paper, we show that the stricter definition based on evidence from associated words is preferable (see Hockett 1958). It allows us to account for the surprising Norwegian data, and it also allows for a clearer view of the syntax-morphology interface, according to which inflectional exponence is a matter of morphology, while gender agreement is a matter of syntax.

We, therefore, indicate the values of the morphosyntactic features gender and number in our glosses. That is, we do not give /o/ in /mam-o/ the same status as that of the marking on associated words. Similarly, since the degree of coincidence of the definiteness forms with gender in particular dialects is of considerable relevance here, we note the expected gender in { }. That is, we note in the gloss that *-o* usually occurs with feminine nouns, *-en* with masculine nouns, and *-e* with neuter nouns. We give the same information for the other dialects discussed.

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The Sunnhordland example is as expected, then. The noun *mamma* is feminine, by all accounts, just as *pappa* is masculine. Furthermore, as a rule, most nouns have the same gender in different Norwegian dialects (although occasional exceptions can be found; see, for example, Beito 1954). To the best of our knowledge, the noun meaning 'dad, father', in most dialects *pappa,* is never anything but masculine.

1.2. Outline.
The structure of the rest of this paper is as follows. In section 2, we look at a surprising example from the Oslo dialect, in which the gender of the noun *mamma* 'mother, mum' is not as expected; *mamma* triggers masculine agreement within the noun phrase. We then show that once the Agreement Hierarchy has been introduced, *mamma* in the Oslo dialect behaves as we expect from a HYBRID noun, as illustrated through a comparison with Dutch *meisje* 'girl'. Section 3 is devoted to an even more intriguing example involving *mamma*, this time in the Nordreisa dialect, where this noun triggers masculine agreement within the noun phrase only in the definite (not in the indefinite). The unusual properties here are brought out by comparing the Nordreisa noun with two nouns from Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. Section 4 presents other examples from Norwegian dialects of this unusual phenomenon, namely, gender mixture based on (in)definiteness. The examples are few and admittedly peripheral, but they show that *mamma* in Nordreisa is not an entirely isolated case. In section 5, we present a comparison with nouns inflected for definiteness in Bulgarian. We argue that the facts surveyed conform to the Agreement Hierarchy, and that the definition of gender based on associated words is to be preferred over the definition based on associated morphemes. We suggest a tentative account of why gender mixture is linked to definiteness, involving both (morphological) form and (semantic/pragmatic) meaning. Section 6 contains our conclusions.

2. The Oslo Dialect and the Relevance of the Agreement Hierarchy.

2.1. What We Learn from the Oslo Dialect.
In light of what we have seen in the Sunnhordland dialect, the noun *mamma* 'mum, mother' in a conservative version of the dialect of Oslo

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(East Norwegian) may come as a surprise.[4] Consider now the agreement patterns in 7, from the Oslo dialect of Norwegian.

(7) a. /e:n mama/
INDF.SG.M mum
'a mum'

b. /mama-en mi:-n/
mum-DEF.SG.{M} my-SG.M
'my mum'

In this dialect, the noun *mamma* is apparently masculine. It does, at least, take a masculine determiner (aka article) and a masculine possessive. Consider now the predictably feminine nouns *jente* 'girl' in 8a,b and *dame* 'lady, girlfriend' in 8b,c.

(8) a. /ei jente/
INDF.SG.F girl
'a girl'

b. /jent-a mi:/
girl-DEF.SG.{F} my.SG.F
'my girl'

c. /ei da:me/
INDF.SG.F lady
'a lady'

d. /da:m-a mi:/
lady-DEF.SG.{F} my.SG.F
'my lady'

We are now in a position to compare *mamma* with such masculine nouns as *gutt* 'boy' in 9a,b and *mann* 'man, husband' in 9c,d.

[4] In less conservative varieties, the feminine is disappearing; see, for example, Opsahl 2009, Lødrup 2011b, and section 1.1 above.

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(9) a. /e:n gʉt/
INDF.SG.M boy
'a boy'

b. /gʉt-en mi:-n/
boy-DEF.SG.{M} my-SG.M
'my boy'

c. /e:n man/
INDF.SG.M man
'a man, husband'

d. /man-en mi:-n/
man-DEF.SG.{M} my-SG.M
'my husband'

Thus, in Oslo *mamma* seems to thwart our expectations—its gender is not explicable on the basis of the semantics. This fact has been given ample attention in the literature on Norwegian gender (see, for instance, Trosterud 2001, Enger 2002, Rice 2006). In this respect, this noun is reminiscent of German *Mädchen* 'girl', also a favorite example for those who question the connection between semantics and gender.

Note that *mamma* in the Oslo dialect does not trigger masculine on all agreeing elements. It is not masculine for all the positions in the Agreement Hierarchy (Corbett 1979, 1991, 2006). Although it does take a masculine determiner (*en* and not the feminine *ei*), the associated personal pronoun can never be masculine; it has to be feminine. Consider 10, where *mamma* in 10a is compared with *gutt* 'boy', *mann* 'man, husband', *jente* 'girl', and *dame* 'lady, girlfriend'.

(10) a. /den mama-en .... hʉ:/
that (M+F) mum-DEF.SG.{M} 3SG.F
'that mum … she'[5]

[5] The + sign does not belong to the Leipzig Glossing Rules, but it is useful for those occasions in which the masculine and feminine share one form, different from that of the neuter.

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b. /den gʉt-en … han/
that (M+F) boy-DEF.SG.{M} 3SG.M
'that boy … he'

c. /den man-en … han/
that (M+F) man-DEF.SG.{M} 3SG.M
'that man … he'

d. /den jent-a … hʉ:/
that (M+F) girl-DEF.SG.{F} 3SG.F
'that girl … she'

e. /den da:m-a … hʉ:/
that (M+F) lady-DEF.SG.{F} 3SG.F
'that lady … she'

While the agreeing elements in 10b,c are all masculine and the agreeing elements in 10d,e are all feminine, the agreeing elements in 10a are not similarly consistent.

