

# Gender in Language Contact: Evidence from Faroese-Danish and Catalan-Spanish

*Kyn og málsamband – dæmi í føroyskum-donskum og katalanskum-sponskum*

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## Úrtak

Greinin snýr seg um kynstillutan í tveimum tvímæltum hópum. Í tí fyrra partinum av greinini verður hugt at føroyskum, og vit fara at vísa á, hvussu dansk lániorð hjálpa at gera av, hvat kyn er ómarkað, tí fleiri dansk orð, sum eru felagskyn skifta k yn til hvørkikyn í føroyskum enn øvugt. Seinni parturin er um kynstillutan í katalanskum arvorðum borið saman við spanskt, har málini bæði ikki hava sama kyn. Vit síggja, at ein brúkstendensur er í trimum aldursbókum (3-5, 19-23 and 32-40). Munurin er mest at síggja, har munur er á, hvussu nógv katalanskt verður lært í skúlunum.

## Abstract

This article deals with gender assignment in two different bilingual contexts. In the first part, we look at Faroese, and will show how Danish loanwords help us establishing default gender, as more Danish common gender nouns end up as neuter than neuter as common gender. The second part focuses on gender assignment in Catalan words that have lexical cognates in Spanish and which differ in gender in the two languages. It observes usage trends among three age groups (3-5, 19-23 and 32-40 years old) differing mainly in the degree of Catalan received at school. The speakers are from two districts of Barcelona (Gràcia and Nou Barris) differing in the presence and usage of Spanish.

## 1. Introduction

The goal of our investigation is twofold: (i) to show the status of borrowings when establishing the notion of default gender in a language and (ii) to look for possible trends in the use of lexical cognates with differing gender in the two languages involved in a language-contact situation. Thus, the issue of gender assignment is dealt with in both a theoretical – in the case of (i) – and a usage-based approach – in the case of (ii). We use data from Faroese-Danish language contact in order to find evidence for (i), and Catalan-Spanish language data in order to find evidence for (ii).

### 1.1. Arbitrary or rule-based gender assignment

Leonard Bloomfield wrote the following on gender in German, French and Latin:

There seems to be no practical criterion by which the gender of a noun in German, French, or Latin could be determined.

(Bloomfield, 1933:280).

Gender assignment is fully arbitrary, according to Bloomfield, and this was a view long upheld in the linguistic literature. More recent research on the matter in Indo-European, and also in other languages, has shown that gender assignment rules in different languages are rule based in that languages have a predominant either semantic, morphological or phonological assignment system; or there can be also a mixture between these principles. This has been incorporated into different linguistic theories, see for example Steinmetz (1985, 1986, 1997), Köpcke & Zubin (1984), Bittner (2000), Doleschal (2000), Leiss (2000), Trosterud (2001, 2006), Froschauer (2003), Nessel (2006), Rice (2006), among others.

With regard to French, as it is mentioned by Bloomfield above, and as gender assignment usually is taken to be totally arbitrary in that language, Mel'čuk (1958), (cf. Bidot, 1925), has shown that there are phonological assignment rules at work for “not less than 85 per cent of the frequently occurring nouns” (Corbett, 1999:57).

As for gender assignment in German, we refer to the work by scholars such as Köpcke (1982), Köpcke & Zubin (1984), Steinmetz (1985, 1986, 1997), Doleschal (2000). All these studies show that gender assignment is rule based, and the main assumption is that there is a hierarchy in gender assignment in that semantic assignment rules (SAR) take precedence over morphological assignment rules (MAR), which again take precedence over phonological assignment rules (PAR) (Corbett, 1999; Corbett & Fraser, 2000a, b). Al-

though such a formulation (SAR >> MAR >> PAR) might be too strong, given that for example Faroese *tjaldur* ‘oystercatcher’ is neuter even though names of birds are masculine or feminine, there is a certain core, which follows this principle:

#### **The Core Semantic Override Principle**

Rules referring to biological sex take precedence in gender assignment

(Nessel, 2006:18).

According to The Core Semantic Override Principle, gender follows sex for example in German: *der Mann*-m., *die Frau*-f. and *das Kind*-n. The same pattern is observed, for example, in Faroese, Icelandic and Old Norse: *mað(u)r*-m. ‘man’, *kona*-f. ‘woman’, *barn*-n. ‘child’; and Latin: *vir*-m., *femina*-f., but *liberi*-m.pl. (because masculine is default in Latin = here denoting ‘human beings of both sexes’).

Evidence in favor of a rule based approach to gender are that:

- (1) Native speakers typically make few mistakes,
- (2) borrowed words acquire a gender, which shows that there is a mechanism for assigning and not just remembering gender, and
- (3) when presented with invented words, speakers give them a gender and they do so with a high degree of consistency.

(Corbett, 1999: 7).

In addition to this, we note that there are very few changes of gender in language change, unless the whole system ‘breaks down’ (cf. English), with consequences for the whole morphological system of the language. A fourth evidence in favor of gender as rule based is the fact that children

acquire a complex system like gender pretty effortlessly.

As gender is so crucial for the morphology of a language – requiring agreement – the speaker and the child acquiring the gender system apply one main principle: *Preserve gender*, which would explain the very few gender changes between Old Norse and Faroese or Icelandic, and also why the gender of a borrowed word usually is preserved - if the speaker is more or less a balanced bilingual<sup>1</sup>. An interesting example is that where the speaker, a woman from the elder generation (70+), first uses common gender, corresponding to the Faroese masculine noun *sandur* ('sand, beach'); then she immediately corrects herself and uses the correct Danish gender, which is neuter:

- (1) og vi endte nede på **sanden, sandet** dér...  
and we ended up down on the beach-m./  
beach-n. there  
'And we ended up down on the beach over  
there'

(WO2V).

The rule with regard to Danish borrowings in Faroese is that Danish neuter nouns are neuter in Faroese, common gender nouns in Danish end up as either masculine or feminine, cf. also *opus*, which is neuter in Polish (and Latin), even though a word with a final consonant should be masculine (Kryk-Kastovsky, 2000: 734). Example (1) shows that the gender systems of a bilingual speaker are autonomous (Costa et al., 2003); this would indeed be expected in asymmetrical gender systems like Faroese and Danish.

The function of gender as a reference point for declensional classes is decisive for having two independent systems, and when the systems change they do so in certain steps, for example in Norwegian, where the change first was from neuter plural collective nouns to feminine singular collective, then masculine became used for *nomen agentis*, neuter as *nomen actiones*; masculine became also used to denote *abstracta*, neuter to denote *concreta*, ultimately ending up with common gender and neuter, Beito (1986).

In a parallel way to (1), bilingual speakers in Catalan and Spanish show confusion not with borrowings, but with cognates that differ in gender in one language and the other. For example, the Catalan word for road sign is *senyal*-m. whereas it is *señal*-f. in Spanish. It has been observed that bilingual speakers display confusion in gender assignment when they speak Catalan, and some display the confusion in their Spanish production too. The study presented in section 4 focuses on the Catalan production of cognates displaying such a mismatch.

