THE PROBLEM OF BODY PARTS AND NOUN CLASS MEMBERSHIP IN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES.

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'You are not your buttocks'.
Advertising slogan for Kaz Cooke's book 'Real Gorgeous'

1. INTRODUCTION.

If you are not your buttocks, what gender are they? Languages with gender systems face a dilemma when marking the gender of body parts and other inalienables like 'name' or 'spirit'. Do they choose the gender of the possessor of the body part (the *inherited gender*), so that we get forms like 'he-buttock', 'she-buttock' etc.? Or does the body part have an *intrinsic gender*, giving forms like 'it-buttock'?[1]

A variety of complex compromises are also available. A language may manage to mark both genders, giving forms like 'it-he-buttock'. Or it may mark the inherited gender on the body part noun, but let the body part's intrinsic gender appear on agreeing adjectives, giving forms like 'he-buttock it-large' for 'his large buttock'. Or, perhaps most commonly, it may vacillate between inherited-gender and intrinsic-gender strategies, depending on the noun involved, or on the degree to which it is seen as a separate entity from its possessor.

Unfortunately this problem is not treated systematically in most grammars and dictionaries of Australian languages, and it is often difficult to recover the relevant information. Partly this is because of the lack of a clear logical framework for describing the phenomenon.

In this brief paper I shall give examples of each of the above strategies from several Australian languages with noun classes; my aim is to exemplify each logical possibility rather than to give a complete survey. In representing gender (more commonly called noun class in the Australianist literature, but I follow Corbett (1991) in seeing noun class as a special case where there just happen to be a large set of genders) I use roman numerals for those languages, such as Nungali, Burarra, Mayali and Umbugarla, with typical Australian four-gender systems: I = masculine, II = feminine, III = vegetable, IV = neuter; I use V for the arboreal gender in Maung. For Nunggubuyu and Yanyuwa, with their larger set of genders, I adopt the terms used by the primary source.

2. BODY PARTS TAKE INTRINSIC GENDER.

Mayali (at least the Gun-djeihmi and Kunwinjku dialects) is a clear case of this: all body parts are in either the neuter or the vegetable genders. Full descriptions of the semantics of this choice are in Evans (1991, 1995, to appear); the default is the neuter gender but some nouns for genitals and excretions take the vegetable gender (a pattern that is widespread in Australian languages). Some examples are[2]: *kun-mim* 'eye', *kun-kodj* 'head', *kun-denge* 'foot', *kun-keb* 'nose', *kun-berd* 'tail', all with the neuter prefix, as opposed to *man-berd* 'penis', *man-barle* 'vagina', *man-dile* 'urine', *man-duk* 'sperm'.

The gender marked on the body part is unaffected by that of its possessor; in (1), for example, 'name' retains its neuter prefix rather than taking a feminine prefix in agreement with its possessor (which would be the strategy in Maung, for example).

(1)   *bi-wo-ng*   *kornkumo kun-ngey/ *ngal-ngey Kurlumirridj*
        3/3PST-give-PstPerf   father   IV-name   II-name
        'Her father gave her the name Kurlumirridj.'

The question of what semantic factors influence the choice of intrinsic gender for body parts is beyond the scope of this paper; for some discussion of the rationale for anomalous assignments of body part nouns to masculine and feminine see Harvey (to appear) and Walsh (to appear).

3. BODY PARTS TAKE INHERITED GENDER.

Yanyuwa (Kirton 1971) has seven genders (female, male, feminine, masculine, food, arboreal and abstract), marked by prefix on the head noun and on such modifiers as demonstratives; only in the female dialect is the distinction between female (i.e. human) and feminine (i.e. other female) and between male (i.e. human) and masculine maintained (Kirton 1988). Examples are *rra-bardibardi* 'old woman' (female), *nya-malbu* 'old man' (male), *a-rnangantha* 'emu' (feminine), *ø-julaki* 'bird' (masculine), *ma-bujuwa* 'lilyroot' (food), *na-lungundu* 'bark shelter' (arboreal), *narnu-yuwa* 'law' (abstract).