2.2. The Agreement Hierarchy.
On the point illustrated in 10, *mamma* in the Oslo dialect behaves exactly as expected from the Agreement Hierarchy (Corbett 1979, 2006:206–230); that is, semantic agreement prevails in pronominal agreement. To refer to one's mum using *han* 'he' is unacceptable, as is using the noun *jent-a* 'girl-DEF.SG.{F}' and the pronoun *han* 'he' in the same context to refer to the same person. In this respect, *mamma* is a typical hybrid noun, in Corbett's terminology.[6] The gender that this noun controls varies according to the particular agreement target. This means that it is not simply a masculine noun—if it were, it would always trigger masculine agreement. Rather, it can trigger either masculine or feminine agreement, depending on the target—hence it is a hybrid.

We should introduce the Agreement Hierarchy briefly. In the simplest case, a single morphosyntactic specification for a particular item can be given, which is applicable in all syntactic environments. Thus, if a

[6] For further general discussion of these concepts, see Dahl 1999 and Corbett 2006.

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noun is feminine and plural, any agreement target is expected to appear in the feminine plural. However, there are some well-established phenomena that run counter to this simple expectation. Hybrids are items that trigger different agreement depending on the agreement target. Consider the Dutch data in 11 (Corpus of Spoken Dutch, Jenny Audring, p.c.). In Dutch, both *meisje* 'girl' and *jonge-tje* 'boy-DIM' can trigger neuter agreement, even if one might think of them as semantically feminine and masculine, respectively.

(11) a. een meisje
INDF.SG girl

dat naast mij **'r** tent had opgezet
who.SG.N next me 3SG.F tent AUX.PST pitched

'a girl, who had pitched her tent next to me'

b. **Dat** andere jonge-tje
DEM.SG.N other boy-DIM

dat Frans heette
who.SG.N Frans be.called.PST

die ging nadoen wat andere kinderen deden.
DEM.SG.COMN go.PST copy what other kids do.PST.PL

'That other boy, who was called Frans, he started copying what other kids did.'

The nouns in 11 trigger different agreements according to the target. Within the noun phrase in 11b, there is syntactic (formal) agreement between the neuter *dat* 'DEM' and *jonge-tje*. However, 11a also contains a possessive pronoun, which is feminine, while 11b contains a demonstrative used as personal pronoun, which is of common gender. Both of the latter are instances of semantic agreement. The use of *'r* and *die* should be explained in terms of the semantic (or referential) properties of *meisje* and *jonge-tje*, respectively, and not in terms of form. There is also an example of a relative pronoun in both 11a and 11b, in the neuter, and that is syntactic agreement. In Dutch, one can also find instances of semantic agreement of the relative pronoun, comparable to the examples

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of the personal pronoun (though not in our example 11); however, examples of semantic agreement of the personal pronoun are more frequent than examples of semantic agreement of the relative pronoun (Audring 2006:111). This fits in within a much more general pattern of the Agreement Hierarchy, which consists of the following positions:

(12) The Agreement Hierarchy

attributive > predicate > relative pronoun > personal pronoun

The associated claim for the Agreement Hierarchy appears in 13 (Corbett 2006:207).

(13) For any controller that permits alternative agreements, as we move rightwards along the Agreement Hierarchy, the likelihood of agreement with greater semantic justification will increase monotonically (that is, with no intervening decrease).

A monotonic increase is one with no intervening decrease, and this condition means that the hierarchy can be applied to constructions that show optionality and variability with respect to agreement. If one considers the Dutch data in this light, it appears that semantic agreement is found in the personal pronoun and in the relative pronoun. If the two are compared, semantic agreement is found with greater likelihood in the personal pronoun than in the relative pronoun. Similarly, if one looks at *mamma* 'mother' in the Oslo dialect, one finds that semantic agreement is possible in all positions of the Agreement Hierarchy where agreement distinctions are available, except within the noun phrase (attributive position).[7]

3. The Nordreisa Dialect of North Norwegian.

The Oslo dialect data fit in with an established typological pattern. Things become more complicated, however, as soon as one turns to the Nordreisa dialect of North Norwegian. These data are more challenging,

[7] There is no relative pronoun. Agreement is available on determiners, attributive adjectives, predicative adjectives, and on personal pronouns.

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and the analysis requires an extra step, that is, both the Agreement Hierarchy and definiteness are relevant.

3.1. What the Nordreisa Dialect Teaches Us.
Consider the examples in 14 from the Nordreisa dialect of Norwegian.

(14) a. /ei/e:n mama/
INDF.SG.F/M mum
'a mum'

b. /mama-n diː-n/
mum-DEF.SG.{M} your-M
'your mum'

(15) a. /ei/e:n øks/
INDF.SG.F/M axe
'an axe'

b. /øks-a diː/
axe-DEF.SG.{F} your.F
'your axe'

c. /øks-en diː-n/
axe-DEF.SG.{M} your-M
'your axe'

(16) a. /e:n papa/
INDF.SG.M dad
'a dad'

b. /papa-n diː-n/
dad-DEF.SG.{M} your-M
'your dad'

Apparently, almost any noun that can take the feminine determiner *ei* can optionally take the masculine determiner *en* in this dialect (but not vice versa). This reflects the weak position of the feminine in this dialect (see section 1.1 above). In Nordreisa, the distinction between masculine

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and feminine is close to being lost (see Sollid 2005). What is particularly intriguing about the noun *mamma* in this dialect, however, is that it triggers only masculine agreement—never feminine—in the definite (within the noun phrase). Unlike *øks* 'axe', *mamma* triggers feminine agreement only in the indefinite. Such examples are highly unusual. One hardly ever finds a noun in Norwegian that has different gender depending on whether it is indefinite or definite (though see section 4 below).

