

# Gender in Koman Languages

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General information on Koman  
What is gender?

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# Koman languages



Figure 1 : Koman languages (map from Nations Online project)

## Koman languages

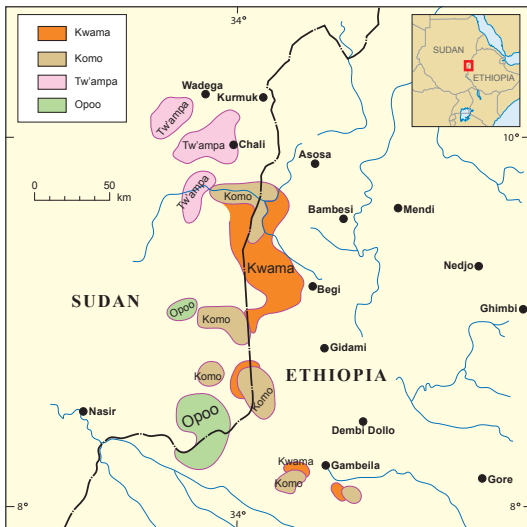


Figure 2 : Koman Languages (Blench unpublished)

## General information on Koman

- Group of four languages along the border of Sudan and Ethiopia
- Uduk [udu], Komo [xom], Opuo [lgn], Gwama [kmq]
- Possibly includes extinct Gule
- Linked with Nilo-Saharan by Greenberg (1963), Bender (1997), Ehret (2001), and Blench (2006)
- Shows some lexical similarity, but some prototypical grammatical features of NS are lacking
- More research needed to determine higher up classifications

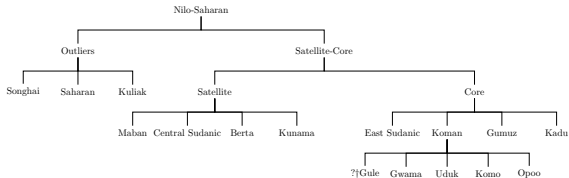


Figure 3 : Koman and Nilo-Saharan Languages (Bender 1997)

## General information on Koman

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- Earlier research very limited
- Includes unpublished manuscripts by Stevenson (1944) and Burns (1947) on Uduk and Komo, respectively
- Some general overviews also found in Tucker & Bryan (1956, 1966), and Bender (1983, 1985, 1994)
- Koman languages have seen more recent research activity, however
  - Gwama: Kievit (2012); current work by Anne-Christie Hellenthal, and by Justin & Joelle Goldberg
  - Komo: Manuel Otero (e.g. Otero 2012, 2015a, 2015b, etc.)
  - Opuo: Kebebw (2010), van Silfhout (2013), current work by Mellese Gelaneh
  - Uduk: Killian (2015a, 2015b)
- No research until recently has uncovered any signs of a grammatical gender system

# What is gender?

- Noun classification strategy (Di Garbo 2014)
- Reflected in behavior of associated words through indexation patterns (Di Garbo 2014)
- Pronouns also viable agreement targets (following terminology of Corbett 1991)
- The term ‘gender’ used in this presentation refers strictly to limited numbers of class distinctions
- Criteria for gender assignment more complicated question



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# Overview of gender in Koman

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- Gender systems exist in some form in all living Koman languages
- Agreement scope limited to verbs, as well as demonstratives in some languages
- Proto-language likely had three-way system with semantic principles of gender assignment
- Evidence suggests that current gender systems are old
- Highly grammaticalized, some erosion of semantic basis in assignment
- Synchronic connections with information structure and number
- Some languages show greater shift away from gender marking than others

# Pronominal gender in Koman

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- 3SG pronominal forms in most languages encode biological gender
- Use primarily semantic criteria of assignment
- Two- or three-way systems most common
- Verbs often use same agreement patterns with nouns as well as pronouns
- Uduk does not differentiate gender in pronouns

## 3SG Koman independent pronouns

f	Uduk ádī	Komo hàp'	Gwama hāp'	Opuo bā, ābá
m	ádī	hàr	ūhāj	ūtà, ārá
n	ádī	hìn		àn, án

## 3SG Koman bound pronominal forms

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	Uduk	Komo			Gwama		Opuo
	S/A	S/A	A	O	S/A	O	
f	-d'	-p'	-p'	-ap'	-á, -bí	-àp'	?
m	-d'	-r	-r	-ar	-ní	-è	?
n	-d'	-n	-n	-i, in		-à	?

