

The Category of *Humanity*: Language as a Reflection of the Opposition between the Natural Sphere and the Human Sphere

Enrique J. Vercher García

University of Granada, Spain

Abstract

The article analyses the way in which human languages classify reality into two large categories: the natural sphere and the human sphere. Thus, a given language will use the resources of its different linguistic levels (phonetic-phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical) to configure the references of reality and classify them based on what the speaker considers as belonging to the sphere of human society or the sphere of nature, outwith the human community. The same object, animal, phenomenon, or event may be treated (and evaluated) differently depending on whether the speakers of a given language consider it as belonging to the human sphere or the natural sphere.

Keywords: linguistics, cognitive linguistics, linguistic anthropology, linguoculturology, natural languages, linguistic categories, human/non-human

1. Introduction

The starting point of the study and the reflections that we offer here is one of the very common phenomena that any speaker may notice. For example, when speaking of fish in Spanish, in the distinction between *pez/pescado*, the first term refers to the living

animal in the water in its natural environment (nature), while the second refers to the same animal after having been captured by humans for consumption (therefore being in the human sphere).

Language effectively establishes a distinction between a human sphere and a non-human sphere (or natural sphere). The same object, animal, phenomenon or event may be treated (and evaluated) differently depending on whether the speakers of a given language consider it as belonging to the human sphere or the natural sphere.

The human sphere will usually (but not always) be the marked element, while the natural sphere will not. Thus, in principle, the word for fire, *fuego*, may be used for both the natural sphere and the human sphere, but not the other way around; the word *hoguera* belongs strictly to the human sphere and is never used in the case of a fire in nature. The speaker may refer to a fish on the plate as *pez*, but never refer to living fish in the natural sphere (such as in a documentary about fish) as *pescados* (except, of course, if there is a humorous intention). Nevertheless, this is not a strictly occurring feature, as there may be cases in which both elements are clearly identified as belonging only to the human sphere or the natural sphere, such as, for example, the word for leg, *pierna*, which is always used in the human sphere, whereas the word *pata* is used in the natural sphere (with the exception, as always, of cases of humour, personifications, etc.).

This linguistic phenomenon may be considered universal and entails a basic way of configuring the inherent language of human speech. That said, its manifestations are very different across different languages, which means that it is a linguoculturological element. Furthermore, this means that we are referring to the spoken use of a given language by its native speakers, not to scientific language or the scientific categorisation of the world.

There is, therefore, a category that we may call *humanity*, which affects the form and content of the linguistic elements in the way we have indicated (human sphere/natural sphere). The category of humanity manifests itself in different levels of the language (morphological, syntactic, and lexical). In the terminology of A. V. Bondarko (1987), we may talk about a polycentric semantic-functional field (lacking

a dominant centre or linguistic resource).

We must emphasise that we are not talking about the extensively studied “subjectivity” or “anthropocentrism” in human language, or broader concepts, but about the linguistic resources of languages for explicitly differentiating the human sphere from the natural sphere of a given reality (parts of the body, elements of nature, relationships between individuals, etc.).

This opposition must also not be confused with the animate/inanimate aspect present in many languages. Thus, the distinction in Russian between the masculine accusative for animate beings (*человека* [čeloveka] ‘person’, *господина* [gospodina] ‘mister, lord’, *кота* [kota] ‘cat’, *журавля* [žuravlja] ‘crane’, etc., formally the same as the genitive) and inanimate beings (*лес* [lex] ‘forest’, *чемодан* [čemodan] ‘suitcase’, *пейзаж* [pejzaž, from the French *paysage*] ‘landscape’, *сон* [son] ‘dream’, *сюрреализм* [sjurrealizm, from the French *surréalisme*] ‘surrealism’, etc., formally the same as the nominative) would not be pertinent to this study. However, the syntactic distinction in Spanish in the accusative between the obligatory use of the preposition *a* for people and the absence of the preposition in other cases (*veo a Juan*/**veo Juan* vs. *veo una mesa*/**veo a una mesa*) is pertinent.

We will analyse the resources in different linguistic levels of different languages in detail to categorise humanity and distinguish between the natural sphere and the human sphere.

2. Lexical Level

We will begin our analysis with the lexical level, as it is more evident and of greater relevance due to the large number of examples. As we have commented, the distinction between the two groups of the humanity category, as we understand it, arises mainly from realities which may be present in both the human sphere and the natural sphere, such as elements of nature (water, fire, etc.), animals, plants, parts of the body, etc.