We now need to specify which agreement contexts we are interested in.[8] There are effects of word order and alienability; we address the former first. Given that the noun can be marked as definite (the more interesting case for us) or indefinite, and that the possessive could, in principle, precede or follow the noun, four theoretical possibilities exist. Of these, two are excluded (17b and 18b). Consider the case where the possessive precedes the noun:

(17) a. /miː-n biːl/
my-M car
'my car'

b. */miː-n biːl-en/
my.M car-DEF.SG.{M}
'my car'

Thus, the possessive cannot precede the noun if this noun is marked as definite. In the reverse order, the following basic situation is found (a complication to this situation is discussed below):

(18) a. /biːl-en miː-n/
car-DEF.SG.{M} my-M
'my car'

b. */biːl miː-n/
car my-M
'my car'

[8] What we say about the contexts (but not the agreements) is true for Norwegian more generally, but we discuss it specifically with respect to Nordreisa examples.

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In 18, the noun has to be marked as definite. There is a complication, however. Alongside the normal word order in 18a, examples such as 18b are possible, provided they involve inalienable possession denoting close kinship relations, as in 19.

(19) a. /faːr mi:-n/
father my-M
'my father'

b. /faː-eɳ mi:-n/
father-DEF.SG.{M} my-M
'my father'

According to our informant (Hilde Sollid at the University of Tromsø, sociolinguist, dialectologist, and a native of Nordreisa), 19a and 19b are both acceptable.[9] To summarize, the normal patterns are possessive plus (morphologically) indefinite, and definite plus possessive. Just for inalienable possession, there is also the pattern indefinite plus possessive.

For the agreements that concern us, there are three contexts we need to examine with respect to inalienable possession. First, a morphologically indefinite noun follows the possessive, as in 20.

(20) a. /miː mama/
my.F mum
'my mum'

b. /miː-n mama/
my-M mum
'my mum'

Second, the possessive follows a morphologically definite noun, as in 21.

(21) a. /mama-n mi:-n/
mum-DEF.SG.{M} my-M
'my mum'

[9] The alternation between /faːr/ and /faː-eɳ/ is interesting from the morphophonological point of view, but it does not bear on present issues.

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b. */mama-n mi:/
mum-DEF.SG.{M} my.F
'my mum'

Third, since *mamma* denotes a relation of inalienable possession, there is also a possibility of its indefinite form preceding the possessive, as in 22.

(22) a. /mama mi:/
mum my.F
'my mum'

b. ?/mama mi:-n/
mum my-M
'my mum'

Example 22b is marginally acceptable, while 21a and 22a are preferred.

The acceptability judgment in 22 should be contrasted with those in 23, where the noun *øks* 'axe' does not denote a relation of inalienable possession.

(23) a. */øks mi:/
axe my.F
'my axe'

b. */øks mi:-n/
axe my-M
'my axe'

Given the general situation of gender in this dialect, and that the noun *øks* is feminine, the alternative where the possessive appears first is expected:

(24) a. /mi: øks/
my.F axe
'my axe'

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b. /miː-n øks/
my-M axe
'my axe'

The key point is that *øks* 'axe' provides the normal case against which we see the interest of *mamma*, which takes masculine only when the noun is definite.

Importantly, *mamma* triggers masculine agreement inside the NP, not outside it. When pressed, our informant finds the choice between 25a and 25b difficult, but she still much prefers 25a, with feminine agreement outside the NP.

(25) a. /mama-n miː-n e liːt-a/
mum-DEF.SG.{M} my-M is small-F
'My mum is small.'

b. /mama-n miː-n e liːt-en/
mum-DEF.SG.{M} my-M is small-M
'My mum is small.'

Thus, semantic agreement is preferred on predicative adjectives. On pronouns, syntactic agreement is simply out, at least in cases like this. To refer to one's mother using the masculine pronoun *han* 'he' is unacceptable, in Nordreisa as in other dialects (see section 2.2).

3.2. Lexical Splits.

Lexemes can follow a consistent pattern across the paradigm, or their pattern can be split in various ways. That is, the cells in the paradigm of the same lexeme can follow more than one pattern, so that the paradigm is split into two or more parts. The split can be internal to the lexeme, as when the same lexeme has different stems, or it can be external and affect the properties of other lexemes, such as agreement. Against this background, the general regularity of Norwegian noted in section 3.1, that is, consistent gender across definiteness, is not surprising. Yet there can be gender mixtures, that is, the gender value of the same item can vary according to the value of some other feature. Such variations represent a particular type of split. However, Carstairs-McCarthy (1994:771) states that, overall, such splitting—or gender mixture—is only possible

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on the basis of number. According to this suggestion, one does not find, for example, a noun that is feminine in the nominative and masculine in the dative.[10] If there is any gender mixture in the paradigm of a noun, it would be based on number. In Norwegian (with the exception of a few dialects), the gender opposition is neutralized in the plural (see section 1.1 above), making such examples impossible. Therefore, we turn to an example from further afield.

The Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian noun *oko* 'eye' has a singular-plural split, having the irregular plural stem *oč-i* 'eyes'. The different stems belong to different inflection classes (making the lexeme heteroclitic). This split in the noun's inflection brings with it a difference in gender (neuter in the singular but feminine in the plural), as shown in 26. Thus, the external and the internal split referred to above can co-occur.

(26) a. njezin-o ok-o
her-NOM.SG.N eye-NOM.SG
'her eye'

b. njezin-e oč-i
her-NOM.PL.F eye-NOM.PL
'her eyes'

Note that *oko* 'eye' has a split paradigm, in that its plural forms are not regularly linked to the singular ones (the stems are not related by a synchronic pattern of the language, and the inflections belong to different classes). Moreover, this noun triggers mixed gender agreement (neuter in the singular and feminine in the plural). Nevertheless, the case of *oko* 'eye' is straightforward, in that agreement, irrespective of agreement target, is always neuter in the singular and feminine in the plural.