In this study we will observe the choices as regards to gender when Catalan speakers use a set of cognate words that differ in gender in Catalan and Spanish. In this sense, Costa et al. (2003)'s study on the gender systems of bilingual speakers is relevant. They try to find evidence for or against the autonomy of the systems of both languages; the pairs of languages considered have structurally identical gender systems (i.e., Catalan-Spanish and French-Italian, with two genders in each of the languages of the language pair) and another pair is asym-

metrical in this respect (i.e., Croatian-Italian, Croatian having three genders and Italian only two). They compare the naming latencies of pictures whose names differ in gender with those whose names have the same gender in both languages. The results show that the naming latencies do not vary depending on the fact that the word pairs have different or the same gender in both languages, no matter whether both languages are structurally asymmetrical or identical. This leads to the conclusion that the gender systems of a bilingual speaker are autonomous, even when both languages are similar, as it is the case of Catalan and Spanish.

## 2. Gender in language contact

The aim of this paper is to observe how gender manifests itself in language contact. We will draw attention to two different language contact situations: one involves Faroese and Danish, and the other Catalan and Spanish. Specifically, for the first case we will take borrowings from Danish into Faroese into consideration. For the second language contact situation, we will observe the gender that Catalan speakers tend to use for cognate words that have different grammatical gender in Spanish and in Catalan.

### 2.1. Faroese: how borrowings can help establishing default gender

In entering a room, an Icelander would ask if *allir*-m.pl. have arrived, that is, masculine plural when referring to both sexes. A Faroese would use neuter plural *øll*.

Another evidence in favor of neuter as default in Faroese is the use of past par-

ticiples neuter when referring to both sexes opposite to masculine plural in Icelandic: (Far.) *brekað*-n.pl., ~ (Icl.) *fatlaðir*-m.pl. ‘handicapped’.

Faroese has three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter, whereas Danish has two: common gender and neuter. Common gender nouns in Danish are a merger of Old Danish masculine and feminine. One important principle noticeable in the Faroese-Danish language contact is that gender is preserved, so that Danish neuter nouns, not only cognates, are neuter in Faroese; and Danish common gender nouns are either masculine or feminine in Faroese.

We will use the data from Faroese-Danish to find further evidence in favor of a default neuter, assuming that cyclic derivations with one default gender are crucial in language processing and derivation (cf. Kiparsky’s (1982) and Anderson’s (1992) *Elsewhere Principle* or *Elsewhere Condition*, which has also been labelled *Panini’s Theorem* after the famous Indian grammarian).

The way we expect default to be represented in the borrowings is that (1) there are more changes from Danish common gender nouns to Faroese neuter or from Danish common gender and neuter nouns to neuter in Faroese, than (2) to the opposite gender: that is, changes from Danish neuter to masculine or feminine in Faroese. If we find more evidence in favor of (1) and there are not semantic, morphological nor phonological motivations behind the change, the only explanation is neuter as default.

### 2.2. Catalan: trends in gender usage

Both Catalan and Spanish have two genders

for substantives and adjectives: masculine and feminine (when talking about pronouns, also neuter should be considered). The usual gender markers for substantives in each language are the following ones (Lloret & Viaplana, 1998; Clua, 2003):

(1) **Catalan:**

<i>Masculine:</i>	-[Ø]	[ˈgat-Ø]	<i>cat</i>
<i>Feminine:</i>	-[ə]	[ˈkaz-ə]	<i>house</i>

**Spanish:**

<i>Masculine:</i>	-[o]	[ˈgat-o]	<i>cat</i>
<i>Feminine:</i>	-[a]	[ˈkas-a]	<i>house</i>

There is also a set of other gender markers for substantives which are not as usual as the previous ones:

## (2)

**Catalan:***Masculine:*

- [u] ([ˈamu], *owner*), -[ə] ([ˈdiə], *day*),
- [us] ([ˈtipus], *type*), -[i] ([biˈγoti], *moustache*),
- [is] ([ˈbrindis], *toast*), -[s] ([ˈfons], *bottom*)

*Feminine:*

- [u] ([ˈfotu], *photo*), -[us] ([ˈbenus], *Venus*),
- [i] ([ˈdɔzi], *dose*), -[is] ([ˈglɔtis], *glottis*),
- [s] ([ˈɛliks], *helix*), -[Ø] ([ˈkɔl], *cabbage*),

**Spanish:***Masculine:*

- [a] ([ˈdia], *day*), -[e] ([oˈβoe], *oboe*),
- [i] ([ˈtaksi], *taxi*), -[is] ([ˈbrindis], *toast*),
- [s] ([ˈtoraks], *thorax*), -[Ø] ([liˈmon], *lemon*)

*Feminine:*

- [o] ([soˈprano], *soprano*), -[e] ([ˈprole], *progeny*),
- [i] ([meˈtropol], *metropolis*), -[is] ([ˈdosis], *dose*),
- [Ø] ([ˈkruθ], *cross*)

In general, cognate words have the same gender in Catalan and Spanish: *casa-casa*, f. ‘house’, *paret-pared*, f. ‘wall’, *boca-boca*, f. ‘mouth’, *armari-armario*, m. ‘cupboard’, *peix-peç*, m. ‘fish’, *llapis-làpiz*, m. ‘pencil’, etc. However, in some cases, Catalan and Spanish cognates show different genders, for instance: *dent* (Cat.), m. - *diente* (Sp.), f. ‘tooth’. These cases normally correspond to words that in one and/or the other language take one of the more alternative gender markers presented in (2). Due to this fact and also to the contact language situation, when bilingual speakers face this different behavior in both languages may get influence from one or the other language and thus they may use the wrong gender, which is made apparent through the agreement with articles or adjectives.

The speakers of the present study belong to three different age groups (children, young adults and adults) in two different districts in Barcelona, differing in the amount of Spanish usage. Considering these six groups, we will see whether any kind of relationship can be established between the characteristics of the group of speakers and their behavior as regards to gender assignment in the case of such cognate words. And in a more general view, we will try and account for the speakers’ decisions considering semantic, morphological or phonological criteria.

### 2.3. Meeting point in the study of gender in Faroese and Catalan

Both studies presented in this article contribute differently to an explanation of gender assignment in a language contact situation.

While through the Faroese-Danish case we are trying to find out a more theoretical aspect of Faroese (i.e., to account for the default gender of the language through loanwords), the case of Catalan-Spanish looks for trends of usage among different groups of speakers and their corresponding linguistic explanation. The common point of both approaches is that they look for possible semantic, morphological or phonological patterns in gender assignment that could explain both the speakers' usage (for the case of Catalan) and the establishment of grammatical decisions (for the case of Faroese).

