A few remarks on gender in Martinican Creole*

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Abstract This paper argues that, besides natural gender which it has long possessed, Martinican Creole (MQ) is developing the category of grammatical gender. Evidence for this claim is adduced from the so-called marker of semantic definiteness LA- described in Zribi-Hertz & Jean-Louis (2014). Based on the previously unnoticed fact that this marker has two more allomorphs, viz. *lè-* and *li-*), and that its realization depends on the gender of the French cognate of the root it associates with, I argue that LA- is in fact the spell-out of a variant of *n* which bears the features [-SORTAL] and [±FEM]. I propose that, owing to its contact with French, MQ is undergoing a process of feature recombination which affects the inventory of its *n*s and whose outcome may be the introduction of grammatical gender. The absence of grammatical gender agreement on other categories suggests that the process remains incomplete.

1 Introduction

It is commonly claimed that the expression of gender is reduced to its bare minimum in creole languages (e.g. Holm 1990, 2000; Bakker 2003). Many creole languages simply do not have gender, and where it exists, it is generally limited to natural gender,[1] and even where natural gender is marked, it tends to apply to a rather restricted set of nouns (Holm 1990, 2000; Baxter 2010). Similar claims have been made about French creoles in general (Neumann-Holzschuh 2006), and Martinican Creole (MQ) in particular (Bernabé 1994; Zribi-Hertz & Jean-Louis 2014).

However, a closer look at LA-, the MQ proclitic marker of semantic definiteness described in Zribi-Hertz & Jean-Louis (2014), suggests that these claims should be reconsidered. This marker, it turns out, may also be realized as *lè-* or *li-* when it combines with a root whose French etymon is masculine. If the root has a French feminine etymon, it is instead spelled out as *la-*. Crucially, this holds for both human and non-human individual concepts. One could then hastily conclude that MQ possesses grammatical gender, but non-human individual concepts do not trigger gender agreement on other grammatical categories. This standard diagnostic (Corbett 1991; Kramer 2015) militates against the existence of grammatical gender in MQ. How can we reconcile these apparently conflicting facts?

The solution which I proposed to this paradox is that the so-called marker of semantic definiteness should be reanalyzed as the spell-out of a certain flavor of the categorizing head, *n*, which some scholars have identified as the locus of gender (e.g. Kihm 2005; Kramer 2015). On this view, the aforementioned pattern may be attributed to a process of feature recombination (Aboh 2015) licensed by widespread French-MQ bilingualism. I thus conjecture that MQ may be on its way to developing grammatical gender, *n* being the first target of this process.

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1 For instance, both Berbice Dutch (Kouwenberg 2013)) and Sranan (Winford & Plag 2013) are said to lack gender altogether. On the other hand, Cape Verdean Creole (Baptista 2002) and Malacca Creole Portuguese (Baxter 2010) possess natural gender.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the expression of natural gender in MQ. Section 3 takes a closer look at the so-called marker of definiteness and reveals the previously unnoticed fact that its morphological realization depends in a systematic fashion on the gender of the French etymon of the root it combines with. Section 4 then offers an analysis which relies on the featural properties of *n*. Next, section 5 rejects the view that MQ already possesses grammatical gender but conjectures that it may be on its way to developing that category. Finally, section 6 concludes the paper.

2   Natural gender in Martinican Creole

The morphological expression of gender in MQ is relatively restricted, and the consensus is that the language does not have grammatical gender (Bernabé 1994; Neumann-Holzschuh 2006; Zribi-Hertz & Jean-Louis 2014). Gender marking is therefore be limited to natural gender, and even this is subject to severe restrictions. The set of nouns and adjectives which distinguish between a masculine and a feminine form represents a rather small subset of these lexical categories (Bernabé 1994; Neumann-Holzschuh 2006). Examples of such nouns are provided in Table 1.

Masculine	Feminine	
kwafè	*kwafez*	'hairdresser'
profésè	*profésez*	'teacher/professor'
mantè	*mantez*	'liar'
chantè	*chantez*	singer
enstitité	*enstititris*	'teacher'
agrikiltè	*agrikiltris*	'farmer'
aktè	*aktris*	'actor'
met	*métres*	'teacher'
chaben	*chabin*	'light-skinned person'

Table 1   Examples of nouns whose form is sensitive to natural gender

Given the relatively low frequency of such alternations, one may question the relation between masculine and feminine forms. Are they both stored as morphologically non-decomposable units in the lexicon? Or are they instead derived from one another in some way to be determined?