The Nordreisa data are more complex than that, and in two distinct ways. First, as we have shown above, the alternation between masculine and feminine agreement is subject to the Agreement Hierarchy, not number as in the case of *oko* 'eye'. The second difference is more subtle, but we can bring it out by further comparing Nordreisa with Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. There is an interesting class of Bosnian/Croatian/

[10] There is apparently an example in certain Gaelic dialects, though; see Lamb 2008:206.

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Serbian nouns, for example *gazda* 'landlord, boss'. These nouns exhibit the following split. They show masculine agreement in the singular, while in the plural, there are examples both of masculine and of feminine agreement (see Marković 1954, Corbett 1983:14–17). This distribution of agreement is subject to the Agreement Hierarchy. The relevant point is that these nouns are hybrids in terms of gender only with respect to the plural.

Now, it may seem that all hybrids are like this. For example, English nouns such as *committee* (which are semantically plural, as it were) have interesting agreement properties only in the singular—they trigger singular or plural agreement when singular, but only plural when plural, as shown in 27. However, the singular is the only place for such nouns where an effect could, in principle, be found (since it concerns singular/plural number). The noun *committee* is semantically plural, and it is only in the singular that there can be a discrepancy between semantics and syntax.

(27) a. The committee is vs. the committee are (singular)
b. *The committees is vs. the committees are (plural)

Within the feature space, English thus has the interesting agreement effect exactly and only where it is possible on semantic grounds. Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian could, in principle, have a gender effect in the singular, but it has the split only in part of the theoretically possible feature space. Similarly, Nordreisa *mamma* could, in principle, have a gender mixture in the indefinite as well as in the definite. What one finds, however, is that the split is governed by the following conditions:

(a) it is conditioned by definiteness
(b) it varies by target (and is subject to the Agreement Hierarchy)
(c) the effect is found in the definite only[11]

[11] We need both (a) and (c) since a special effect could be conditioned by definiteness (it might occur more readily in the definite than in the indefinite), but it could still occur in both. In our instance, the effect is determined by definiteness (depending also on the target), and furthermore, it is excluded in the indefinite.

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The example of *mamma* in Nordreisa is so interesting and unusual that it would be valuable to place it in a wider context. To do this, we survey other gender effects in a range of Norwegian dialects.

4. Other Examples from Norwegian.

The Nordreisa noun *mamma* appears to be a highly unusual case. Yet the example is not entirely isolated. Similar examples are basically of two kinds. First, in section 4.1, we review relevant data from four Norwegian dialects (see also Enger 2005). Then, in section 4.2, we turn to slightly different, but related examples from the Web. The dialectological descriptions and the Web evidence thus support each other; they converge.

4.1. Further Examples from Norwegian Dialects.

The first example to consider is the noun *gong* 'time, occasion' from the dialect of Bud (Møre and Romsdal, West Norwegian). This noun takes a masculine determiner in the indefinite singular, as shown in 28a. Yet it takes the suffix normally associated with the feminine in the definite singular, as shown in 28b.

(28) a. /ein goŋ/
INDF.SG.M time
'a time'

b. /gonj-a/
time-DEF.SG.{F}
'the time'[12]

As noted in section 1.1 above, we would not like to interpret the definite suffix as a straightforward gender marker. Due to the meaning of this particular noun ('time, occasion'), however, and the fact that most Norwegian adjectives do not have formally distinct masculine and feminine forms, it is difficult to find compelling evidence from possessive and adjectival agreement.[13] Since in the Bud dialect the definiteness suffixes

[12] The alternation between /ŋ/ and /nj/ is interesting, but it does not bear on the present paper.

[13] An exception is *liten* 'small', on which we relied in 1c versus 3c and in 25a versus 25b above, but which cannot be used with this particular noun.

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in the singular correlate perfectly with gender markers, we would not like to dismiss the suffix as completely irrelevant.[14] We treat /a/ as indicative of feminine (see the discussion in section 1 above). Nevertheless, agreement evidence is preferable, and such evidence can be found with the adjective *eigen* 'own', which, like *liten*, often differentiates masculine and feminine, as shown in 29.

(29) Han køyrde ein eig-en gong
3SG.M drove INDF.SG.M separate-INDF.SG.M time
for å sjå etter sau-ene
for INF look after sheep-DEF.PL

'He drove (there) a separate time in order to look after the sheep.'

The feminine form of the adjective *eigen* 'own, separate' here is categorically excluded, according to our consultant. Since our consultant Helge Sandøy is not only a native speaker of this dialect, but also a respected dialectologist, it is worth mentioning that he has stated (p.c.) that he is not aware of any parallel item to this one in the Bud dialect.

[14] An anonymous referee asks whether the deviant behavior of *gong* might be due to its being among those masculine nouns that take the plural suffixes *-er* and *-ene*, normally associated with feminine nouns. This is an interesting suggestion, though it is not sufficient in itself to provide an explanation. There have been many masculine nouns that have taken *-er* and *-ene*, and these normally do not behave like *gong* with respect to gender agreement (see, among others, Enger 2004b for more details). Still, the particular semantics of *gong* would make it less liable to control agreement on any target, anyway. The string *gong* produces 97 hits in the NOWAC corpus of written Norwegian; nine of them turn out to be instances of the Chinese word (as in *Dong gong, Jichu gong*), and so irrelevant for us. Of the remaining 89 hits, there is not a single example of the sequence determiner + adjective + head noun. This may be compared with a presumably more typical noun, *bok* 'book'. The string *bok* produces 96 hits in the NOWAC corpus; of these, 25 instantiate the pattern determiner + adjective + head noun. The difference is considerable. Assuming that agreement evidence helps speakers learn gender, this bears on the deviant behavior of *gong* in Bud as well as in other dialects. Gender mixture (and uncertainty) may be more likely to arise when speakers hardly ever get help from agreement.

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Beito (1954:206) also mentions *ein gong–gonga* (masculine determiner, but the suffix normally associated with the feminine) from several dialects in the East Norwegian dialect area, so Bud is not entirely unique. Still, the pattern is rare, to say the least.