Two types of noun behave in an exceptional way. Body parts have no inherent gender, but take prefixes showing the person, number and gender of the whole, e.g. *nda-ngurru* 'your nose', *ngali-nganthal* 'our (dual inclusive) tongue', *niwa-marnda* 'his foot, feet (of male class)', *ni-yirra* 'its (masculine) skin', *nu-wulaya* 'its head, fruit (food class)', *nanu-mulu* 'its mouth (arboreal class), e:g. a cave', *ni-wimbi* 'its (masc.) bee, i.e. the bee of the masculine hive'[1]. Note that the prefixed forms are morphologically most similar to the absolutive rather than the possessive free pronouns, so the structure is 'he-foot' rather than 'his-foot', parallelling a very general pattern for body-part possession in Australian languages to be treated as an appositional rather than a genitival relationship; it is for this reason that I prefer to speak of 'gender inheritance' rather than possessor marking.

Modifiers of body-part nouns also inherit the gender of the whole, but take the normal gender prefix form rather than the special form found on the part noun.[2] An example with 'name' from Kirton (1971:13), using the female dialect which shows prefix classes more explicitly, is:

(2)   (a)   *nya-ganymarda niya-wini*   (b)   *rra-mangaji nanda-wini*
                male-two   his-name   female-that her-name
                'his two names'   'that name of hers'

Kin terms also behave exceptionally: unlike body parts, they do have an intrinsic gender (though some cross-classify between male and female), but they follow a double-marking strategy (see below) whereby they mark both the inherent gender of the noun, and the gender of the possessor, as with *ny-anku-nya-wangu* [male-her-male-spouse] 'her husband', *rr-iku-rra-wangu* [female-his-female-spouse] 'his wife'.

The Yanyuwa type, in which no body parts have intrinsic gender, is quite rare. Tiwi, with two noun classes, shows gender by agreement on the numerals 'two' and 'three', as well as suffixes on some nouns themselves. (Osborne 1974) In general, body part nouns take the gender of their possessor, except that genitals take the gender of the opposite sex; Yallop (1982:102) commenting on this cites Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians 7.4: "The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife".[3] The Tiwi example, though, is less clear than one would like because of the lack of further alternative classes from which parts could be assigned an intrinsic gender, though one could argue that it would be possible to assign them a gender on the basis of 'intrinsic' characteristics such as size (a salient semantic dimension in the Tiwi gender systems) rather than the inherited characteristic of the gender of their possessor. Interestingly, the Tiwi system appears to be changing towards an intrinsic gender system, since Lee (1987) in her description of young people's Tiwi points out that most body parts in young people's varieties are masculine, regardless of the gender of their possessor.

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[1] This example illustrates an interesting extension of part-whole semantics: the hive is treated as the whole, being masculine or feminine according to the shape of the entrance, and the bee is treated as the part.

[2] The only exception to this is the noun *-rakuku* 'penis', which follows a domino pattern (see below): the noun itself takes a prefix for the gender of the possessor, but governs food-class agreement on modifiers (Kirton 1971:58).

[3] Bolwell (1994: 47) points out that this principle applies to a few other nouns as well: digging sticks (a women's item) belong to the masculine class, for example.

4. BOTH GENDERS REPRESENTED ON THE BODY PART NOUN.

A clear example of a language that marks both intrinsic and inherited gender on body-parts is Nungali (Bolt, Hoddinott &Kofod 67-8), where at least some body parts may take prefixes for both inherited and intrinsic genders. (Many other body parts do not mark gender on the head itself so double marking cannot arise).