In Haitian Creole (HC) where a similar pattern obtains, DeGraff (2001) argues for a morphological process which relates feminine to masculine forms, notably on the grounds that some HC feminine forms do not have a French equivalent. The same argument can be made *mutatis mutandis* about MQ. Take the form *pwofésez* 'female teacher' mentioned by Bernabé (1994); its French etymon should be the unattested **professeuse*. An even stronger argument is that the morphological process which underlies the formation of similar feminine forms is rather productive, as illustrated in (1). The arguably novel form *vonmisez* may be used to designate a woman with a habit of vomiting. It is thus reasonable to posit that MQ has a bound morpheme *-z* which expones a [+FEM] feature.

(1)   Ou sé   an vonmisez, ti   mafi. Ou ka   yen ki   vonmi toulong.
       2SG COP a *vonmisez* little girl   2SG IMPF just COMP vomit all the time

       'You are a vomitter, my dear. All you do is vomit all the time.'

As noted by Bernabé (1994), bound morphology is not the only means of forming feminine nouns. Compounding is also possible. For instance, *fanm* 'woman' may be used as the first term in NN compounds to designate female practitioners of a given occupation. Hence, the compound *fanm-doktè* '(lit.) woman-doctor'.

Incidentally, the above facts show that in MQ the expression of natural gender is limited to human-denoting nouns. Bound morphology does not distinguish between male and female individuals of non-human animal species. NN compounds are the only way to express such a distinction. For instance, one may oppose *mal-mouton* 'male sheep' to *fimel-mouton* 'female sheep' (see Bernabé 1994: for other types of compounds).

Of course, the above alternations do not suffice to establish the existence of natural gender in MC. The real evidence comes from adjectives, as this is the only category which distinguishes between masculine and feminine forms. Recall, however, that such adjectives are a rather small minority. Table 2 offers a few examples, some of which come from Bernabé (1994) and others from Confiant (2007).

Masculine	Feminine	
fou	*fol*	'crazy'
visié	*visiez*	'vicious'
bondaliè	*bondaliez*	'callipygous'
éré	*érez*	'happy'
eskandalè	*eskandalez*	'scandalous'
fwansé	*fwansez*	'French'
grenché	*grenchez*	'grumpy'
japonnè	*japonnez*	'Japanese'
manipilatè	*manipilatris*	'manipulative'
meksitjen	*meksitjèn*	'Mexican'

Table 2   Examples of adjectives which are sensitive to natural gender

The concord patterns illustrated in (2) confirm that natural gender does not extend beyond nouns which denote human beings. The ungrammaticality of (2b) and (2c) thus stems from the fact that the noun which the attributive adjective modifies denotes a non-human animal and an inanimate, respectively. In contrast, in the well-formed (2a) the noun which the adjective modifies denotes human entities.

(2)　a.　an fanm　japonnez/*japonné
　　　　　a　woman Japanese.F/Japanese.M
　　　　　'a Japanese woman'

　　　b.　* an fimel-chien japonnez/*japonné
　　　　　a　female-dog Japanese.F/Japanese.M
　　　　　'a Japanese female dog'

　　　c.　* an loto japonnez/*japonné[2]
　　　　　a　car　Japanese.F/Japanese.M
　　　　　'a Japanese car'

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2 The noun *loto* 'car' was chosen because its French eytmon *auto* is feminine. Given the fact that the vast majority of MQ speakers also speak French (Bernabé 2004), one might expect that they would assign feminine gender to *loto*. This obviously does not obtain.

It should be noted that these observations carry over to the case of adjectival predicates.[3] For illustration, consider the facts in (3), which parallels (2). Here again, the conclusion must be that adjectives will match the gender of only human-denoting nouns.

(3)   a.   Fanm lan té japonnez
              woman DEF PST Japanese.F
              'The woman was Japanese.'

       b.   * Fimel-chien an té japonnez
              female-dog DEF PST Japanese.F
              'The female dog was Japanese.'

       c.   * Loto a té japonnez
              car DEF PST Japanese.F
              'The car was Japanese.'