As for gender in pronominal reference, it is hard to think of any good examples, again due to the semantics of the lexeme *gong*. Our consultant suggests the following as a possibility, though he calls it very "far-fetched:"

(30) Tre gånje ... Første gånja var eigentleg mislykka.
three times ... first time-DEF.{F} was really failed
'Three times ... The first time was really a failure.'

Ho berre gjekk forbi oss utan at me
3SG.F just go.PST past us without that we

oppdaga at sjansen var der.
discover-PST that chance-DEF.SG.{M} was there

'She(feminine) [that is, that time] just passed us by without us discovering that the opportunity was there.'

The gender on the personal pronoun in 30 is feminine.

The second set of examples comes from another West Norwegian dialect, this time Bjerkreim (Rogaland), and includes the words *gong* 'time' and *avis* 'newspaper'. While Bud is at the northernmost end of West Norwegian, Bjerkreim is closer to the southernmost. Our main source is Levang 2003 (and p.c.) and we turn first to example 31.

(31) a. /ei goŋ/
INDF.SG.F time
'a time'

b. /goŋ-en/
time-DEF.SG.{M}
'the time'

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Surprisingly, although the lexeme *gong* 'time' shows gender mixture in Bjerkreim as it does in Bud, there is a crisscross pattern here. In Bud, this noun is feminine in the indefinite and masculine in the definite. In Bjerkreim, the opposite appears to be the case, but the only available evidence comes from the suffix. As noted above, agreement evidence is hard to come by, due to the semantics of this noun.

Much more interestingly, the lexeme *avis* 'newspaper' shows clear-cut feminine agreement in the determiner and the attributive adjective, as shown in 32a,b. In the definite, the agreement on the possessive is equally clear-cut masculine, as in 32c.

(32) a. /ei avi:s/
INDF.SG.F newspaper
'a newspaper'

b. /ei li:do avi:s/
INDF.SG.F small.SG.F newspaper
'a small newspaper'

c. /avi:s-en di:-n/
newspaper-DEF.SG.{M} your-SG.M
'your newspaper'

Unfortunately for us, the relevant personal pronoun in this dialect would be *den* '3SG.M+F'. This pronoun is used to refer to inanimates, but it does not distinguish between masculine and feminine. Unlike the gender system of Bud (see section 4.1.1), the gender system of this dialect (like many other varieties of Scandinavian, see, for instance, section 1.1 above, Enger 2004a, Braunmüller 1999) may be undergoing a change, whereby the pronoun that has been used for both animates and inanimates in the feminine and masculine genders is becoming restricted to animates only, more specifically, humans. There are parallels in many languages, for example, in Latvian and Persian (see Corbett 1991:311). Therefore, we cannot gain more insight from the data for our analysis, but it does at least seem fairly clear that Bjerkreim corroborates the pattern from Bud. We do find gender mixture based on definiteness, albeit in few isolated cases.

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Our next example is *sofa* 'sofa, couch' from the Nordreisa dialect. Besides the *mamma* example discussed earlier, one also finds examples such as 33.

(33) a. /ei sufa/
INDF.SG.F sofa
'a sofa/couch'

b. /sufa-en/
sofa-DEF.SG.{M}
'the sofa/couch'

c. /sufa-en diː-n/
sofa-DEF.SG.{M} your-SG.M
'your sofa/couch'

In this dialect, one has to rely on possessives and determiners for agreement evidence. The different adjectival agreement in masculine and feminine nouns is lost, with the exception of *liten*, again (compare 1c versus 3c above). In fact, one finds *ei lita sofa* 'a.F small.F sofa' versus *en liten sofa* 'a.M small.M sofa'.

The last example is the noun /æue/ 'eye' from the Romerike dialect. This noun has the feminine suffix in 34b, and the dialectologist Ross (1908:14) reports that in some East Norwegian dialects, it appears with the neuter demonstrative, as shown in 34.

(34) a. /et æue/
INDF.SG.N eye
'an eye'

b. /dæ eːne æu-a/
that.N one eye-DEF.SG.{F}
'that one eye'

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In 34a, which is indefinite, there is neuter agreement. In 34b, which is definite, the determiner is clearly neuter, but the declensional suffix on the noun is feminine.[15]

The example is intriguing also because Ross attributes it, among other places, to Udenes parish, Romerike. One of the authors of this paper has lived in that particular parish for eleven years without hearing the inflection Ross mentions. This, of course, can mean that Ross was wrong, or that the author simply did not happen to speak with the right people. Yet a third possibility exists, namely, that this pattern has not been diachronically stable.

4.2. Examples from the Web.

So far, we have looked at examples from the dialectological literature. In these examples, the reason for the gender variation is not always obvious. However, there are many examples of a slightly different, but related kind to be found at present on the Web. One such example is *ei kleptoman* 'a.F kleptomaniac'. To most Norwegians, the noun *kleptoman* is masculine, but the rap artist Ravi (from whom this particular example is taken) uses the feminine determiner to signal that the particular kleptomaniac is a woman. To our knowledge, these examples and their significance did not receive much attention before Korsæth 2010. The examples are tangential to her aim, but she observes that they smack of semantic agreement. Indeed, many such examples can be found, as illustrated in 35.[16]

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[15] There is an alternative interpretation. At first glance, /æua/ could reflect the Old Norse neuter, for this noun was a neuter in Old Norse (*augat* in the definite singular). This interpretation is unlikely, however, for two reasons. First, Old Norse word-final unstressed *-at* is regularly reflected as /e/ in this dialect (Old Norse *kastat* 'thrown' > Romerike /kaste/.) Second, having reported 34, Ross says, in the next sentence, that in some places there is a complete change to feminine. This indicates, in our interpretation, that Ross was familiar with diachronic changes leading to gender mixture.

[16] The two sentences in 35a belong to the same text accessed at chvidsten.blogg.no/1297204182 on July 18, 2012. The examples in 35b are found in another text, accessed at ringblomst.no/forum/archive/index.php/t-12453.html on July 18, 2012.