### 3. The Faroese study

The Faroese data builds on simplex nouns in the following two dictionaries: *Donsk-føroysk orðabók* (1995) (Danish-Faroese dictionary) and *Føroysk orðabók* (1998) (Faroese dictionary). The data from *Føroysk orðabók* was used to look into semantic, morphological and some phonological assignment rules in Faroese. This work was needed in order to understand the mechanism behind assignment in borrowings, which we found in the Danish-Faroese dictionary. Where there were doubts, we asked different people by sending them sentence examples via e-mail, but also by looking at the word in Google by simply wringing the 'WORD site:fo'. In some cases we used the collection of words in *Føroyamálsdeildin* (Department of Faroese, Fróðskaparsetur Føroya).

The following nouns are common gender in Danish, neuter in Faroese:

*afasi* 'aphasia', *alkohol* 'alcohol', *aktiv* 'active', *aorist* 'aorist', *antabus* 'antabuse', *baby* 'baby', *blits* 'flash', *boycott* 'boycott', *bonus* 'bonus', *brint* 'hydrogen', *buffe* 'sideboard', *butan* 'butane', *dativ* 'dative', *deodorant* 'deodorant', *ebonitt* 'ebonite', *fallitt* 'bankruptcy', *forbannilsí* 'curse', *forlovlísi* 'engagement', *forbrydlísi* 'crime', *fornermísi* 'insult', *fornýggísi* 'renewal', *forsinkísi* 'delay', *galopp* 'gallop', *garanti* 'guarantee', *ginn* 'gin', *grafitti* > 'graphite', *granitt* 'granite', *hekti* > 'hook', *herpes* 'herpes', *herts* 'hertz', *infinitiv* 'infinitive', *hobby* (*hobby-f.*) 'hobby', *judo* 'judo', *indikativ* 'indicative', *kaffi* 'coffee', *karat* 'carat', *kompliment* 'compliment', *krem* 'cream', *jogurt* 'yogurt', *luksus* 'luxury', *lockout* 'lockout', *metadon* 'methadone', *manna* 'manna', *moskus* 'musk', *melis* 'refined sugar', *neksus* 'nexus', *modell*<sup>2</sup> 'model', *nitroglyserin* 'nitroglycerine', *narkomani* 'drug addiction', *nugga* 'nougat', *notits* (*notits-f.*) 'note', *onani* 'masturbation', *paprika* 'paprika', *papyrus* 'papyrus', *pedofili* 'pedophilia', *pláss* 'place', *passiv* 'passive', *perno* 'pernod', *porno* 'porn', *poesi* (*poesiur-m.*, *poesi-f.*) 'poetry', *reggae* 'reggae', *pláss* 'place', *pynt* 'decoration', *sex* 'sex', *risalamang* 'ris a la mande', *silicon* 'silicone', *sement* 'concrete', *sjalusi* 'jealousy', *sirkumfleks* 'circumflex', *spiritus* 'spirits', *skepsis* 'skepticism', *suvenir* 'souvenir', *stripptis* 'striptease', *te* 'tea', *teyp* 'tape', *telefaks* 'telefax', *tekk* 'teak', *tennis* 'tennis', *teleks* 'telex', *terror* 'terrorism', *terpentin* 'white spirit', *ting* 'thing', *trend* (*trendur-m.*, *trend-f.*) 'trend', *tyfus* 'typhoid fever', *tubbak* 'tobacco', *upplívlísi* 'experience', *vígílsi* 'wedding', *urin* 'urine'.

Some of these nouns change gender due to semantic or morphological assignment rules. More specifically, one of these rule states that *alcoholic drinks are neuter*: *alkohol* 'alcohol', *ginn* 'gin', *perno* 'pernod', *spiritus* 'spirits'; *chemical elements and metals are neuter*: *brint* 'hydrogen', *butan*

‘butane’, *ebonitt* ‘ebonite’, *nitroglycerin* ‘nitroglycerine’ and *terpentín* ‘white spir-its’. One important semantic rule is that *beings of both sexes are neuter*, cf. *barn-n.* ‘child’, hence the change in *baby* from common gender to neuter. There is one more semantic rule observable in the data above: *Latin grammatical terms are neuter*: *aorist* ‘aorist’, *dativ* ‘dative’, *infinitiv* ‘infinitive’, *indikativ* ‘indicative’, *passiv* ‘passive’, *sirkumfleks* ‘circumflex’. These nouns do then have a semantically motivated change from Danish common gender to Faroese neuter.

In other cases it is possible to find morphologically motivated clues behind the gender change: *forbannilsi* ‘curse’, *forlov-ilsí* ‘engagement’, *forbrydilsí* ‘crime’, *for-nermilsi* ‘insult’, *fornýggilsí* ‘renewal’, *forsinkilsí* ‘delay’, *upplivilsí* ‘experience’, and *vígilsí* ‘wedding’, as the suffix *-ilsí* is associated with neuter.

In the *Donsk-føroysk Orðabók* (1995) there are 51 simplex Danish words with word final *-ment*, which are neuter, and only *cement* ‘concrete’, *kompliment* ‘compliment’, and *konsument* ‘consumer’ are common gender in Danish. The reason for the change of gender in Dan. *cement-cg.* > Far. *sement-n.* ‘concrete’, and Dan. *kompliment-cg.* > Far. *kompliment-n.* ‘compliment’ is obvious. The opposite is also obvious, that is, where common gender is preserved as masculine – more specifically, in Danish *konsument-cg.* to *konsumentur-m.* ‘consumer’ – there is a semantic rule: *persons are masculine* in Faroese (cf. other borrowings such as *kommunistur-m.* ‘communist’, *professari* ‘professor’, and native nouns such

as *einstaklingur* ‘person,’ and the historical change of Old Norse *persóna-f.* to *persónur-m.* ‘person’). Note also *sjúkrarøktar-frøðingur-m.* Lit.: sick-nursing-researcher = ‘nurse’.

The above changes are obvious and indisputable. Then we observe *nugga-n.* (Dan. *nougat-cg.*). Words with word final *-a* are, as a rule, feminine. There are 1,262 simplex Faroese feminine nouns with this suffix, 32 neuter<sup>3</sup> in *Føroysk Orðabók* (Faroese Dictionary) from 1997. The change of gender in *nugga* is suspect. If we look at simplex nouns with word final *-gg* with different nuclei vowels, the following picture emerges:

**Table 1**

Three words with word final *-egg* are masculine (*veggur* ‘wall’, *leggur* ‘calf’, *seggur* ‘man’). There are four neuter nouns with word final *-egg* (*egg* ‘egg’, *dregg* ‘grapnel’, *legg* ‘pleat’, *skegg* ‘beard’). There is one feminine word with *-ágg*, (*gágga* ‘whelk’), but there is no actual rule at play here, as *-ágg* and *-ogg* >are phonologically the same [ɔg:]. //// indicates that it is not possible to find any rule.

	i/y	e	ø	u	o	a/æ	á	ú	ó	ei	ey	oy	í/ý
gg	////	3,4	////	////	////	////	1	////	////	////	////	////	////
Gend.		m,n											

This could perhaps explain the change of gender in *nugga* ‘nougat,’ although we are inclined to take the change to be simply that neuter is default, especially since four words are too few to establish a rule, and they do not have *-u* as the nuclei vowel.