In Nungali there is a syntactic contrast between possessed body parts and alienable possessions. In cases of alienable possession the possessed noun appears in the absolutive, with a prefix showing its own gender, and the possessor appears with a portmanteau prefix for gender and possession (3a, 4a). In cases of inalienable possession (3b, 4b) the possessor appears in the absolutive, while the possessed body part takes an inner prefix showing the gender of the possessor preceded by an outer prefix showing the gender of the part (Bolt et al 70)[1]:

(3a) nu-ŋulud   g-uŋunin
      IV-camp   IPOSS-man
      'the man's camp'

(3b) ni-ya-manga d-uŋunin
      IV-I-ear   IABS-man
      'the man's ear'

(4a) d-urib   gaɲi-ŋaruŋ
      I-dog   IIPOSS-woman
      'the woman's dog'

(4b) ni-na-wa   ɲa-ŋaru[2]
      IV-II-foot IIABS-woman
      'the woman's foot'

Double marking is limited to the body part noun itself, since adjectives only agree with the intrinsic gender, not the inherited gender:

(5a) mi-nad mi-ya-ŋargin
      III-big III-I-eye
      'big eye (of man)'

(5b) mi-nad mi-na-ŋargin
      III-big III-II-eye
      'big eye (of woman)'

Within Bolt et al's data the examples of this phenomenon are limited to masculine vs feminine inherited gender, and vegetable (III) and neuter (IV) intrinsic gender. Some of their examples (Bolt, Hoddinott & Kofod 67-8) are repeated here:

ni-ya-mburu	'his head'	ni-na-mburu	'her head'
ni-ya-nuŋguru	'his hand'	ni-na-nuŋguru	'her hand'
ni-ya-lgud	'his leg'	ni-na-lgud	'her leg'
ni-ya-manga	'his ear'	ni-na-manga	'her ear'
IV-I-X		IV-II-X	
mi-ya-ŋargin	'his eye'	mi-ya-ŋargin	'her eye'
mi-ya-luwal	'his knee'	mi-na-luwal	'her knee'
III-I-X		III-II-X	

In Nungali the inherited gender appears as the inner prefix and the intrinsic gender as the outer prefix. Logically, one would also expect cases where the order is reversed, and this a marginal example of this (with one layer involving clitics rather than affixes) is found in another East Kimberley language, Kija (McConvell p.c.). There, body parts normally take a gender suffix showing intrinsic gender, e.g. *therla-m* 'back' (neuter); this may then add the locative clitic indicating the gender of the part, e.g. *therla-m=mi* 'his back'. As an alternative and more marked strategy, the suffix may show inherited rather than intrinsic gender, e.g. *therla-ny* '(male's) back', *therla-l* '(female's) back'.

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[1] In all Nungali examples the interlinear glosses are mine, based on my reading of Bolt et al's analysis, which only gives the Nungali and the translation. I retain their orthography.

[2] No reason is given in the source for the lack of final N here; it may be a misprint or transcription error.

A third example, again from the Kimberleys, of a language using a double-marking strategy is Unggumi (McGregor to appear), in which some body part terms take a prefix for the person, number and gender of their possessor, and a suffix which represents the intrinsic gender of the part: *nga-mana-ngga* (1sg-hand-W class) 'my hand', *ngi-mana-ngga* (2sg-hand-W class) 'your hand', *yi-mana-ngga* (Y class-hand-W class) 'his hand'. (Y is basically masculine, NY feminine, and M and W are neuter class). Modifiers agree with the intrinsic gender represented by the suffix, so that *-mana* 'hand' belongs to the W class, and governs W-class demonstratives.

5. DOMINO SYSTEMS.

By a domino system I refer to a system of percolation whereby the body part noun is marked for inherited gender, but governs agreement on modifiers according to its intrinsic gender. Umbugarla (Davies 1989, on the basis of field notes by Breen) is such a language:

(6)   marŋmu   kw-arik   kiɲ-miɽa
        wife   IV-bad   II-back
        'My wife's got a sore back.' [GB, A, 105]

(7)   kiɲ-jamark   kw-arik
        II-teeth   IV-bad
        '(a woman's) bad teeth' [GB, A, 103]

A logical possibility not reported in Australian languages, to my knowledge, would involve the gender of the whole leapfrogging the part noun and appearing on its modifiers, while the part noun marks it own intrinsic gender, in a construction like 'woman it-teeth she-bad'.[1]

6. MIXED STRATEGIES.

Perhaps the commonest situation is for languages to mix inherited-gender and intrinsic-gender strategies according to the particular noun, and to an extent, according to the prominence and individuation of the part within the discourse. I exemplify with three languages: Maung, Nunggubuyu and Gun-Nartpa.