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(35) a. Ei god venn som alltid er der.
INDF.SG.F good friend who always is there.

Glad i deg venn-en mi-n
fond of you friend-DEF.SG.{M} my-SG.M

'A good friend who is always there. Fond of you, my friend.'

b. Er lærer-en lærer?
is teacher-DEF.SG.{M} teacher?
'Is the teacher really a teacher?'

Blomst har fått ei lærer som … og hun …
Blomst has got INDF.SG.F teacher who … and 3SG.F

'Blomst has got a teacher who … and she …'

While many of the examples in section 4.1 may belong to older stages of the language, 35a and 35b are more recent. They are interesting and intriguing not only for the study of gender mixture in general, but also for the empirical study of Norwegian.

In their authoritative reference grammar, Faarlund et al. (1997:152) say that although there can be a feminine suffix on the noun without a feminine marking on the noun's targets, the opposite is ruled out. There cannot be feminine marking on the associated words without a feminine suffix on the head noun. On the whole, this is, of course, quite correct. While the combinations *ei bok* 'a.F book'–*boka* 'book-DEF.SG{F}', *en bok* 'a.M book'–*boken* 'book-DEF.SG.{M}' and *en bok* 'a. M book'–*boka* 'book-DEF.SG.{F}' all occur, the combination *ei bok* 'a. F book'–*boken* 'book-DEF.SG.{M}' does not normally occur in Norwegian. In diachronic terms, we are witnessing a change from the suffix /a/ being indicative of gender to its being indicative of no more than an inflection class. In other words, what used to be a separate gender is now merely a declension (as long as pronominal gender is not taken into consideration). A similar change has previously taken place in Danish and Swedish (see sections 1.1 and 4.1.2 above).

However, examples like 35 fly in the face of Faarlund et al.'s generalization (as do the somewhat different examples in 31 and 33). Yet such examples have not received sufficient attention in the literature

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before. These are examples of semantic agreement that involves the determiner.

Examples such as 35 are not very common in the spoken language, as far as we know. Rather, they belong in writing—that is, in the deliberate, reflective language use. To Norwegians whose variety has a traditional three-gender system, examples such as these are very strange. Therefore, it is probably no accident that we have found examples like these in Bokmål, but not in Nynorsk, where the traditional three-gender system is more stable.

We do not claim that examples such as these are typical in Norwegian. The Reference Grammar certainly presents a generally accurate picture, and such examples are peripheral. Yet they do exist.[17] Even if the Web examples differ from the ones in the dialects, they converge in indicating that gender can vary depending on whether a noun is indefinite or definite singular. In other words, they show that gender mixture can be linked to definiteness.

One referee suggests that the examples of gender mixture in section 4.1 may be diachronically unstable. The example of /æue/ 'eye' in section 4.1.4 may certainly be a case in point. However, for the purposes of the grammatical theory and the correct description of Scandinavian, these examples are of interest simply because they are possible, and the examples of gender mixture surveyed in section 4.2 indicate that the possibility still exists today (and can even arise in the future).[18] Patterns

[17] At first glance, the examples may even pose a problem for the Agreement Hierarchy because one finds semantic agreement in the determiner, but not in the possessive. Importantly, however, "the Agreement Hierarchy operates at corpus level; that is, its predictions apply not to individual sentences but to sets of sentences or corpora" (Corbett 1991:238).

[18] In fact, we are not the first to draw attention to examples like these. While most Norwegian grammarians would rule out the combination of a feminine determiner and the suffix normally combined with the masculine, Rice (1997) says that such combinations as *ei villa* 'a.F villa'–*villa-en* 'villa-DEF.SG.{M}', *ei mamma* 'a.F mum'–*mamma-en* 'mum-DEF.SG.{M}' are quite common. It is not quite clear what the empirical foundation for this statement is, and Rice's claim that "the facts I'm discussing are not limited to exotic dialects, or even to really major dialect regions of Norwegian" does strike us as overstated. At the same time, he is definitely pointing in the right direction.

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of agreement can also show interesting tendencies when they are subject to diachronic reduction.

At this point, it is worth mentioning two examples from a corpus of spoken material, namely the corpus of spoken Oslo Norwegian.[19] In this corpus, one and the same Oslo speaker says *ei katte* ('a cat' with the feminine determiner) in one sentence, and *katten* ('cat' with the definite singular suffix normally associated with the masculine) in the next. This violates the generalization stated in the reference grammar above. In the dialects, the word for 'cat' is either *katt* /kat/ (masculine) or *katte* /kate/ (feminine). Thus, one expects either *ei katte–katta* or *en katt–katten*. What one finds in this particular Oslo example, instead, is a mixture. There is no further agreement evidence in the recorded example, unfortunately. However, Lødrup (2011b:132) mentions an analogous case. One and the same speaker says /ei se:ter/ *ei seter* 'summer farm' with the feminine determiner and then, twice /se:tæɳ/ *seteren* with the definite suffix normally associated with masculine nouns.

5. The Significance of the Norwegian Data.

At first glance, the general paucity of gender mixture examples based on definiteness might have to do with inflectional marking of definiteness being rare. Thus, Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2006:60) say that "[c]ross-linguistically, bound definiteness markers are rare; they occur only in 5 (or possibly 6) languages [note left out] in Rijkhoff's global 52-language sample." Intriguingly, the figures in the *World Atlas of Linguistic Structure* tell a somewhat different story. Of the 377 languages in Dryer's data that mark the definite, 92 (approximately one fourth) do so with affixes. So, if gender mixture is fairly rare (as we believe), it is not clear that this can be due to the putative rarity of inflectional marking of definiteness. Unfortunately, we have no alternative account.