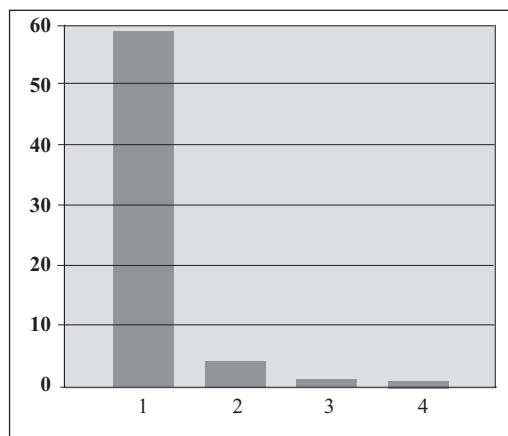
The ending *-o* in Danish common gender nouns is as a rule associated with feminine in Faroese, e.g. *konto-f.* ‘account’.

Strangely enough three words end up as neuter: *judo* ‘judo’, *porno* ‘porn’ and *radio* ‘radio’. Neuter in *porno* and *judo* can best be explained as a result of default gender, but it is possible that the semantic field *judo* belongs to has cased neuter; compare for example *borðtennis* ‘table-tennis’ and *badminton*. Another case of semantic analogy is perhaps in *buffe*-n. ‘side board’ (< Dan. *buffet*-cg. ‘side board’) in analogy to native *borð*-n. ‘table.’ A pretty clear case of semantic analogy is in *pláss*-n. ‘place,’ (Dan. *plads*-cg.) corresponding to the native noun *stað*-n. ‘place’.<sup>4</sup> The noun *urin* might have changed from common gender to neuter because of conceptual association with the native *piss*-n. ‘pee’.

Native *-us* words are associated with masculine: *gánu*s/*glanu*s/*kánu*s ‘person that stares’, *nemus* ‘person that has to touch everything’. *-us* in borrowings is, for instance, found in other nouns such as *bambus*/*bambusur* ‘bamboo’, and *syklus*/*syklusur*-m. ‘cycle’. In Danish there are neuter nouns ending in *-us* such as *genus* ‘gender’,

*korpus* ‘corpus’, and *kursus* ‘course’. But the change of gender in *antabus* ‘antabuse’, *bonus* ‘bonus’, *luksus* ‘luxury’, *moskus* ‘musk’, *papyrus* ‘papyrus’ and *tyfus* ‘typhoid fever’ is still strange. *Spiritus*-n. has changed gender due to the semantic assignment rule *alcohol is neuter*, and *papyrus* has changed gender due to a semantic analogy with *pappír*-n. ‘paper’.

There are 1,314 simplex masculine nouns with word final *-i* in Faroese in the nominative singular. Out of these, 53 are masculine as a result of the semantic assignment rule: *persons*  $\supset$  *m.*, like *granni* ‘neighbor’. Inherited neuter nouns with word final *-i* (as *kvæði* ‘ballad’) are close to 500, so one should not expect common gender nouns with word final *-i* to change to neuter based on these numbers alone. Still we find the following changes from common gender in Danish to neuter in Faroese: *afasi* ‘aphasia’, *garanti* ‘guarantee’, *grafitti* ‘graffiti’, *hekti* ‘hook’, *hobby* ‘hobby’<sup>5</sup>, *kaffi* ‘coffee’, *narkomani* ‘drug addiction’, *onani* ‘masturbation’, *pedofili* ‘pedophilia’, *poesi*



**Figure 1.** (1) Neuter and common gender in Dan., neuter in Far. (2) Neuter and common gender in Dan., masc. in Far. (3) Neuter and common gender in Dan., feminine in Far. (4) Neuter and common gender in Dan., all three genders in Far.

The figure shows, (1) how many nouns are neuter and common gender in Danish, and what gender the same words have in Faroese, that is neuter. Then there are a few nouns that are neuter and common gender in Danish, but end up as masculine in Faroese. (3) illustrates how many nouns are neuter and common gender in Danish and end up as feminine in Faroese. (4) shows the nouns that are neuter and common gender in Danish, and might have all three genders in Faroese. That is, they are in a transition period.



‘poetry’ (might be masculine *poesiur* and feminine also *poesi*), *reggae* ‘reggae’ *sjalusi* ‘jealousy’. There are neither semantic nor any morphological motivations behind the change.

### 3.1. Common or neuter in Danish, neuter in Faroese

Some nouns in Danish might have both common gender and neuter. Most of them end up as neuter in Faroese (Figure 1).

Note here the semantic rule *chemical elements and metals*  $\supset$  n., which will account for the gender of some of the nouns above. For example *anilin* ‘aniline’, *selluloid* ‘celluloid’, *karbid* ‘carbide’, *klor* ‘chlorine’, *naftalin* ‘naphtalene’, *natron* ‘soda’, *salpetur* ‘saltpetter’, *trotyl* ‘TNT’, *uran* ‘uranium’, but the other end up as neuter as a result of default.

If we look at the opposite situation, that is, how many Danish neuter nouns change to masculine or feminine in Faroese, we find the following nouns:

centner > sentnari- <i>m.</i> ‘hundredweight’	credo > kredda- <i>f.</i> ‘creed’
fýr > fýrur- <i>m.</i> ‘fireplace’	gardin > gardina- <i>f.</i> ‘curtain’
gelænder > gelendari- <i>m.</i> ‘banisters’	kabel > kápil- <i>m.</i> ‘cable’
register > registari- <i>m.</i> ‘register’	smykke > smúkka- <i>f.</i> ‘ornament’
spinet > spinett- <i>f.</i> ‘spinet’	

The change of *centner* to masculine *sentnari* ‘hundredweight’, *gelænder* to *gelendari-*m.** ‘banisters’ and *register* to *registari-*m.** is regular. The Danish ending is associated with the nomen agentis ending *-er* as

*løber-*m.** ‘runner’ ~ Faroese *renn-ar-i-*m.** ‘runner’. Also *-el*, in *kápil* ‘cable’, has a morphological explanation, cf. nouns in *-il* or *-ul* in Faroese as *stuðul-*m.** ‘support’.

As for *gardin* ‘curtain’, there are only two words ending in *-din* in Petersen’s database and both are feminine, *gardin-*f.** and *sardin-*f.** ‘sardine’.

The change of *spinet-*n.** to feminine *spinett-*f.** ‘spinet’ is in accordance with the semantic rule: *musical instruments*  $\supset$  *f.*, which belongs to the *Semantic Assignment Rules*.

It is not surprising that *smykke-*n.** changes to *smúkka-*f.**, if we look at the general tendency for nouns ending in *-e* in Danish to become feminine in Faroese.