6.1. *Maung.*

Maung (Capell & Hinch 1970)[2] is famous for the possibilities some body-part roots show for cross-classification, giving sets like:

(8)   *i-ngijalk*   'human body (male)' or 'his body'
        niny-ngijalk   'human body (female)' or 'her body'
        u-ngijalk   'sea', 'body' of a neuter object,
                           e.g. *wuburrk ungijalk* 'body of night, midnight'
        ma-ngijalk   'fruit'
        a-kijalk[3]   'yam, grain or vegetable body'

Although English translations here make the function of these gender shifts look like derivations effected by change in noun class, Capell & Hinch's state that '[s]ome noun roots possess in themselves only a general meaning, connected with some common idea... they are capable of assuming the prefixes of various classes and thus taking the special meaning attached to that class'. This suggests we are dealing with rather general part-noun meanings which inherit the class of their possessor; the semantics of each gender provides a domain (human, plant, earth) within which we identify the corresponding part.

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[1] I am grateful to Mark Cerin for bringing this possibility to my attention.
[2] In citing Maung examples I use the current practical orthography (as per Hewitt 1990), and in numbering genders I use the standard north Australian numbers (converting to Capell & Hinch's system as follows: C&H I = I, II = II, III = 3pl, IV = IV, V = III, VI = V).
[3] Arboreal class nouns with prefixal aw- induce hardening of root-initial nasals and glides followed by loss of w; the derivation is thus %aw ngijalk% > %aw kijalk% > akijalk

This analysis of these terms as involving inherited gender is supported by the occurrence in Hewitt's unpublished dictionary of Maung of body part nouns prefixed for person and number, e.g. *ngangijalk* 'my body' and *wingijalk* 'their bodies', showing that the prefixes are part of a more general pattern of category inheritance for person, number and gender.

Alongside nouns like *-ngijalk*, whose gender appears[1] to always be inherited, are part nouns that Capell & Hinch treat as belonging to specific genders, such as *ngaralk* 'tongue' (class IV), *murlu* 'nose' (class III) and *algij* 'liver' (class V). None of these take prefixes showing inherited gender; the discussion in Capell & Hinch implies they govern agreement in their intrinsic class.

A third category are nouns like *-wari* 'a sore' and *-wiya* 'hair'. These take prefixes agreeing with their possessor, but are identified as belonging to particular classes by Capell & Hinch; the two just mentioned are said to be in the *wu-* class. Capell & Hinch's description has no clear example of how this works, but the cited phrase *da nga-wiya* [IV:DEM 1-hair] for 'my hair' suggests the intrinsic gender of such nouns manifests itself through the selection of an appropriate gender for the article; extrapolation from these examples suggests that 'his hair' would be translated as *nuga iwiya* [IV-that I-hair] lit. 'that (class IV) him-hair'. If this proves to be the case, these nouns then follow the 'domino pattern' described above for Umbugarla, at least for determiners; however, adjectives inherit the gender, person and number of the possessor (Capell & Hinch 1970:62).

Maung, then, exhibits three patterns according to the body-part lexeme: some have inherited gender, manifested as prefix to the noun, some have intrinsic gender, manifested as agreement, while others inherit gender as prefix while governing an intrinsic gender on modifiers such as articles.