Be that as it may, other examples of inflectional marking of definiteness include Bulgarian (Scatton 1993:202, Stoykova 2002, 2004) and Macedonian (Friedman 1993:264, 266–267), and these provide valuable comparison. Below we consider Bulgarian. We do not offer a full analysis of this complex system (see the sources just given for more detail), but we point out the salient similarities with Norwegian. In Bulgarian, if

[19] The corpus is available at http://www.hf.uio.no/iln/tjenester/kunnskap/sprak/korpus/talesprakskorpus/nota-oslo/index.html.

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a noun stands alone, definiteness is realized as a suffix on this noun. The shape of the suffix is determined, at least in part, by the inflection class of the noun (Scatton 1993:202), as shown in table 1.

Singular Indefinite	Singular Definite	Gender	Gloss
grad	grad-ăt	masculine	city
žena	žena-ta	feminine	woman
pesen	pesen-ta	feminine	song
mjasto	mjasto-to	neuter	place

Table 1. The definite suffix in Bulgarian.

These examples demonstrate that the information provided by the phonology of the noun alone would be insufficient. *Grad* 'city' and *pesen* 'song' both end in a consonant but have different forms of the definite suffix. These two nouns belong to different inflection classes, and their inflection class allows us to predict the form of the suffix.[20]

However, based on the data in table 1 alone, there could be another interpretation. One might suggest that the different shapes of the suffix is a matter of gender, since the examples with *-ta* are both feminine. The examples in table 2 show that gender is not a reliable predictor, while inflection class is (examples from Scatton 1993:199, 201 and Nicolova 2008:83–84).

Singular Indefinite	Singular Definite	Gender	Gloss
bašta	bašta-ta	masculine	father
čičo	čičo-to	masculine	uncle

Table 2. The definite suffix in Bulgarian:
Examples with gender/inflection mismatches.

The data in table 2 show that the noun form without the suffix, which indicates the inflection class, is needed to predict the form of the suffix for some nouns. The examples in table 2 do not have the same definite-

[20] The inflectional paradigms of Bulgarian nouns are minimal. However, though we do not include it here, there is comparable evidence from the plural supporting this analysis (Nicolova 2008:80).

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ness suffix as other nouns of the same gender. These are typical "mismatch" nouns, whose inflection class and gender do not line up. The suffix that marks definiteness is clearly sensitive to the form and not to the gender of the noun, as tables 1 and 2 demonstrate. Nevertheless, the forms that realize definiteness look similar to exponents of gender. In this respect the Bulgarian examples are comparable with the Norwegian ones.

If an adjective is added, the Bulgarian definite suffix appears on the first adjective, and its form is now determined by gender in a fully regular way. Consider the examples in 36.

(36) a. dobri-jat grad
good-DEF.SG.M city.(M)[SG]
'the good city'

b. dobra-ta žen-a
good-DEF.SG.F woman.(F)-SG
'the good woman'

c. dobri-jat bašt-a
good-DEF.SG.M father.(M)-SG
'the good father'

d. dobri-jat čič-o
good-DEF.SG.M uncle.(M)-SG
'the good uncle'

Thus, while the Bulgarian definite suffix presents challenges in its own way (see Popova 2000, Dost & Gribanova 2006, and references there), it does not induce the type of split found in Norwegian. When definiteness is expressed as a nominal affix, its form depends, in part, on the inflection class of the noun (not its gender). When definiteness is expressed by an independent morpheme external to the noun, its form is determined regularly by gender and number agreement.

Norwegian, then, is somewhat unusual because of the inflectional marking of definiteness, though this is something shared with a minority of languages around the world, and because the shape of the definiteness suffix is so closely connected to gender. Second, the noun *mother*

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appears to be assigned to the masculine gender in a number of dialects, which is highly unusual.[21] Moreover, this noun is not simply masculine; rather, it is a hybrid, whose gender depends on the particular target. The data from the Oslo dialect have shown that the distribution of the masculine and feminine agreement is straightforwardly constrained by the Agreement Hierarchy. Masculine agreement occurs within the noun phrase, while feminine agreement occurs outside it.

The third unusual property of the noun *mamma* 'mother' surfaces in the Nordreisa dialect, where this noun is split—its gender varies according to definiteness. This is unusual, as gender alternation within the same noun is normally associated with number (Carstairs-McCarthy 1994). Given this split, the noun *mamma* 'mother' in the Nordreisa dialect is masculine only when it is definite and its agreement target is the possessive within the noun phrase. Hence, the agreement pattern is also constrained by the Agreement Hierarchy. These observations suggest strongly that one should maintain the definition of gender that takes into account agreement with associated words (see section 1.1). If one examines the different associated words, an interesting gender split emerges, and the phenomenon conforms to a typologically recognizable pattern.

Under the associated morpheme approach (see section 1.1), the form *mamma-en* 'mother-DEF.SG.{M}' in the Nordreisa dialect indicates that the noun is masculine. Then there is no obvious way to account for the different masculine and feminine forms that also occur. One needs to be able to say that its definite and indefinite forms trigger different agreements.

Given the intriguing data from Norwegian dialects, there are two possible ways to proceed. Either the Agreement Hierarchy needs to be

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[21] Chiara Cappellaro and Martin Maiden (personal communication) have kindly informed us that in the dialect of Bocchigliero, Calabria, Southern Italy, the word for 'wife' was (and perhaps still is) a masculine, though only in the plural:

(i) a mugliera
DEF.SG.F wife.SG.F
'the wife'

(ii) i muglieri
DEF.PL.M wife.PL.M
'the wives'

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elaborated, or the notion of lexical splits needs to be developed. Let us consider each of these two options.

Hypothesis 1: The Agreement Hierarchy needs to be elaborated.

The idea is to divide the attributive position within the noun phrase into definite and indefinite. This does not seem promising, since in Norwegian, this type of definite versus indefinite contrast only exists with respect to a few nouns.[22] There is evidence, however, that the attributive possessive has a particular status within the noun phrase (see Wald 1975 on urban Swahili, reported in Corbett 1991:252, 254; Lødrup 2011a, 2011b on "more modern" Oslo Norwegian).