The examples to be analysed are as follows:

- Parts of the body

Beyond scientific names, since antiquity, mankind has made a distinction between the common body parts that animals and humans may have. This is the case for words such as *patas/piernas*, *pelo/cabello*, *pezuña/mano-pie*, *vibrisas/bigote*, etc.

Patas/piernas: Note that in this case, when a leg moves into the human sphere (as food), it is often specifically a category movement; for example, in Spanish with *pierna de cordero*, *manitas de cerdo*, rather than *pata de cordero* or *pezuñas de cerdo*.

Pelo/cabello: What we find here is really a taxonomical distribution of the words, *pelo* being the generic term from which two nodes are taken, firstly that of the human sphere, which would include the word *cabello*, and secondly that of the natural sphere, where we find words such as *crin* ('mane') and *cerdas* ('bristles'). This is an example of a specific, non-transferrable element, in which the word of the human element *cabello* is not used in the natural sphere, although conversely, the generic *pelo* is used in referring to humans.

- Gender and age

Concepts related with sex, age, and other circumstances of physiological development are also usually susceptible to the distinction between the natural sphere and the human sphere: *macho*, *hembra/varón*, *mujer* (Russian: *самец* [*samets*], *самка* [*samka*]/*мужчина* [*mužčina*], *женщина* [*ženščina*]; English: *male*, *female/man*, *woman*); *cría/hijo* (Russian: *детёныш* [*detěnyš*]/*ребёнок* [*reběnok*]; Basque: *kume/ seme*; English: *(animal) young/ (human) child*).

As Yu. S. Stepanov (2004) indicates, the more important a concept is in a culture, the more parameterised it is. Probably the most parameterised concept at a universal level is that of *human being*. This author presents the examples of *varón*, which we can define as 'a human being contrasting with the woman by sex', and from there *marido* ('man with regard to a woman with whom he has a marital relationship'), *padre* ('man with regard to his children'), *maestro* ('man who teaches, with regard to his students'), and so forth, with all equivalents applied to *mujer*.

In the case of cataloguing beings by their age, in Protoindoeuropean we also

find examples of this distinction: *g^werabh- [Proto-Slavic *žerbъ, *žerbьсь, *žerbē, leading to forms such as the Russian жеребёнок ‘foal’] ‘young in the non-human sphere’, *kat- [Proto-Slavic. *kotъ ‘calf’, umbr. *katel*] ‘young (non-human sphere), calf’, *stādh- [Russian стадо, protogerm. *stōd-a-, *stōd-ō, *stad-jō, -an-] ‘young animals and plants’, compared with *mag^hó-, *maghu-, *maghos [Avestan *magava* ‘unmarried man’ English *maid* ‘maiden, unmarried woman’] ‘young (human sphere), unmarried’, *mery- ‘young man’, *mounos ‘young person’, *puH-, *pupos ‘child’, *ieHw3-g, ‘young’ and *H₂iw-wH₁ṛkó-, *H₂iw-wHen, *yowen- ‘young, young person’.

- Animals and plants

In reality, we can establish a first differentiation between human (*human being*)/non-human (*animal*), and at the level of animals a second differentiation between domestic animals (human sphere) and wild animals: Spanish *bestia* (domestic, ‘domestic load-bearing animals’ [DRAE])/*fiera* (wild, ‘wild or aggressive animals’ [DRAE]).

The opposition between the natural sphere and the human sphere, with regard to animals, may manifest itself based on different criteria. One would be the different varieties (domestic compared with wild) of the same species. The domestic form of the human sphere, which may be cultivated by humans in the case of plants or domesticated in the case of animals, is in many cases the basic generic form, the wild variety being specific, the form belonging to the natural sphere, in this case being the marked element. Examples of this first criterion for distinction are cases such as the *acebuche* (‘wild olive tree’)/*olivo* (‘olive tree’); in English *mustang*/*horse*.

A second possible criterion for classification between the natural sphere and the human sphere in the case of animals and plants would be used as food for humans. An animal or a plant may have a name in a given language when in the natural sphere and another if the same animal or plant is used as food for humans. This is the case for *pez/pescado* (fish); *cacahuete/maní* (peanut); or in Russian *спинка* (fish fillet)/*балык* (fish fillet prepared as a dish, normally cured); *свиня* [*svinja*] (‘pig’, the animal)/*свинина* [*svinina*] (‘pork’, pig meat).

The distinction of the lexemes belonging to this group seems to be quite strict, it not being possible to apply those belonging to the human sphere to the natural sphere, or vice versa. This gives the impression that the use of animals and plants as food for humans is one of the most basic and primitive cases in which mankind distinguished the two spheres in their language.