6.2. Nunggubuyu.

In Nunggubuyu, most body part nouns have an intrinsic gender which they will govern (and, in most cases, also receive head-class marking for it). For example, *gulmung* 'belly' is in the so-called MANA class, and will receive appropriate forms of MANA prefix, such as *ama-gulmun-duj* 'in the belly' [MANA:PUNC-belly-LOC] (Text 7.9.6[2]) and *mana-gulmuny-jinyung* [MANA-belly-GEN] 'the belly area' (Text 109.3.4) when the possessor is backgrounded (which may be because the body part has become detached, as in the latter example, dealing with butchering stingrays, but not always – the former example comes from a text about Emu swallowing stones and ending up with them sitting 'in her belly'.

However, when being linked in discourse with a possessor, most Nunggubuyu body-part nouns forsake their own intrinsic gender and undergo what Heath (1984:173) calls 'whole-to-part noun-class harmony': they take an inner 'NC$_{der}$ prefix' (short for 'derivational noun class' and also an outer, inflectional noun class prefix (which has portmanteaux with case), both agreeing with the 'whole' in class; for a masculine possessor this would give forms such as

(9)   *na-ni-ngu-gulmung*
        'belly' [NAclass(inflectional:continuous)-NAclass(NC$_{der}$)-LIG-belly]
        'his belly'

(10)   *yi:-ni-ngu-gulmung-guy*
        [NAclass(inflectional:punctual)-NAclass(NC$_{der}$)-LIG-belly-ALLATIVE   /DATIVE]
        'to/in his belly'

Interestingly, for most nouns the intrinsic gender construction is used when the possessor is human, but the inherited gender construction is used 'when designating corresponding parts of objects and plants (and sometimes animals)' (ibid:173); an exception with human parts is with 'subparts' (such as 'roof of the mouth'), which inherit the gender of the more inclusive body part.

A few nouns extend the inherited gender construction to human possessors also; an example is 'name'. Sometimes the inherited gender construction, when used with human possessors,

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[1] Unfortunately the discussion in Capell & Hinch's grammar is not sufficiently explicit on this point; careful further research on Maung is needed here.

has a different nuance, as with *ngagara* 'bones', which means 'skeleton' when showing 'whole-to-part harmony' with human possessors.

A few nouns, which Heath calls 'defective (bound) roots', can never be used as 'simple noun stems' – in other words, they cannot appear without overt gender marking, even in the citation form. Of these, some will always get their gender by inheritance from the possessor; an example is *-lhag-* 'end, tip'. Others, such as *-lhangaj-* 'entrails' and *-lhawal-* 'splinter, thorn' have intrinsic gender – respectively MANA and ANA$_{wu}$ in these two cases.

6.3. Gun-nartpa and Gurr-goni.

Gun-nartpa (Carew in prep.) and Gurr-goni (Green in prep.), along with other members of the Maningrida family such as Ndjébbana (see McKay in press), have a number of grammatical constructions involving body parts. Some body parts appear as a sort of inert (uninflected) noun together with a stance verb agreeing in gender with the whole (e.g. *mernda a-jirra* 'his arm, lit. arm he-stands' *mernda jiny-jirra* 'her arm, lit. arm she-stands', *mernda mu-jirra* 'its branch, lit. arm VEG-stands', memda gu-jirra 'arm of a creek, lit. arm NEUT-stands'). Others, which concern us here, appear as a regular noun taking the gender prefix of their possessor, e.g. *an-birlirla* 'liver (of class I possessor)'.

A third strategy used with some body part nouns is for them to take an intrinsic gender; many genital terms take vegetable class prefixes, for example. Sometimes the same root allows both inherited gender selection (with one sense) or intrinsic gender selection (with another sense), leading to ambiguity in certain genders. Thus the root *-malirra* 'skin' can take gender prefixes for the possessor, as with the masculine *an-malirra* 'his skin' (of a man, or another masculine class), *jin-malirra* 'her skin' (of a woman or other feminine class noun) but *mun-malirra* which can either follow the inherited-class strategy and mean 'its skin (of a vegetable class noun)' or the intrinsic-class strategy and mean 'skin of the groin area'.

In the closely related Gurr-goni, there are two types of construction involving a stance verb with body parts. In one, found with about 28 body part terms, the stance verb agrees in gender with the whole; an example is 'foot, track':

(11) *woku   dji-djerre   dji-na-ni*   *batgaw*
       foot   she-stands   3/her-see-PRECONTEMP   cow
       'He saw the tracks of a cow.'