## 3SG Koman bound pronominal forms

	Uduk	Komo			Gwama		Opuo
	S/A	S/A	A	O	S/A	O	
f	-d'	-p'	-p'	-ap'	-á, -bí	-àp'	?
m	-d'	-r	-r	-ar	-ní	-è	?
n	-d'	-n	-n	-i, in		-à	?

Gwama data from Joelle Goldberg (2015); Komo data from Otero (2015c)

## Example in Komo (Otero 2012)

- (1) *Àdòshār īf-ī-r*  
Adoshar sleep-ADØ-3SG.M

‘Adoshar is sleeping.’

- (2) *hàr īf-ī-r*  
3SG.M sleep-ADØ-3SG.M

‘He is sleeping.’

- (3) *īf-ī-r*  
sleep-ADØ-3SG.M

‘He is sleeping.’

## Komo and Gwama agreement (Otero p.c., Goldberg, p.c.)

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- (4) à = *bāmít*      *dū*      *tā-∅-p'-g-ák*      *yèn*  
ID.SG = woman    DEM.F    COP-AD∅-3SG.F-APPL-1SG.O    oil

'I (really) desire this woman! (lit .This woman is oil to me!)

- (5) *kíkìzì-tè*      *è-tū*  
man-DIST.M    3SG.M-tall

'That man is tall.'

- (6) *kíkjàt-tò*      *àp'-tū*  
woman-DIST.F    3SG.F-tall

'That woman is tall.'



# Nominal gender assignment

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- Nouns also are assigned grammatical gender in Koman languages
- Opuo and Gwama still use semantic criteria for gender assignment
  - Inherently masculine and feminine pronouns and nouns assigned as expected
  - Most nouns which are not inherently female assigned to M gender in Gwama (Justin Goldberg, p.c.)
  - Very small amount of irregular nouns (such as tortoise) take feminine agreement in Gwama (Justin Goldberg, p.c.)
  - Irregular nouns show signs of agreement erosion
  - Can also sometimes take masculine agreement patterns

## Gwama examples (Justin Goldberg, p.c.)

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- (7) *íní gùs-ní gùs*  
cow run-3SG.M.S RED

‘An ox ran.’

- (8) *k'ík'ìf gùs-á gùs*  
tortoise run-3SG.F.S RED

‘A tortoise ran.’

- (9) *k'ík'ìf gùs-ní gùs*  
tortoise run-3SG.M.S RED

‘A tortoise ran.’

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- **Komo** less rooted in biology than Opuo and Gwama
  - Human nouns still generally assigned as expected, but more signs of lexicalized forms
  - Morphology and phonology play more of a role
  - Frozen morphology can trigger agreement patterns
  - Some nouns require agreement patterns even without frozen morphological markers
  - N category used primarily for abstract concepts such as nominalized verb forms
  - Most inanimate objects use masculine forms
  - Sun and moon always take feminine agreement
- **Uduk** gender assignment opaque; appears largely arbitrary
  - Almost no phonological, morphological, or semantic criteria involved
  - All nouns assigned to either Class I ( $\emptyset$ ) or Class II ( $\grave{a} =$ )
  - Nouns much more rigid in class placement than in other Koman languages

## Some Komo nouns

Feminine	
bāgúlàlà	'yellow-bellied kite'
bāt'úrsá	'woodpecker'
bāk'āmáāk	'centipede'
bādíyè	'rainbow'
bābḍḍnk'ós	'frog'
té	'sun'
Masculine	
à = bár	'bird, sp.'
à = kíʃ	'antelope, sp.'
à = ó	'rain'

## Nominal proclitics

- Koman languages also make use of gender markers directly on nouns through nominal proclitics
- Vary in how much nominal proclitics are still rooted in coding biological gender
- From what is known, Opuo appears to still use semantic criteria for proclitics
- Gwama uses mixture of semantics and information structure
- Some forms still require further research
- Komo gender markers have largely shifted from marking gender to marking information structure (Manuel Otero, p.c.)
  - Do not encode biological gender
  - Feminine form largely lost; used only with female names and in some frozen lexicalized forms
- Uduk clitics hard to place or compare due to loss of semantics
- Do not encode biological gender, but do retain classificatory role as primary use of proclitics