A third possible criterion for distinction between the natural sphere and the human sphere is utility for humans. For example, the distinction in the words for wood between *madera/leña*, where *madera* is an element belonging to the natural sphere (and used as the generic term for the material), compared with *leña*, which is the element belonging to the human sphere, specifically the wood used to create a domestic fire. This distinction also arises in other languages: Russian *дерево* [*derevo*]/*дрова* [*drova*]; English *wood/firewood*.

- Other fields

Natural elements are one of the clearest examples of the distinction that human language makes based on the association with their natural state, present in nature on one hand, and controlled and used by human beings on the other. In this semantic field, we again see that the defined element is that of the human sphere. Thus, we find examples such as those of *fuego/hoguera* (English *fire/bonfire*; Russian *огонь* [*ogon'*]/*костёр* [*kostër*]; Latin *focus/pyra*). In the case of fire and words of its semantic field, in Indoeuropean we find the distinction between the root **H₁égni-* [Latin *ignis* 'fire, flash, scintillation', Russian *огонь* 'fire, light'] 'fire in nature', and probably also **H₁eH₂ter-*, **āt-* (-*th-*) <PIH **H-*> [Avestan. *ātarš*, Neo-Persian. *ādar* 'fire'] on one hand, compared with **pue-r/n-*, **pwō-* <PIH **-H^{w-}*>, **péH₂ wr₂-* (**bhlag_{sma}*) [Greek *πῦρ* 'fire, fire from the sky, flash, torchlight', *πυρά* 'pyre, fire on the altar'; Latin *flamma* 'flame', English *fire*] 'fire in the human sphere, bonfire, pyre', on the other.

In the case of the word for water, *agua*, and its semantic field, the distinction between the natural sphere and the human sphere may be traced to the etymology of forms such as *onda*, *linfa*, and *agua*. This distinction is better appreciated in Latin, and constitutes one of the few cases in which the word of the human sphere

(*aqua*) is the non-defined term compared with the words designating this element specifically in nature (*unda*, *lympa*). Thus, the word *aqua* designates the element of water in general, and is used, among other cases, in the human sphere to refer to stored or drinking water. Compared with this word we find others that designate water specifically in forms of nature, such as *unda* ('water in movement, wave') or *lympa* ('crystal clear water emerging from a source or spring').

In this sense, in Protoindoeuropean we find the root **H₂eHp-*, **H₂ek^weH₂*, **H₁ewg^wh*, **H₁weg^wh*, **ak^w*- meaning 'flowing water, river', leading to the etymology of the forms in Latin *aqua*, Hittite *akukal*, Proto-Germanic **a(g)wo^z*, **áxwō*; **ō(g)wjá-z*; **a(g)wjō*, compared with the forms of the root **wed-* and its derivatives (**wed_r*, **wēd-o-*, **wod-r-*, **Hwr*, **weri*, **we-n-d-*, **ud-ōr*, **u-n-d-ā-*, **ud-ro-*, **ud-rā-*) 'water in general, water as an element', leading to the forms in Latin *unda*, Hittite *watar*, Proto-Germanic *watar*, Russian *вода*, and English *water*.

The sound with which the members of a species communicate also has a distinction between the word used to refer to animals and those of humans: *reclamo* (call) (animal)/*habla* (speech) (human).

Quite representative of the distinction between the natural sphere and the human sphere are colours. Taxonomically, a language such as Spanish distinguishes between generic names for colours (*blanco*, *negro*, *rojo*, *naranja*, *amarillo*, *verde*, *azul*, *violeta*)¹ (white, black, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet), names for colours applied to the natural sphere, for example the colours of animals (*zaino*, *albahío*, *cárdeno*, etc.) (bay, yellowish white, piebald or opalescent), and names for colours applied to the human sphere (*rubio*, *castaño*, *pelirrojo*, etc.) (blonde, brunette, red-haired).

Another lexical example is the grouping of non-human/human individuals. Thus, in Spanish we have words such as *jauría*, *manada/clan*, *tribu*, *familia*, *tropel*, *cuadrilla*, *muchedumbre* (pack, herd/clan, tribe, family, horde, squad, crowd) (and many other words to designate the grouping of people). This distinction can be seen in Protoindoeuropean: **sleH₁iu*, **slak-*, **slowg^hos* 'non-human multitude', leading to forms such as in English *slew* 'many', and **(s)trent-* 'multitude (of animals), herd,

pack’, leading to forms such as in Proto-Slavic **trǫtь* ‘multitude, many’, Old Russian *труппа* ‘group, multitude’ Celtic **trento-* (although in Greek *στρατός* lead to the meaning of ‘army’), compared with **pledhwis*, **pléh₁ d^huh₁* ‘(human) multitude’, leading to forms such as in Latin *plebs* ‘plebs’, and **(s)k^wel-* ‘multitude, people, group of people’, leading to forms such as in Old English *scolu* ‘band, troop, group of people’, and Russian *человек* ‘person’.