Thus, gender concord between a noun and an adjective obtains only if the noun bears a [+HUMAN] feature. Gender distinctions are therefore irrelevant for all other nouns. This puts MQ on a par with, e.g., Malaccca Portuguese Creole (Baxter 2010). The ungrammaticality of the (b) and (c) examples in (2) and (3) further suggests that the masculine form is the default.

     More evidence for the relevance of a [+HUMAN] feature in gender concord can be adduced from proper nouns and common nouns, i.e. nouns which use a single form to denote both male and female entities. Provided they denote a human being, both types of nouns will be matched in gender by the adjectives, predicative and attributive. Consider (4) and (5).

(4)   a.   Max té éré/*érez di wè yich li
           Max PST happy.M/happy.F of see child 3SG
           'Max was happy to see his child.'

       b.   Sandra té érez/*éré di wè yich li
           Sandra PST happy.F/happy.M of see child 3SG
           'Sandra was happy to see her child.'

(5)   a.   Nonm tala sé an artis japoné/*japonez
           man DEM COP a artist Japanese.M/Japanese.F
           'This man is a Japanese artist.'

       b.   Fanm tala sé an artis japonez/*japoné
           woman DEM COP a artist Japanese.F/Japanese.M
           'This woman is a Japanese artist.'

The masculine proper noun in (4a) is matched with the masculine form of the predicative adjective, while the feminine proper noun in (4b) is matched with the feminine form. Likewise, the common noun *artis* 'artist' triggers masculine agreement when its referent is a man, as in (5a), and feminine agreement when it is a woman, as in (5b). Agreement being the defining criterion of gender (Corbett 1991; Kramer 2015),[4] we may safely draw the conclusion that [+HUMAN] nouns are either [+FEM] and [-FEM] depending on the biological sex of their referent, even when the [±FEM] feature has no morphological reflex.

     In summary, this section has confirmed that MQ has natural gender (Bernabé 1994; Neumann-Holzschuh 2006) and that its expression is limited to [+HUMAN] nouns. All other nouns are

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3 The predicative status of the adjectives is evidenced in the fact that they are preceded by the past tense marker *té*.

4 See Kihm (2005) for a different view.

seemingly insensitive to gender distinctions, as reflected by the absence of agreement on adjectives. The evidence adduced thus far suggests, then, that the type of agreement observed falls under the category of semantic agreement and that grammatical gender does not exist in MQ. The latter point, however, is challenged by the data presented in the next section.

3 Grammatical gender in Martinican Creole: evidence from the marker of semantic definiteness?

Zribi-Hertz & Jean-Louis (2014) (henceforth, ZH&JL) argue that MQ distinguishes two markers of definiteness: the enclitic LA marker marks pragmatic definiteness while the proclitic LA- does semantic definiteness.[5] The latter marker is particularly interesting as it participates in noun alternations between a short and a long form. As illustrated in (6a), the short form denotes a sortal concept, while the long form does an individual concept, as in (6b).[6]

(6) a. Pwof ta'a   kòmèt anlo enjistis
       teacher DEM-DEF commit a.lot injustice

       'This professor committed a lot of injustices (was unfair in many situations).'

    b. Lenjistis sé   an bagay tout moun rayi
       injustice COP a   thing everybody hate

       'Injustice is something everybody hates.'
       Adapted from Zribi-Hertz & Jean-Louis (2014: 282)

Based on the data provided by ZH&JL, it would appear that this marker is subject to phonologically conditioned allomorphy, since it is spelled out as *la* before a consonant or as *l-* before a vowel. Hence, the data in (7).

(7) a. **la-**plaj
       LA-beach
       'The beach'
    b. **la-**lwa
       LA-law
       'The Law'
    c. **l-**enjistis
       LA-injustice
       'Injustice'
    d. **l-**istwa
       LA-history
       'History'

The marker surfaces as *la-* before the consonant-initial roots in (7a) and (7b), and as *l-* before the vowel-initial roots in (7c) and (7d). Describing this marker, ZH&JL (277) state that

> [...] *l(a)-* is historically derived from the French proclitic definite singular article spelt out *le*, *la* or *l'*, depending on gender specification and the phonological context. Although inflectional gender is absent from creole, the French article has entered the creole lexicon by attaching to a number of lexical roots.