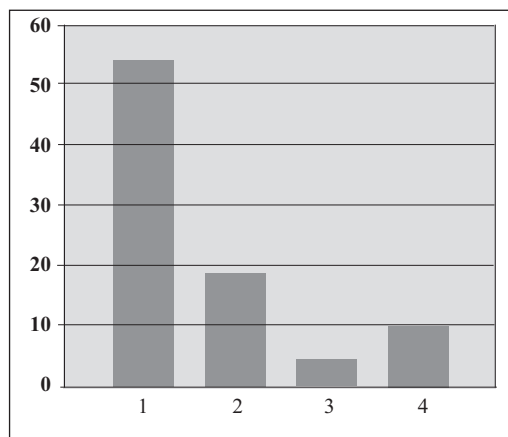
Neuter nouns ending in *-e* change their ending to *-i*: *bælte* > *belti* ‘belt’, *hæfte* > *hefti* ‘pamphlet’, *orgie* > *orgi* ‘orgy’, *rygte* > *rykti* ‘rumor’, *studie* > *studii* ‘study’; to *-a*: *dogme* > *dogma* ‘dogma’, *medie* > *media* ‘media’, or they preserve the Danish (or English) ending: *hardware*, *software*, *pate*, *resume*.

Given the data above, especially common gender > neuter and common gender/neuter > neuter, we conclude that there is evidence in borrowings for neuter as being the

default gender in Faroese.

## 4. The Catalan study

As described in 1.1., the Catalan study focuses on the production of Catalan words,



**Figure 4.** Figure 4 shows (1) nouns that are common gender in Danish, but are borrowed into Faroese as neuter. In this particular case there are no specific rules, semantic, morphological or phonological that might explain the change. The only explanation is that neuter is default. The numbers show how borrowings support other findings in the language. In (2) there is a semantic explanation of why the Danish common gender nouns end up, when borrowed, as neuter in Faroese. In (3) the motivation behind the change is semantic analogy and in (4) formal rules are responsible for the change of Danish common gender to neuter in Faroese.

which happen to be cognates with Spanish words but differ in gender in the two languages.

#### 4.1. Methodology

##### 4.1.1. Target words

A list of Catalan target words was devised, with cognates that differ in gender in Spanish and Catalan. The target words in the present test are the following:

**Table 3.** Target Catalan words and their Spanish cognates.

Catalan	Spanish	Gloss
front - m.	frente - f.	forehead
dent - f.	diente - m.	tooth
olor - f.	olor - m.	smell
dubte - m.	duda - f.	doubt
llum - m.	luz - f.	lamp
full - m.	hoja - f.	sheet (of paper)
sida - f.	sida - m.	AIDS
anàlisi - f.	análisis - m.	analysis
postres - f.	postre - m.	dessert
senyal - m.	señal - f.	sign

##### 4.1.2. Subjects

The subjects for this study belonged to 3 different generations in 2 different districts in Barcelona, namely Gràcia and Nou Barris:

- G1 (age: 3-5): 10 children in Gràcia (8 girls and 2 boys; mean age = 3.9) and Nou Barris (5 girls and 5 boys; mean age = 4.5).
- G2 (age: 19-23): 10 young adults in Gràcia (5 male and 5 female; mean age = 21) and 10 in Nou Barris (4 male and 6 female; mean age = 20.8).
- G3 (age: 32-40): The group of adults comprised one of the members of each parental unit of the children interviewed: 10 in Gràcia (9 female and 1 male; mean age = 36.4) and 10 in Nou Barris (6 female and 4 male; mean age = 37.1).

In the case of some words which do not belong to the child lexicon, we did not include G1 in the test, because the chances to obtain the word from them were too scarce. Therefore, the cases in which this was the case will be indicated in the results section.

#### 4.1.3. Equipment

The data were recorded with a Sony ECM-CS10 unidirectional lapel microphone, plugged into a portable Mini-Disc Hi-MD Walkman MZ-RH10 Sony recorder.

#### 4.1.4. Procedure

As the data reported here forms part of a larger study, data collection sessions lasted 45 minutes each, approximately, in which subjects were asked to perform different tasks. For the specific purpose of the current study, subjects were asked questions aimed at eliciting some of the cognates in the list above. Apart from being asked specific questions, subjects were also shown pictures of objects, which they were meant to describe, in which they could see objects in the list of target words.

### 4.2. Results

#### 4.2.1. First group: front - *m.*, dent - *f.*, olor - *m.*, dubte - *f.*

The words under study in this first group have in common that they are everyday words. They are, in principle, high frequency words as they include parts of the body and a word that has to do with the senses (i.e., *olor*). As for *dubte*, it is a more abstract noun but is still often used in everyday speech.

The original gender of these words in Latin is always kept in Spanish, but changes to the opposite gender in Catalan. Thus, Spanish follows the *Preserve gender* principle, but Catalan does not.

#### 4.2.1.1. front - *m.*, Spanish: frente - *f.*; 'forehead'

The Catalan word for 'forehead' comes from Latin *FRŌNS*, *FRŌNTIS*, *f.*, and the Catalan masculine gender is consistently used in most Catalan dialects. It is only kept as a feminine noun at the Northern and Western part of the Western dialect (Coromines, 1980).

Group	% of Catalan gender usage
G1 Gràcia	87.5
G1 Nou Barris	44.44
G2 Gràcia	100
G2 Nou Barris	90
G3 Gràcia	90.9
G3 Nou Barris	60

Table 4. *front*

The results show that Catalan speakers do not have a problem with the gender of these words overall. The only noticeable differences are those between G1 in Gràcia and Nou Barris, as well as in G3 in both districts.

The strong presence of Spanish in Nou Barris is made obvious in speech production patterns in the language of children and adults. Nevertheless, G2 shows ceiling effects in both districts. This could be due to the fact that these subjects have received Catalan education from the beginning. Hence, they have learnt the gender distinction from very early on, and that is why their production sticks to the standard regardless of the district they live in.

4.2.1.2. *dent - f., Spanish: diente - m.; 'tooth'*

Catalan *dent* comes from Latin DENS, DĒNTIS, m. Although the etymological word is masculine, it appears as feminine in Catalan from the very first occurrences in texts, in the 13<sup>th</sup> c. (Coromines, 1980).

Group	% of Catalan gender usage
G1 Gràcia100	
G1 Nou Barris	37.5
G2 Gràcia	91.66
G2 Nou Barris	90
G3 Gràcia	100
G3 Nou Barris	86.66

**Table 5.** *dent*

The production reaches ceiling effects across the board. The only group that does not stick to the standard is the group of children in Nou Barris. It looks as though the influence of the language of the environment plays a crucial role for this age group, which displays a major usage of the Spanish gender when they produce this Catalan noun.