We must comment that this double scope of application would explain the semantic duplications that exist in Indo-European, outwith geographic and temporal variants due to the evolution and spread of this proto-language. This human/non-human motivation does not exclude other semantic content present in Protoindoeuropean forms and other languages.

3. Morphological Level

At the morphological level in languages we also find many resources for specifying the category of humanity. As we can see with this category, in the majority of cases, it is not a systematic set of resources, but instead a series of resources which vary from one language to another but which in one way or another also serve to distinguish between the natural sphere and the human sphere. We have already seen one case of this in one of the previous examples, that of *свиня* (pig, the animal)/*свинина* (pork), as Russian has the suffix *-ина* specifically to designate the meat of an animal intended for consumption (human sphere). Thus, we have forms such as *телёнок* [*telënok*] ‘calf’/*телятина* [*teljatina*] ‘veal’, *баран* [*baran*] ‘ram’/*баранина* [*baranina*] ‘mutton’, and *говядо* [*govjado*] (archaic and dialectal) ‘bovine animal (bull, ox, cow)’/*говядина* [*govjadina*] ‘bovine meat’. In the Niuean language, a Polynesian language, the prefix *kau-* designates a ‘group of people’, such as, for example *kauvaka* (*kau* + *vaka* ‘boat’) ‘crew of a ship’. In Chinese, the character 人 *rén*, one of the 10 most used Chinese characters, with the primary meaning of ‘person, people’, functions as a designation for humans, such as, for example 爱人 ‘spouse’.

Spanish morphemes of the specifically human sphere include: *-azgo* ‘title, demarcation’ (*mayorazgo, almirantazgo, cacicazgo, noviazgo*, etc.); *-cidio* ‘killing or elimination (referring expressly to human groups or individuals)’ (*homicidio, genocidio, infanticidio, parricidio, magnicidio, tiranicidio*, etc.); *-crata* ‘defender of a system or belonging to a power group’ (*demócrata, ácrata, tecnócrata, aristócrata*, etc.); *-eco, -ego, -eño, or -ense* as demonyms (*zapoteco, mixteco, manchego, gallego, madrileño, sureño, nicaragüense, bonaerense*, etc.); and *-latra* ‘person who loves’ (*ególatra, idólatra, demonólatra, zoólatra*, etc.). Note that we are discussing morphemes which appear exclusively in lexemes of the human sphere. There are other morphemes which may refer to lexemes of the human sphere, while also appearing in the non-human sphere, and we therefore do not consider them within this group (for example, the suffixes *-or, -dero*, etc.). Also note that we are discussing affixes with a specific meaning in the human sphere and not simple endings due to etymological reasons. We would of course also include morphemes specifically of the human sphere (professions, demonyms, etc.), e.g. in Lithuanian the suffixes *-tojas, -ejas*, and *-ininkas* (*mokytojas* ‘teacher’, *pardavejas* ‘seller, shop assistant’, *ukininkas* ‘farmer’, etc.).

Among the Spanish morphemes related with the non-human sphere, we have *-aceo* ‘belonging to a family of animals or plants’ (*crustáceo, oliváceo, herbáceo, aceráceo*, etc.); *-ato* ‘animal young’ (*ballenato, lobato, jabato, cervato*, etc.); and *-eda* ‘place where a certain species is plentiful’ (*arboleda, alameda, avellaneda, rosaleda*, etc.).

In our opinion, the appearance of the vocative case in many languages is a manifestation of this trend of the human language to specify the human sphere, as in principle it is a case expressly intended to be used with human beings to name them (or personified objects). For example: Polish *mama* (nominative)/*mamo!* (vocative) ‘mamá’ (mother); Lithuanian *Petras* (nominative)/*Petrai!* (vocative) ‘Petras (proper noun, Peter)’; or the Russian colloquial vocative *Hamaua* (nominative)/*Hamau!* (vocative) (Natasha).

Chinese distinguishes between a third person plural pronoun for humans (他

们, and also 她们 ‘they’ specifically for women) and for non-humans (它们). This phenomenon is found in many other languages, such as Finnish: *he* (‘they (humans)’)/ *ne* (‘they (non-humans)’)². It is curious that although there is only one form of third person singular pronoun in Chinese (*tā*), in writing there is a distinction between a synogram for man or indeterminate gender (他), another for woman (她), another for objects (它) and another for animals (牠).