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5 I shall follow ZH&JL in distinguishing individual concepts by writing them with an initial capital in the translations.

6 I refer the reader to Löbner (1985, 2011) for an exposé of the theory of definiteness which underlies their analysis.

The origin of this marker does not require further discussion, but the issue of "inflectional gender" (i.e. grammatical gender) calls for deeper scrutiny. As a matter of fact, all the nouns ZH&JL offer as examples are either vowel-initial or derived from French feminine nouns. Consider again the data in (7). In (7a) and (7b), *plaj* and *lwa* are historically related to French *plage* 'beach' and *loi* 'law', both of which are feminine. In (7c) and (7d), *enjistis* and *istwa* are vowel-initial and related respectively to the French feminine nouns *injustice* 'injustice' and *histoire* 'story/history'. ZH&JL do, however, also mention *lesklaval* 'slavery', whose root, *esklavaj*, is derived from the French vowel-initial masculine noun *esclavage* 'slavery'. Crucially, missing from their dataset are roots historically related to French consonant-initial masculine nouns. This gap, I will now argue, obscures two significant facts.

First, contrary to ZH&JL's claim, the marker of semantic definiteness is not limited in its realization to *la* or *l-*. Observe the data in (8), taken from Confiant (2007).The marker spells out as *li-* in (8a) and as *lè* in (8b). Neither *la-* nor *l-* would be compatible with the roots in either example.

(8) a. **li-**wa
         LA-king
         'the King'

     b. **lè-**pap
         LA-pope
         'the Pope'

The root in (8a)is related to the French consonant-initial masculine noun *roi* 'king'. In (8b), it is related to *pape* 'pope'. Crucially, in both examples we are dealing with individual concepts, as reflected in the presence the so-called marker of semantic definiteness. This is confirmed in (9), which shows that the related sortal concepts are incompatible with the so-called marker of semantic definiteness (which I shall continue to refer to as LA- for the sake of convenience).

(9) a. Pé pa ni dé **(*li-)**wa
         can NEG have two LA-king
         'There cannot be two kings.'

     b. Pé pa ni dé **(*lè-)**pap
         can NEG have two LA-pope
         'There cannot be two popes.'

It is therefore reasonable to assume that *li-* and *lè-* are both realizations of the marker of semantic definiteness. However, these clearly cannot be said to be the result of phonologically conditioned allomorphy. Take the individual concepts in (10).

(10) a. **la-**pasians
          LA-patience
          'patience'

      b. **la-**wont
          LA-shame
          'shame'

These examples readily show that the realization of the marker is not conditioned by any of the following factors: syllable structure, mono- vs. polysyllabicity, initial segment quality. The roots in (9a) and (10b) share the same initial segment, yet differ in which allomorph of LA- attaches

to them. The same goes for (9b) and (10a). Furthermore, while the roots in (9) and in (10b) are all monosyllabic, again, they differ in the realization of LA-. Phonologically conditioned allomorphy, then, does not suffice to account for the form of the marker of semantic definiteness.

Gender must therefore be given consideration as a possible conditioning factor. When LA- precedes a root that is historically derived from a French consonant-initial masculine noun, it is spelled out as either *li-* or *lè-* and it is likely that both forms are historically derived from the French masculine definite article *le*. This begs the question of whether there is a difference between these forms. Pending further investigation, the best answer I can offer the reader is that *li-* appears to be an older form restricted in its distribution to a select set of roots such as *wa* 'king' and *mè* 'mayor'. On the other hand, *lè-* seems to be a more recent form, somewhat phonologically closer to its French etymon and with a larger distribution. This difference in distribution incidentally raises the question of whether these forms are involved in productive morphological processes.

To support the view that they are, I would like to adduce the additional facts in (11) and (12).

(11) a. *(**Lè-**)monn ka   pati tjou pou tet
          LA-world   IMPF leave upside down
          'The world is going crazy.'

     b. Man té   ké simié viv adan an lot   (***lè-**)monn
          1SG PST IRR prefer live in   a   other LA-world
          'I would have preferred to live in another world.'

(12) a. *(**Lè-**)travay enpòtan   pou **la**-dignité
          LA-work   important for LA-dignity
          'Work is important to one's sense of dignity.'

     b. Jan ni   an nouvo (***lè-**)travay
          John have a   new   LA-work
          'John has got a new job.'