## Koman nominal proclitics

	<b>Uduk</b>	<b>Komo</b>	<b>Gwama</b>	<b>Opuo</b>
<b>f</b>	à =, mǎ = ?	(bǎ =)	Ø, (ī = ?)	bǎ =
<b>m</b>	Ø, ā = ?	à =	ū =, (ā = ?)	ù =
<b>pl.</b>	(ī = ?)	gù =	mā =	bì =

## Gender and number interactions

- Koman nouns are generally unmarked for number
- No inherent singular or plural encoding for most nouns; interpretation depends on context
- Number-marking instead most commonly occurs at clause or phrasal level
- Can sometimes allow for more nuanced interpretations of number, such as general, dual, paucal, etc.
- Marked with nominal proclitics as well as in agreement patterns
- Uduk Associative plural  $\bar{i}$  requires Class 1 agreement patterns
- Uduk numeral classifiers may be connected to the gender system, but too little known as of yet

## Komo examples: Gender & Number (Otero p.c.)

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- (10) *mángà if-í-n*  
mango be.ripe-ADØ-3PL

‘The mangoes are ripe.’

- (11) *mángà if-í-r*  
mango be.ripe-ADØ-3SG.M

‘The mango is ripe.’



## Gwama examples: Gender & Number (Goldberg p.c.)

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(12) *dùlū è-tū*  
stick 3SG.M-tall

‘The stick is tall.’

(13) *dùlū à-tū*  
stick 3SG.N-tall

‘The sticks are tall (two or three or general).’

(14) *mā-dùlū ùn-tū*  
DEF.PL-stick 3PL-tall

‘The sticks are tall (many).’

## Gender and information structure

- Gender also interacts with information structure
- Primary synchronic use of  $\grave{a} =$  (historical M) and  $g\grave{u} =$  (plural) in Komo is for marking information structure
- Mark identifiable but less activated elements of the discourse (singular and plural, respectively) (Otero 2015)
- Gwama also uses  $\bar{u} =$  and  $m\bar{a}$  as definite markers (Justin Goldberg, p.c.)
- Uduk shows signs that  $\grave{a} =$  also has role in information structure
- Further importance of gender in Uduk for argument structure

## Uduk gender

- Nouns show gender agreement primarily with verbs, when functioning as O arguments
- No agreements with demonstratives or most modifiers
- Uduk's gender marking system has particularly strong basis in referent and argument tracking
- Primary distinction between marking of gender is not a difference in which particular markers are used
- Instead, Class II genders generally show overt marking in some way whereas Class I genders do not
- Accusative and the Associative cases show overt marking only for Class II nouns
- Use of the Accusative marker also requires cross-referencing of A
- Constructions with Class I O not only do not use overt marking for O, but inhibit cross referencing of A

## Uduk Examples

(15) *wàthí dhìth-ì'd à shō?*  
man sweep:PFV-3SG ACC.CL2 floor

‘The man swept the floor.’

(16) *wàthí dhìth gù'b*  
man sweep:PFV house

‘The man swept the house.’

(17) *áhā wǔ'c mā 'ká*  
1SG bite:PFV ERG.CL2 dog

‘The dog bit me.’

(18) *áhā wǔ'c ā á'dī*  
1SG bite:PFV ERG.CL1 3SG

‘It bit me.’

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- Dahl (2004) gives some reasons why reference tracking may not always justify grammatical gender distinctions, e.g.
  - reference tracking does not explain use of gender in NP-internal agreement
  - referential ambiguity between two referents that differ in animacy is unlikely
- **But!**
- Uduk does not show NP-internal agreement
- And semantic categories such as animacy are not a factor in gender assignment
- Constituent order frequently changes based on information structure
- Limited amount of cross-referencing of arguments on verb (Unlike Komo and Gwama)
- Suggests high correlation between IS and gender marking

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- Recent research shows all extant Koman languages to have gender-marking systems
- Gender marking shows heavy correlation with information structure in at least three of the four languages, possibly all four
- Number marking also connected in all four languages

## Conclusion

- Gender in Koman languages appears to be a remnant system of an earlier, more productive system
- More complicated and haphazard than it appears on the surface
- Assignment to particular classes can be particularly arbitrary
- Research raises a number of questions, such as:
  - How did Uduk lose semantic bases other languages show?
  - If gender is an old feature of Koman languages, what is the connection to Nilo-Saharan?



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Thanks!

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