4.2.1.3. *olor - f., Spanish: olor - m.; 'smell'*

Catalan *olor* comes from vulgar Latin OLOR, OLORIS, m. (from classical Latin, ODOR, ODŌRIS). It often appears as 'odor', in the learned version of the word, in the middle ages but it disappears after the 15<sup>th</sup> c. In Ramon Llull's works *olor* occurs already. The masculine gender is generally associated to Spanish influence and is rejected for this lexical item (Coromines, 1980).

Group	% of Catalan gender usage
G1 Gràcia	100
G1 Nou Barris	55.55
G2 Gràcia	100
G2 Nou Barris	100
G3 Gràcia	100
G3 Nou Barris	90

**Table 6.** *olor*

Again, the only group that shows a production with a large association of the Spanish gender when speaking Catalan is G1 in Nou Barris.

4.2.1.4. *dubte - m., Spanish: duda - f.; 'doubt'*

This word was not elicited from G1 informants due to its abstract nature and the unlikelihood for it to be part of the active lexicon of children. Therefore, only results of this word's production by G2 and G3 are reported here.

This is a deverbal noun, which comes from the Latin verb DŪBITARE. The closest noun in Latin is DUBITĀTIO, DUBITATIŌNIS, f.

Group	% of Catalan gender usage
G2 Gràcia	100
G2 Nou Barris	90
G3 Gràcia	90.9
G3 Nou Barris	72.72

**Table 7.** *dubte*

Results show ceiling effects across the board, with the lowest percentage of Catalan gender usage by G3 in Nou Barris. The

influence of Spanish in the environment might be playing a role here.

#### 4.2.1.4. Summary

The words in the present group do not constitute problems for Catalan speakers, with respect to their gender marking in Catalan. The children in Nou Barris are the speakers who show more confusion with respect to this. Perhaps they are at a developmental stage where they need more input in both languages to have a clearer idea of which gender to use in each language. Cognates present a further complication in the acquisition process, especially in districts where Spanish is highly active in the environment, because of their similar form in both languages. Hence, Spanish has a detrimental effect on the acquisition of Catalan gender in these cognate words in the Spanish-speaking district.

#### 4.2.2. Second group: *llum - m. and full - m.*

The words in the present group have in common that they are possible in both genders in Catalan although each gender is associated with a different meaning. Hence, *llum* means ‘light’ in feminine but ‘lamp’ in masculine. In turn, *fulla* (with the extra feminine morphological marker -a) means ‘leaf’ whereas the masculine form *full* refers to ‘sheet (of paper)’. It is important to mention that these two words come from neuter gender words in Latin.

##### 4.2.2.1. *llum - m., Spanish: luz - f.; ‘lamp’.*

This word comes from Latin LŪMEN,

LŪMĪNIS, n. Although neuter Latin words generally took the masculine gender in Catalan, *llum* showed a strong tendency to take the feminine gender, possibly due to the influence of LUCEM, f. However, the feminine eventually refers to ‘light’ whereas the masculine refers to ‘lamp’ (Coromines, 1980). Spanish only has one referent, which corresponds to the feminine Catalan form.

Group	% of Catalan gender usage
G1 Gràcia	12.5
G1 Nou Barris	0
G2 Gràcia	66.66
G2 Nou Barris	68.42
G3 Gràcia	65.21
G3 Nou Barris	79.16

Table 8. *llum*

The results are overall lower than those in the previous group. The specialization of gender might play a role in such a behavior. Children seem to be at a loss because, if cognates are difficult enough to acquire, when a word can be associated with any of the genders in a single language depending on the referent, the task is even harder. And in G1 Nou Barris, the influence of Spanish reinforcing the gender with a different meaning in Catalan does not help. Young adults and adults also show the problematic status in production of this lexical item.

##### 4.2.2.2. *full - m., Spanish: hoja - f.; ‘sheet (of paper)’.*

As mentioned above, the Latin word Cata-

lan *full* comes from its neuter: FÖLĪUM. In turn, the feminine word *fulla*, which refers to ‘leaf’, comes from the plural form of this word, i.e. FÖLĪA. It was originally used as a collective noun referring to all the leaves of a tree/bush, for example. Then, it adopted the singular meaning too, but semantically specialised to designate ‘leaf’ and not ‘sheet (of paper)’ (Coromines, 1980). This semantic association with specific genders parallels the case of Norwegian described in Beito (1986).

Group	% of Catalan gender usage
G1 Gràcia	30.76
G1 Nou Barris	62.5
G2 Gràcia	88.88
G2 Nou Barris	58.33
G3 Gràcia	70
G3 Nou Barris	61.53

Table 9. *full*

Here we see that most groups have problems with using the appropriate gender when designating a sheet of paper in Catalan. Strikingly, the children in Gràcia are those with more difficulties in producing *full* instead of *fulla*. This group is followed by G2 in Nou Barris, and then closely followed by G3 in Nou Barris and then G1 in Nou Barris. The two groups with production more in accordance with the standard are G2 and G3 in Gràcia. Thus, it looks as though the influence of Spanish is important because most groups that display problems in producing this Catalan word with the Catalan gender are those living in

the district with a higher usage of Spanish. The children in Gràcia also show difficulties in producing ‘llum’ with its appropriate gender when designating a lamp due to the polysemy of the word. Therefore, the problem might be developmental in the case of this group rather than caused by external factors.

#### 4.2.2.3. Summary

This second group seems to be more problematic than the first one due to the polysemy of the target words, be it in the same form or with slight modifications. It is clear that the acquisition of these polysemic cognates means a further complication for children. It constitutes a real handicap for bilingual children. However, it looks like it is a developmental stage they go through because older groups show better production levels, even though hardly any of them shows ceiling effects.

#### 4.2.3. Third group: *sida -f. and anàlisi -f.*

In this third case, we have grouped two words belonging to the semantic field of science together: ‘syndrome’ and ‘analysis’. This was one of the cases in which we did not try to elicit the words from the youngest group (G1), since the words are not part of the children’s lexicon. In fact, these are words not commonly used in everyday situations and often learned late at school. This means that adult speakers who have received education only in Spanish will have learned these scientific words in Spanish and, as they are cognate words, they will probably keep on using the Span-

ish gender even when they use the Catalan word. In the groups under study, the one which has not received education in Catalan – at least not since the beginning of their school years – is the third generation (G3). We predict thus that this will be the group which will use the Spanish gender the most.

4.2.3.1. *sida* - *f.*, Spanish: *sida* – *m.*; ‘AIDS’

This acronym stands for *síndrome d’immunodeficiència adquirida*. Thus, the gender of the word is given by the substantive *síndrome*. In Catalan it is feminine, whereas it is masculine in Spanish. The Catalan word preserves the original gender, since it was feminine in Greek: ἡ συνδρομή, which means ‘meeting, different things gathering together’. But in Catalan, as well as in Spanish, there are other words with phonologically similar suffixes: *-asme*, *-isme*, *-itme*: *sarcasme* (‘sarcasm’), *periodisme* (‘journalism’), *algoritme* (‘algorithm’). These words are always and in both languages masculine. Therefore, it seems that the case of the feminine gender for ‘syndrome’, and thus for ‘AIDS’, follows a non-expected direction for the Catalan speaker, leaving etymology aside. This may lead the speaker to confusion, which will be more apparent, the higher his/her usage of Spanish is.