Again, a straightforward explanation is found in the fact *monn* 'world' and *travay* 'work' are derived from the French masculine nouns, *monde* and *travail*, respectively.

Now, it would make little sense to link the realization of the so-called marker of semantic definiteness to the gender of a noun in another language. It would be as though MQ grammar had no autonomous existence of its own. A more promising alternative, then, is to consider that the realization of LA- is dictated by gender distinctions inherent to MQ. Let us consider whether this hypothesis resists deeper scrutiny.

If MQ does indeed possess grammatical gender, one would expect to find evidence of it in agreement-like phenomena. Recall that agreement is the standard diagnosis of gender (Corbett 1991; Kramer 2015). On this view, we are led to reject the existence of grammatical gender in MQ. Recall (2c) and (3c), reproduced here as (11a) and (11b), respectively. It was established through these examples that agreement in MQ obtains only with nouns that denote [+HUMAN] entities.

(13) a. * an loto japonez
          a   car Japanese.F
          'a Japanese car'

     b. * Loto a   té   japonez
          car   DEF PST Japanese.F
          'The car was Japanese,'

The very same can be said of LA-marked nouns. Regardless of the actual realization of LA- (and thus the gender of the French etymon of the root), agreement fails to obtain when the individual concept is [-HUMAN]. This is illustrated in (14).

(14) a. **Lè-**monn ka   vini   two visié/*visiez
          LA-world IMPF come too vicious.M/vicious.F

          'The world is becoming too vicious.'

      b. **La-**lwa ka   vini   two visié/*visiez   pou lé   maléré
          LA-law IMPF come too vicious.M/*vicious.F for   DEF destitute

          'The Law is becoming too vicious for the destitute.'

In (14a) and (14b) the predicative adjective[7] surfaces in its default masculine form. This is especially significant in (14b) where *loi* 'law', the French etymon of the root, is a feminine noun. We must therefore conclude that, beside LA-, there is no evidence for the existence of grammatical gender in MQ. In other words, LA-marked nouns do not diverge from other nouns in that respect.

Of course, when LA-marked nouns denote [+HUMAN] entities, semantic agreement obtains, as evidenced in (15).

(15) a. **Lè-**pap té   éré/*érez   di wè yo
          LA-pope PST happy.M/happy.F of see 3PL

          'The Pope was happy to see them.'

      b. **La-**rèn té   érez/*éré   di wè yo
          LA-queen PST happy.F/happy.M of see 3PL

          'The Queen was happy to see them.'

The patterns in (14) and (15) are consistent with our earlier observations that MQ has natural gender but lacks grammatical gender.

It is nonetheless rather puzzling that the realization of LA- should be dictated by the gender of the French etymon of the root for both human or non-human individual concepts. Take, for instance, (14a) and (15a). In both examples, the root has a French masculine etymon and LA- is then realized as *lè-*. Similarly, in (14b) and (15b), where the the root has a French feminine etymon, it is spelled out as *la-*. Agreement facts, on the other hand, militate against the existence of grammatical gender. This paradox is addressed in section 5, where I argue that ongoing changes in MQ grammar are responsible for this perplexing state of affairs. Before that, I offer an analysis of MQ gender which recasts LA- as the spell-out of *n*.

4   Gender in MQ: an account based on the featural properties of *n*

In section 3, I referred to ZH&JL, where it is argued that LA-marked nouns denote individual concepts. In the absence of this marker, the very same root thus denotes a sortal concept. ZH&JL further note that LA- is a proclitic and that no modifier may intervene between it and the noun. Finally, ZH&JL demonstrate that LA-marked nouns behave very much like proper nouns. ZH&JL argue that LA- is a determiner, but I would like to suggest an alternative account under which the various properties of LA- all fall into place, viz. that LA- is the spell-out of a certain flavor of the categorizing head, *n*.

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[7] Because LA-marked nouns denote individual concepts, they are incompatible with modification by attributive objectives. This leaves us with predicative adjectives as the only possible diagnostic.