Hypothesis 2: The notion of lexical splits needs to be developed.

Under this approach, lexemes may be split, with only a part of the lexeme being hybrid. Specifically, Nordreisa *mamma* 'mother' is split, and only in the definite is it a hybrid. This appears to be the more promising route. The comparison with Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian *gazda* 'landlord, boss' is helpful here, since that noun is split, and agreement options are available for it only in the plural. However, there is certainly more to be understood about lexical splits. Carstairs-McCarthy's (1994:771) claim that gender mixture can only be based on number (and not on case, for instance) has been generally accepted, as far as we are aware. Yet the gender mixture in Norwegian is based on definiteness.

Nevertheless, one may wonder why these exceptions are found with definiteness as opposed to some other category. It is well known that there is a special relationship between gender and number (Corbett 1991: 132, 2000:27). Carstairs-McCarthy (1994:771) suggests, tentatively, that the reason why gender mixture is based on number only is that number has relatively high relevance—in Bybee's (1985) terms—for nouns. According to Bybee's (1985:15) definition of relevance, "[a] category is relevant to the verb to the extent that the meaning of the category directly affects the lexical content of the stem" (emphasis removed). Though Bybee discusses the notion of relevance with respect to verbs, the concept can be used more widely (Bybee 1985:13, 85; see also other

[22] But compare Cornish (1986:203–211) on French.

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researchers who apply the concept to nouns, such as Lie 1986, Bauer 2003, Nübling 2005).

Should this argument be extended to definiteness? At first glance, the major consideration would be that the definite form of the noun in question is odd: *mamma-en* has the shape appropriate for the definite form of a masculine noun. This observation is discussed in more detail by Rice (1997), who suggests that *mamma-en* is chosen over *mamma-a* because phonology outranks morphology. Rice works within Optimality Theory, and the idea is that /mama.a/ (where . signifies syllable boundary) is not an acceptable phonological form, and that the account of the interfaces in Optimality Theory will ensure that the morphologically unacceptable form is chosen rather than the phonologically unacceptable one. While this explanation would work for the example from the Oslo dialect, since to have one /a/ immediately followed by another one in that dialect seems to be excluded, there are Norwegian dialects in which there is nothing phonologically wrong with /mama.a/. Trondheim is a case in point, as it has /mama.an/ in the definite plural, but it still has /maman min/ in the definite singular, just like Oslo. To us, this indicates that a form-based account, though appealing, may not be the entire story. Also, the form-based approach is not helpful with such mixtures as *gong* 'time, occasion' (see section 4.1) or with the Web examples *venn* 'friend', *lærer* 'teacher', *katte* 'cat', *seter* 'summer farm' (see section 4.2).

Note, however, that there are a number of dialects where the normal plural suffix for masculine nouns is *-ar*, and yet nouns that end in *a* in the indefinite singular can have the plural suffix *-er*.[23] This supports Rice's account, and more generally, the importance of form. The very reason that in the Oslo dialect the noun *mamma* /mama/ takes a masculine determiner is its formal similarity to masculine nouns such as /haːna/ 'rooster' and /steːga/ 'ladder' (these nouns have a different shape in, for instance, Sunnhordland, and, therefore, cannot affect the gender of *mamma* there.)

As for the relevance (in Bybee's sense) of definiteness, we do find particular lexical items for which definiteness appears to have high relevance. For Swedish (which is structurally very close to Norwegian), Svanlund (2001:289ff) notes that the definite form of the noun *balans*

[23] This is even reflected in Nynorsk orthography, where the masculine *villa* 'villa' can have the plural *villaer*, in striking contrast to, for instance, *hest* 'horse', for which only *hestar* is acceptable.

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'balance' is used almost exclusively with reference to physical balance, while for spiritual or psychological balance the indefinite form is used. Similarly, if Swedish *värld* 'world' or its Norwegian Nynorsk cognate *verd* are used in the definite form (as they usually are, in normal discourse), they almost always refer to our world, and hardly ever to any other world. Thus, these polysemous nouns have slightly different senses in the definite and the indefinite, which indicates that the category definiteness can have high relevance for nouns. Kürschner (2008:24–25) and Lie (1986) also argue that definiteness, though less relevant than number, is more relevant than, for example, case.

Consider again the word *mamma* 'mother'. This noun has an unusual distribution (also associated with some other inalienables). One normally refers to one's own mother or the person who is the mother in a family under discussion, and so explicit marking of definiteness is not strictly necessary. In its indefinite form this noun can function as though it were definite:

(37) Mamma er snill.
mother is kind
'Mother is kind.'

An indefinite article can be added for typical indefinite uses, as in *A mother is expected to be caring*. The definite article would appear if there is also a possessive. This noun, therefore, differs from regular nouns denoting humans, for which the syntax of 37 would not be acceptable. This special status may also be contributing to the remarkable behavior of *mamma* 'mother' in the Nordreisa dialect, in addition to the formal and semantic factors.

6. Conclusion.

We have looked at surprising facts from some Norwegian dialects, where the noun *mamma* 'mother' appears to act like a masculine noun (sections 2 and 3). This is not what one would expect, given the semantics of this noun. In one particular dialect, that of Nordreisa, the word even looks like a masculine noun, but only in its definite form. This is an unusual type of split, as gender mixture is typically found on the basis of number, while in this case it is based on definiteness (although we have shown in

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section 4 that there are some corroborative examples in other varieties, even if the phenomenon is clearly marginal).

The Nordreisa example of *mamma* is unusual also because it affects its agreement targets differently, and clearly triggers masculine agreement within the noun phrase, but not outside it (preferably). Thus, on close inspection, and given strict adherence to the classical agreement-based definition of gender, the Nordreisa example turns out to be in accord with the Agreement Hierarchy. To conclude, this noun exhibits three unusual properties. However, each unusual property individually has analogous counterparts in other languages, and in this sense the whole phenomenon conforms to established typological generalizations.

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