Besides, the Catalan word for ‘AIDS’ is widely used in mass media, which in Catalonia are Spanish- or Catalan-speaking. In fact, Catalan-speaking media are relatively new, since Catalan was prohibited in public domains until the mid 1970s. From then on, Catalan normalization was led mainly

through media and education. And the effect of it falls for the most part on younger speakers and on the traditionally Catalan ones. Therefore, it is expectable that the youngest groups and/or those with a higher usage of Catalan in their district show the highest number of productions with the Catalan gender.

Group	% of Catalan gender usage
G2 Gràcia	62.50
G2 Nou Barris	72.72
G3 Gràcia	81.81
G3 Nou Barris	36.36

Table 10. *sida*

The most noticeable result is the low usage of the Catalan gender by G3 in Nou Barris, which correlates well with the prediction stated above. This is the group with less influence from the Catalan normalization, as they live in a mostly Spanish-speaking area, where mass media in Catalan have low audience indexes, and they have not received education in Catalan.

As for the effect of the education only in Spanish, which should influence the whole of G3 as predicted at the beginning of this section, here it seems that this effect is overridden by the effect of mass media. G3 in Gràcia is actually the group with the highest percentage of usage of the Catalan gender. They have not received formal education in Catalan, but nowadays they may be acquiring at least part of what they did not have the chance to learn at school through the Catalan-speaking mass media.

4.2.3.2. *anàlisi* - *f.*, *Spanish*:  
*análisis* - *m.*; ‘*analysis*’

Again, the Catalan word keeps the original gender from Greek: ἡ ἄνάλυσις was feminine and means ‘dissolution of a whole in its parts’. Strikingly, the Spanish gender follows a non-expected direction, since substantives ending in -V+si in Catalan and in -V+sis in Spanish are feminine: *paràlisi*, *diàlisi*, *hipòtesi*, *crisi*. Thus, a morphological rule should not allow confusion to arise.

Here we can apply only the prediction about the lack of schooling in Catalan, as this is not a word especially used in the mass media. Thus, the older generation will be the most likely to use the gender in Spanish, i.e., the masculine.

Before analysing the results, it has to be said that really clear productions were difficult to find due to the coincidence of the phonetic form of the substantive preceded by the masculine article and that preceded by the feminine one: *un\* anàlisi* (m.) and *una anàlisi* (f.) are both pronounced as [u.nə.ˈna.li.zi]; the same would happen with the definite article. A possible way to disambiguate the gender usage in the interviews was to try and elicit the word *un/una*, not as the indefinite article with the substantive, but alone as the numeral. Thus, for instance, after having produced [u.nə.ˈna.li.zi], a second question was posed: “And how many analyses does the doctor want to be made?”. However, the aim was not reached in all cases. So, here only the results of the clear answers are presented.

Group	% of Catalan gender usage
G2 Gràcia	33.33
G2 Nou Barris	57.14
G3 Gràcia	50.00
G3 Nou Barris	50.00

Table 11. *anàlisi*

The percentage of productions using the Catalan gender is in general lower than with the previous word *síndrome*. Thus, although the Catalan gender follows a more logical direction – as similar suffixes have the same gender and the noun keeps the original gender from Greek – the influence of Spanish overrides the Catalan morphological rule associated with the ending V +-si. And the effect of the mass media is clear in the case of *sida*, as referred to above, but not with *anàlisi*. The latter is a word not so commonly used in mass media, but in interpersonal situations, like between the doctor and the patient, where linguistic correctness is not so controlled.

If we look at the results for groups, the most striking fact is that G2 in Gràcia is the one with the lowest rate, which do not correlate with the schooling in Catalan nor with the dominance of this language in the district. On the contrary, G2 in Nou Barris has the highest rate. Thus, it seems that in the case of this word the effect of the education in Catalan is higher in the district with lower degree of Catalan usage.

4.2.4. *postres* - *f. pl.*, *Spanish*: *postre* -  
*m. sg.*; ‘*dessert*’

This is a word taken from Spanish, from an



expression like “fruta que se da a la postre en las comidas” (‘fruit which is given at the end of the meals’). Note that the gender in Spanish is also feminine, and sometimes it was used also with the plural feminine form, exactly like the actual Catalan form. However, in other Spanish texts it appears as masculine, already in 1490. The first written data of the Spanish word used in a Catalan text is from the 18<sup>th</sup> c. (Coromines, 1980). The Spanish substantive evolved towards the masculine singular form, while the Catalan one remained the same, i.e. feminine plural. There is reason to believe that during Catalan normativization, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., some decision about keeping the opposite gender from Spanish might have been taken. In fact, during some times there had been attempts to find a more genuine Catalan substantive (*clou-dinar* ‘close-lunch’, *llevant-de-taula* ‘clearing-of-table’, *darrerries* ‘at the end’), but no proposal had enough acceptance (Coromines, 1980).

As for the predictions about the degree of Catalan gender usage that we will find, it is clear that the word is mainly used in the context of a household, as well as in the daily activities at school. Therefore, although schooling in Catalan might have an effect, the most important influence will come from the family and their linguistic background, at least in the speakers with Catalan dominance.

Group	% of Catalan gender usage
G1 Gràcia	0
G1 Nou Barris	0
G2 Gràcia	22.22
G2 Nou Barris	54.54
G3 Gràcia	44.44
G3 Nou Barris	9.09

**Table 12.** *postres*

The clearest result comes from children: in both districts they always used the Spanish gender (and in some cases the Spanish singular form as well), although G3, their parents, show much higher rates, at least in Gràcia. This indicates that the correct gender in Catalan for this word is difficult to be acquired by children up to five years old.

As for the adults, G2 shows a non-expected result, since the group in the district with a lowest usage of Spanish (i.e., Gràcia) is the one with the lowest percentage of productions with the Catalan gender. This may be attributed to education in Catalan, in the sense that it may have a stronger effect in the district where the word is used the least in Catalan: if it is not normally used in Catalan, the young speakers have learnt the Catalan gender at school; if it is used in Catalan in the familiar context, it is used with the Spanish gender and education has no effect.

However, the results are reversed in the oldest generation, with Gràcia showing the highest rate. In this case the influence from the family language background and also from mass media in Catalan may be the factors at play.

This case, and especially the results of

G2, can be related to the fact that the Catalan word took the opposite gender from the original Spanish one. In general, there are few productions of the correct gender in Catalan, which reflect the lack of naturalness in the usage of the gender of *les postres* and therefore the idea that this attribution to the opposite gender (and also number) may have been decided as a way to create a linguistic norm of Catalan contrary to the Spanish entry in order to keep forms as different as possible. As we see from the results, though, this attempt would not be really working.