Following ZH&JL, I hold that the semantic contribution of LA- is to turn a sortal concept into an individual concept. This suggests an interesting parallelism between LA- and Bantu noun class markers. Kihm (2005: 497) states that "[c]lass is endowed with a classificatory (i.e., semantic) content of varying richness or relevance with respect to the universe of concepts each language's particular lexicon expresses." Kihm further mentions that Manjuku's class 7 marker participates in the formation of action nouns. Categorially, Bantu noun class markers are instantiations of n (Kihm 2005; Kramer 2015) and their function is therefore to form nouns. Let us assume that LA- is on a par with Bantu class markers and, therefore, that it too instantiates n.

Under this view, the fact that no modifier can intervene between LA- and the root finds a straightforward explanation. LA- qua categorizer selects the root as its complement, and the root then adjoins to LA- for categorizing purposes. Additionally, the fact that LA- marked nouns behave like proper nouns could be accounted for if we assume that both types of nouns undergo head movement to D à la Longobardi (1994). This would additionally explain why LA-marked nouns cannot cooccur with the enclitic marker of pragmatic definiteness (Zribi-Hertz & Jean-Louis 2014).[8] In addition, analyzing LA- as a spell-out of n has interesting consequences for gender in MQ.

As a matter of fact, n has been identified as the locus of gender in various studies (a.o. Kihm 2005; Kramer 2014, 2015). This is the hypothesis that I shall adopt to account for the properties of gender in MQ. But let us first consider a possible objection to the analysis of LA- as an instantiation of n.

ZH&JL argue that LA- should be analyzed as the lexicalization of Num because of nouns such as *lakouyonni* 'stupidity'. According to them, *lakouyonni* decomposes into the root $\sqrt{\text{KOUYON}}$, the nominalizer *-ni* and *la-*, the spell-out of Num. Their implicit assumption seems to be that categoryless roots are the only acceptable complements of n. This would then justify their postulate that LA- is first merged in Num, rather than n. This premise, however, is not warranted.

There is in fact no *a priori* reason why n should select only for roots. The literature suggests that nPs may be stacked. This is, for instance, the case in Bantu languages (see Fuchs & van der Wal 2022: and references therein). Since the theory does not preclude this possibility, I assume that there is no reason to exclude an analysis whereby LA- spells out n. To illustrate what I have in mind, consider the representation in (16).

(16)
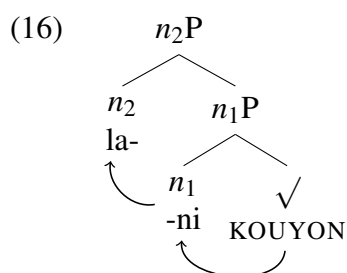
The first step in the derivation is the merger of $\sqrt{\text{KOUYON}}$ with n_1, which hosts the nominalizer *-ni*. Next is the merger of n_2, which is lexicalized as *la-*. The arrows in (16) represent the various instantiations of internal merge which ultimately result in the formation of *lakouyonni*. This structure raises questions concerning the featural makeup of n_2, the host of LA-.

As was previously mentioned, a crucial property of LA-marked nouns is that they denote individual concepts. Therefore, I propose that one of the features spelled out by LA- is [-SORTAL].

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8 An anonymous reviewer rightly notes that this restriction could also simply be attributed to a clash in the semantics of these two markers. However, this does not in itself account for ZH&JL's observation that LA-marked nouns behave like proper nouns.

This feature is responsible for turning a sortal concept into an individual one. Crucially, [-SORTAL] is not the only feature spelled out by LA-. It also lexicalizes a gender feature: [±FEM]. This accounts for the observation that the actual spell-out of LA- is gender-dependent.[9] Keep in mind, however, that MQ nouns which are sensitive to natural gender trigger agreement, while those which are sensitive to grammatical gender (as reflected by the form of LA-) do not. That distinction should then be encoded in the grammar. I thus adopt the view that natural gender is an interpretable feature and grammatical gender its uninterpretable counterpart (Bošković 2009, 2011; Kramer 2014, 2015). Finally, I assume that LA- also spells out a [±HUMAN] feature to reflect the fact that the resulting noun denotes either a human or a non-human concept. Of course, we would not want the features [-HUMAN] and i[±FEM] to cooccur. We should therefore posit a rule such as (17) to prevent this.

(17) n i[±FEM] → [+HUMAN]

It follows that LA- may thus realize the types of n listed in (18).

