



Why Languages Have Masculine and Feminine Words

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What Does 'Grammatical Gender' Mean?

Many languages around the world give **nouns** (words for things) a **gender**. This doesn't mean the thing is actually male or female—it's just a grammar rule. In **French**, the word for 'table' is feminine, and the word for 'chair' is masculine. In **Spanish**, 'moon' is feminine and 'sun' is masculine. In **German**, there are even three genders!

Each gender comes with its own set of rules about which **articles** (words like 'the' or 'a') and **adjectives** (describing words) you use. This is why learning languages can feel tricky—you don't just learn words, you learn their 'gender tag' too.

Think of it like: sorting toys into boxes. Each toy doesn't become boy or girl, but once it's in the 'blue box' or 'pink box', it follows different rules about how you use it.

Where Did Grammatical Gender Come From?

Thousands of years ago, **Proto-Indo-European**—an ancient language that most European languages descended from—had grammatical genders. These early languages used gender partly to help people remember and organise words. Over time, this system stayed in many languages but vanished in others.

English used to have grammatical gender too! Old English had three genders, just like modern German. But over **about 500 years**, English speakers gradually stopped using gender markers. Today, we barely notice it—we just say 'the' for everything.

Why Do Some Languages Keep It?

Languages like **French**, **Spanish**, **Italian**, and **German** kept their gender systems because they're passed down through families and schools. Once a system is baked into a language, it's hard to change. The words rhyme differently, the sounds fit together differently, and native speakers just expect it.

Think of it like: a family tradition. Even if it seems strange to outsiders, families keep doing it because that's how they've always done it.

Is It Useful?

Gender can actually help you predict word endings and remember vocabulary better—but it also makes learning a language more challenging for beginners. It's not really 'useful' or 'useless'—it's just part of how that language evolved.

The good news? If you're learning a language with gender, the patterns make sense once you practise. And **English speakers** have it easier than many—we left our gender system behind!