4.2.5. *senyal* - *m.*, *Spanish: señal* - *f.*;  
'*sign*'

The word comes from the Latin substantivized adjective *SIGNĀLIS*, which, in turn, comes from *SIGNUM*, neuter. In Spanish it took the feminine but, in most of the Romance languages form – in Portuguese, Italian, French – it evolved to the masculine form, and it is found with this gender even in some old Spanish texts (Coromines, 1980). However, the Catalan usage of the Spanish feminine gender is documented as a “non-accepted Spanish loanword from” both by Coromines (1980) and by Alcover & Moll (1930-1962).

In Catalan, substantives with the same ending (-al) are usually feminine: *catedral* ('cathedral'), *moral* ('morals' or 'morale'), *canal* ('channel'). They could be used by the speaker as analogy and would serve as influence, together with the Spanish gender of *la señal*, to produce the Catalan word with the feminine gender.

As a final remark on the grammatical

background of the word, it is worth pointing out that it is a quite highly polysemic word. It refers to 'mark', 'road sign', 'sign of the cross', 'beep' (like that of the telephone, for instance) and others. This fact implies that the word is used in several semantic fields, some of them belonging to contexts in which Spanish is a more usual language than Catalan. It is the case for instance of 'sign of the cross', which for many people was learnt in Spanish, since during Franco's times schooling was only in Spanish and religion was an essential part of education. In order to elicit the word, the picture of a road sign was shown. This was another word not tested among G1 due to the high probability of their early vocabulary not comprising it.

The coincidence of the phonological endings and the polysemic characteristics of the word may induce to the usage of the Spanish gender. The effect of education in Catalan, thus on G2, may have again an important role, since the wrong gender usage of the word is quite strongly corrected by the Catalan grammar syllabuses at secondary school.

Group	% of Catalan gender usage
G2 Gràcia	62.5
G2 Nou Barris	30
G3 Gràcia	41.66
G3 Nou Barris	28.57

**Table 13.** *senyal*

The highest percentage of productions with the Catalan gender comes from the group

of young adults (19-23 y.o.) in Gràcia, the district with the highest usage of Catalan of the study. Education in Catalan and the language of the environment do play a role in this case. Actually, the second factor seems to be the most influent one, since it works also with the oldest generation (G3).

The polysemic character of the word and the several contexts in which the word is used can also be observed from the results. The relative low percentage of the Catalan gender usage in both groups of G3 may reflect the old usage in Spanish of the referent 'sign of the cross'. Another context in which the word is mainly used in Spanish is that of traffic rules, since they are mainly codified in Spanish and learnt also in this language at the driving schools. This fact may cause the low results for G2, especially in Nou Barris, since many youngsters learn to drive at that age, and in this district with more presence of Spanish the chances to hear the word with the Catalan gender are lower than in Gràcia.

#### 4.3. Summary and discussion

The results have shown two different tendencies among the words studied. On the one hand, highly frequent and basic words (i.e., *olor*, *dent*, *front*) do not lead to confusion, in general. Only the group of children in Nou Barris shows percentages of the Catalan gender production below or around 50%. On the other hand, with the rest of the words speakers do show uncertainty in gender assignment to several degrees. The causes are diverse depending on each case. One factor we have seen that may lead to confusion is the polysemy of

the word, and specifically the fact of having different genders for different meanings (*llum*, *full*) within the same language. Another case that causes low percentages of the Catalan gender production, at least in some groups, is when the cognate words are more used or learned in Spanish than in Catalan (*síndrome*, *anàlisi*, *senyal*). Finally, with the word *postres*, we have seen that a possibly imposed Catalan grammatical norm might be responsible for the low usage of the correct gender of this word in Catalan.

The conclusion from Costa et al. (2003) related to the autonomy of the gender systems in the bilingual speakers can possibly account for the relatively high degree of correctness in the case of the first group of words. As for the rest of words, which do lead to confusion, other causes, mainly semantic and usage-related, make the speaker access the wrong gender system, in this case the Spanish instead of the Catalan one.

#### 5. Conclusion

We have shown that we can use the language-contact data in Faroese as evidence in favor of a neuter default. The general gender assignment process in which Danish common gender nouns go to either masculine or feminine in Faroese borrowings shows exceptions. In the cases where common gender nouns in Danish end up as neuter in Faroese, and there are no morphological, phonological or semantic rules to account for them, the only possible explanation is to have neuter as the default, which is supported by other parts of gram-

mar, where neuter is also the default, as the change of *allir* -m. pl. ‘all’ to *øll* - n.pl.

As for the language-contact study of Catalan, basic words in the lexicon (i.e., *front*, *dent* and *olor*) do not represent a problem for Catalan speakers, although these words have a differing gender in Spanish. When confusion in gender usage arises, it can be mainly attributed to two different factors along the Spanish influence: semantic rules related to polysemy, as in the cases of *llum*, *full* and *senyal*; and the fact that the word is more often learnt in a Spanish-related context (e.g. *sida*, *anàlisi*).

The two studies in the present paper are consistent with Costa et al. (2003)’s findings, that is: the speaker uses the particular gender system of the language he/she speaks when in that language mode. The errors found in structurally asymmetric gender systems such as Faroese and Danish are few, even in cognates, and when changes are found in borrowings as those presented above, they are motivated by the selected language (Faroese). The production of Catalan basic lexical items without incurring in gender confusion might provide further evidence for the autonomy of the gender systems in bilinguals of structurally similar languages.

### Acknowledgements

This study has been carried out as part of the research projects "K8: Variance in multilingualism on the Faroe Islands" and "H6: Phonoprosodic development of Catalan in its current bilingual context" at the Collaborative Research Center for Multilingualism. We are indebted to the Center and its sponsors, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Science Foundation) and the University of Hamburg for their

support. For the Catalan part of the study, we want to express our most sincere gratitude to M. Rosa Lloret, who gave us inspiring suggestions during her stay at our Center. We would also like to thank Laura Batalla, Laia Puig and Anna Schreiber for their essential help with the transcription of the data. Finally, our most sincere gratitude to the schools, children and parents who kindly accepted to participate in the study, which without their collaboration would not have been possible.

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## Notes

- 1 It is not a universal principle, however, as studies have shown, that formal assignment may take precedence over the principle: *Preserve gender* (Corbett 1999:70ff).
- 2 When referring to a human, the noun is feminine *ein modell* 'a model'.
- 3 There are only three masculine nouns (two actually) with word final *-a*, *babba*, *pabba* 'father' and *harra* 'sir.' Note that this speaks in favor of SAR >> MAR >> PAR as *-a* should be associated with the feminine or neuter, as in native *kona*-f. 'woman' and native *eyga*-n. 'eye'.
- 4 An anonymous reviewer has pointed out that in his/her language *bufte* is feminine. That is a possibility. I think it is neuter, so the noun is, as seen, in a transition period.
- 5 This noun is in a transition period. All three genders are found.