(18)   **Types of n spelled out by LA-**
   a. n [-SORTAL] [+HUMAN] i[+FEM] Female natural gender
   b. n [-SORTAL] [+HUMAN] i[-FEM] Male natural gender
   c. n [-SORTAL] [-HUMAN] u[+FEM] Feminine grammatical gender
   d. n [-SORTAL] [-HUMAN] u[-FEM] Masculine grammatical gender

It should be noted that LA-marked nouns are not the only ones which MQ can use to denote individual concepts. ZH&JL provide the example of *rimò* 'remorse', which may denote both sortal and individual concepts. In the latter case, ZH&JL assume that the root √RIMÒ is first adjoined to n and then to *Num*, which they analyze as being the first-merge site of LA-.[10] Now, on the assumption, which this paper adopts, that LA- spells out n when the latter's feature bundle includes the feature [-SORTAL], it follows that there must also be a phonologically null variant of this flavor of n. It is unfortunately very hard to construct examples to determine whether this flavor of n also spells out a [±FEM] feature. The adjectives which alternate between a masculine and a feminine form generally denote human qualities and, though statistical evidence is lacking, I tentatively propose that this flavor of n is found in nouns which denote [-HUMAN] individual concepts and that it lacks a [±FEM] feature. We must therefore add (19) to the inventory of ns that produces individual concepts.

(19)   **Non-LA-marked individual concepts**
       n [-SORTAL] [-HUMAN]

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9 An anonymous reviewer suggests an alternative analysis whereby the contribution of French to the MQ lexicon consists in chunks made up of the proclitic definite article and the noun. The basic form of MQ words would therefore correspond to the equivalent French DET+N string. Under this view, a rule of truncation would then target some (but not all) of these basic MQ words and delete the word-initial /l/ and the following vowel. However, I do not consider this proposal to be viable.

   Consider the fact that the output of the hypothesized truncation rule must systematically match the French cognate. By way of illustration, consider the LA-marked individual concepts *laplaj* 'the beach' and *lagrikilti* 'Agriculture'. In one case the truncation rule should produce *plaj* 'beach' and in the other *agrikilti* 'agriculture', forms which correspond respectively to the French nouns *plage* and *agricutlure*. To account for the discrepancy in the deleted material, the posited truncation rule must then be significantly more complex than what the reviewer suggests. Crucially, it must also presuppose for its proper application that the speaker knows the form of the appropriate French N string. I therefore favor the approach adopted in the paper.

10 ZH&JL propose additional movements (including raising to D) which I shall ignore as they are not crucial to this argument.

As regards Vocabulary Insertion, I propose the set of rules in (20).

(20) **Rules of Vocabulary Insertion governing the realization of *n***

    a. n, [-SORTAL], [+FEM] $\longleftrightarrow$ /la/ $\big/$ ___ {$\sqrt{}$ENJISTIS, $\sqrt{}$LWA, $\sqrt{}$JOUNEN, $n_{\text{-ni}}$...}

    b. n, [-SORTAL], [-FEM] $\longleftrightarrow$ /lɛ/ $\big/$ ___ {$\sqrt{}$PAP, $\sqrt{}$MONN, ...}

    c. n, [-SORTAL] $\longleftrightarrow$ $\emptyset$

Thus, when *n* bears the feature bundle [+SORTAL, +FEM], it is spelled out as *la-*, regardless of the value of the [±HUMAN] feature. When it bears the feature bundle [+SORTAL, -FEM], it is spelled out as *lè-*. In all other cases, it is realized by a null morpheme. As regards the variant *l-*, I assume that it simply results from the application of a more general phonological rule of hiatus resolution which applies after (20a) and (20b).

As for agreement, I assume that it depends on the presence of a [+HUMAN] feature. This feature, as we have seen, is associated with natural gender. It follows that agreement will fail to obtain in all other cases. This is obviously problematic if we take agreement to be the defining characteristic of gender, as this would entail that MQ lacks grammatical gender altogether. On this view, however, little sense could be made of LA-marking. I shall therefore attempt to shed some light on this paradox in the next section.