In the other, found with a group of nouns that includes body parts involved in excretion and reproduction, the part governs an intrinsic gender on the stance verb: masculine for 'vagina' and neuter for 'anus':

(12) *ngar   ngutjuyu   a-djerra*
       mouth   to.her   he-stands
       'her vagina'

(13) *mibilu   nuyu   gi-djerre*
       eye   to.him   it-stands
       'his anus'.

As with Gun-nartpa, a number of polysemous roots distinguish related senses through the choice between inherited and intrinsic gender agreement:

(14) *ngar   arr-djerre*   *ngar   ngarrku   a-djerre*
       mouth   we-stand   mouth   our   he-stands
       'our mouth'   'our vagina'

(15) *nguw   a-djerre*   *nguw   nuyu   gi-djerre*
       bottom he-stands   bottom   his   it-stands
       'his bottom'   'his arsehole'

7. CONCLUSION.

The choice of strategy for assigning gender to body parts has a number of implications.

Firstly, both dictionaries and grammars need to be more explicit about their criteria for determining the gender of part nouns, and include systematic examples of full noun phrases, rather than just isolated nouns; without this it is difficult to assess the status of many listed lexemes.

Secondly, the interaction and possible conflict of different principles within a noun phrase may create complex rules of gender resolution, and it is likely that more detailed studies of languages like Maung could reveal interesting patterns that have so far escaped attention.

Thirdly, a number of questions arise regarding the semantics of the choice between intrinsic and inherited gender marking in those languages which mix systems. Is there a pattern to which nouns inherit gender, and which have an intrinsic gender? (Relevant here is the related discussion by McGregor (1995) on which Nyulnyul nouns take possessor prefixes, and which don't.) Is the Nunggubuyu pattern, whereby inherited gender strategies are more common when the 'whole' is inanimate, typical or anomalous? How far do languages employ the choice to signal that a part is physically detached, or salient (intrinsic gender) vs attached or less salient than the whole (inherited gender)? These questions rarely receive a thorough treatment in existing descriptions.

Finally, shifts between strategies may have important diachronic repercussions.   The loss of gender in the Gunwinyguan languages Dalabon and Rembarrnga seems likely to have been triggered by a shift in part-nouns from intrinsic gender, as still preserved in central and western dialects of Mayali, to an inherited strategy; however, since the suffixed possessor markers did not encode gender the contrast was lost. We can see this process at work in the Dalabon-influenced Kuney, an eastern dialect of Mayali, in which there is free variation between the strategy of prefixing an intrinsic gender prefix (cf *kun-mim* [IV-eye] 'eye', *man-mim* [III-eye] 'fruit, seed') and the strategy of suffixing a third-person possessor marker that doesn't show gender, resulting in the loss of gender distinctions for part-nouns: *mim-no* [eye-3rd person possessor] 'eye; fruit'. For fuller details see Evans (to appear).

The reverse shift in strategy seems to have occurred in Iwaidja (Evans in prep.), where it appears that nouns which once followed the original strategy of inheriting gender (as in the closely related Maung) changed to an intrinsic gender strategy involving the miscellaneous class, as with the shift from a form like *i-mawurr* [he-arm], as found in Maung and Ilgarr, to a miscellaneous form like *a-bawurr* [it-arm], which has the specific meaning 'tendril' in Maung (through inheritance of the miscellaneous gender, appropriate to yams and other such plants) but has broadened to mean 'arm' generally in its Iwaidja reflex *bawurr*.

These are just the most obvious shifts, involving the wholesale replacement of one strategy with another. Given the number of languages with complex mixed strategies, it seems likely that more subtle changes, involving choices of strategy at the lexeme level, have occurred again and again in the history of these languages, and the unravelling of these shifts will be a necessary step for a full understanding of the historical morphology of gender in Australian languages.

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