5   A gender system caught in transition

If we want to get a better grasp of the paradoxical status of grammatical gender in MQ, there is a crucial fact that we cannot ignore – the overwhelming majority of MQ speakers are in fact early bilingual speakers of MQ and French (Bernabé 2004; Bellonie 2011; Beck 2018). In fact, it may even be that some speakers acquire French before MQ (March 1996; Bernabé 2004; Pustka 2006). Most MQ speakers would therefore possess two grammars – one (French) where gender, both natural and grammatical, is omnipresent, and one (MQ) where gender plays a secondary role and is for the most part limited to natural gender. These two languages are also genetically related and most MQ lexical items have French cognates. If one also accepts the view that there is no rigid barrier between the two grammars of a bilingual speaker (Grosjean 1989; López 2020), it then becomes easier to make sense of the facts described above.

In a nutshell, what I would like to propose is that MQ is developing a gender system which includes both natural and grammatical gender, but that this development has not come to its conclusion yet. It stands to reason that, as a result of French influence, the inventory of *n*s in MQ has to come to integrate gender-based differences which are no longer limited to human-denoting concepts. That is, MQ's *n*s are slowly becoming more similar to their French counterparts with respect to their featural makeup.

There is, nonetheless, a major difference between French and MQ inventory of *n*s. None of the French *n*s is spelled out by *la-* or *lè-*.[11] The phonologically similar *la* and *le* are definite articles which must be used with individual concepts, as in, e.g., *le soleil* 'the sun' or *la patience* 'la patience'. Of course, the form of the French article depends on the gender of its complement noun, as reflected in (21).

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11 Another significant difference is the fact that MQ LA-marked nouns all denote individual concepts. In contrast, the French definite article may be used all sorts of concepts.

(21)   **Rules of Vocabulary Insertion governing the realization of the definite article**[12]

    a. D, [+FEM] $\longleftrightarrow$ *la*

    b. D $\longleftrightarrow$ *le*

I posit that a process of feature recombination (Aboh 2015) is responsible for the MQ facts. The form of the French definite article has been reanalyzed as the phonological realization of *n* in MQ and, crucially, it is subject to the same gender-based conditioning. That is, the MQ cognate of a French noun is assumed to have the same gender. Thus, the MQ root $\sqrt{\text{PASIANS}}$ is licensed by a [+FEM] variant of *n* on the grounds that its French cognate *patience* is also licensed by a [+FEM] variant of *n*. That this process of gender assignment is incomplete is reflected in the fact that there remain roots which remain uncategorized for gender, as evidenced by the fact that they are licensed by the null variant of *n* described in section 4.

Further evidence that this process of gender assignment has not reached its final stage is the fact that it has not yet spread beyond *n*. As a matter of fact, adjectives form the only other category which is sensitive to gender in MQ, but even they do not appear to be have developed a sensitivity to gender which goes beyond natural gender. It remains to be seen whether MQ adjectives will become sensitive to grammatical gender.[13]

In summary, I assume that the paradoxical status of grammatical gender in MQ stems from an incomplete process of gender assignment driven by analogy with the French gender system.

6   Conclusion

In this paper, contra previous studies (e.g. Bernabé 1994; Neumann-Holzschuh 2006) I have argued that MQ is developing the category of grammatical gender. This claim is based on the observation that the realization of the so-called marker of semantic definiteness studied by Zribi-Hertz & Jean-Louis (2014) systematically matches that of the French definite article when they are used with cognates. In other words, it appears that the form of this marker is dictated by gender distinctions. I have argued that it is in fact the spell-out of a variant of *n* whose feature bundle includes [-SORTAL] and [±FEM]. Although these facts would suggest that grammatical gender exists in MQ, it may be too early to reach this conclusion as the observed agreement patterns do not (yet?) substantiate this claim. This, I have conjectured, follows from the fact that MQ is gradually developing grammatical gender under the influence of French, the other language spoken by the majority of MQ speakers. This incomplete development has not yet spread beyond *n*.

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12 This is an obvious oversimplification. More needs to be said about, e.g., the plural form of the article. However, in this paper, I am only interested in the relation between the singular forms of the French article and the realizations of LA- in MQ.

13 Gender on adjectives is necessarily an uninterpretable feature, while it may be interpretable on nouns. Whether (un)interpretability plays a role in the process of feature recombination must be left for future research, but it is quite possible that this is a key determinant in MQ's ability to develop gender distinctions beyond nouns.

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