The Yuki language (an isolated dead language of what is now California) distinguished two types of nouns: human and non-human. Thus, human nouns with the grammatical function of patient are marked for patient case, and the oblique case endings are attached to the dative form of the noun (human), while non-human nouns with the function of patient are not marked for patient case and the oblique case endings are added directly to the root of the noun (non-human) (Balodis, 2016, p. 87). Compare the clause *sáʔey ʔú:tʰmil tʰúy hulkʰoʔá* ‘and handed the pitch to Coyote’ (where *hulkʰoʔá* ‘coyote’—non-human—is the patient that receives the action of the verb *ʔú:tʰmil*) with *kiʔat hqʷ ʔi: ʧa:nik* ‘He gave me his (=someone else’s) fish’ (where *kiʔat* ‘me—(human) personal pronoun in dative—is the patient that receives the action of the verb).

The Abkhaz language (Caucasian language) distinguishes two types of nouns based on the category of humanity, and not on the distinction between animate/inanimate: human and non-human. Thus, for example, human nouns form the plural by adding (Abkhaz is a predominantly agglutinative language) the suffix *-цəа* (*аҟабыцəа* ‘girls’, *аиҟадыџцəа* ‘writers’), while non-human nouns form the plural with the suffix *-қəа* (*аеқəа* ‘horses’, *аҟқəа* ‘waters’, *алабақəа* ‘sticks, rods’).

4. Syntactic-Grammatical Level

As we have indicated, the category of humanity affects different levels of the language. This is also reflected at the grammatical level. Thus, for example, in Spanish there is usually a distinction between animate/inanimate for the use of the preposition *a* with a direct object, but in truth there is uncertainty when an animal is

in question. Speakers sometimes use the animate/inanimate distinction, but in other cases the distinction is actually between person/non-person. For example:

I see Juan: *Veo a Juan*/**veo Juan* (person)

I see a dog: *Veo a un perro*/*veo un perro* (animal)

I see a table: **Veo a una mesa*/*veo una mesa* (inanimate object)

In the spoken use of Spanish, we find both *veo a un perro* (*a una vaca, a un gato, etc.*) and *veo un perro* (*una vaca, un gato*). That is, the speaker may not use the preposition when used outwith the human sphere, which would be impossible in the case of a human, when the use of the preposition is obligatory. It is true that the use of the preposition *a* as a direct object is subject to greater comment (for example, its non-use before collective nouns for persons whose reference is uncertain, its use before non-specific nouns with verbs that entail a physical or mental impairment, its non-use before common names for people in plural which lack definition, etc.; for all of this see motto *a* in the DPD), but its non-use before inanimate objects reveals a distinction based on the human/non-human category which generally does not arise in other languages. Etymologically, the masculine clitic in the accusative was *lo* (from the Latin *ILLUM*, the feminine being *la* from *ILLAM*), the *le* form (from *ILLI*) being reserved for the dative. However, since the origins of Spanish, given its tendency to distinguish genders, the use of the *le* form has appeared as the masculine accusative for humans, a form which will alternate with *lo*. In the case of the non-human masculine, the accusative form of the clitic must be *lo*. As the RAE indicates, “Le-ism is not permitted in any way in standard practice when the reference is inanimate: *El libro que me prestaste le leí de un tirón” (DPD). Note that it would not be correct to discuss the distinction between masculine/neuter for *le* and *lo*, as with animals *le* is not used (—¿Has visto a mi perro? —Lo vi esta mañana/*Le vi esta mañana), as we are instead dealing with a human/non-human distinction.

The distinction in English between the interrogative *Who?* and the interrogative *What?* is also a difference between human/non-human. This does not occur, for

example, in Russian, with the interrogatives *кто?* [*kto?*] and *что?* [*što?*], where *кто?* is generally translated as ‘Who?’, but which is also used for animals: *Что это?* ‘What is that?’ (referring to an animal). The distinction in Russian, as we can see, is therefore based on categories of animate/inanimate, while in English it is based on human/non-human categories. This affects learning, and there have been cases of Russians asking in English (while referring to an insect) *Who is that?* instead of *What is that?*

In Niuean there are clitics used specifically for names of people or pronouns. Thus, the proclitic form *a* acts as a particle with the function of indicating the absolutive in pronouns and personal names. It may be combined with other clitics such as *kia* (interrogative particle) leading to *ka*, for example: *Hake ka koe he mouga?* ‘Have you gone up (you = *koe*) the mountain?’.

In the same language there was formerly a distinction between proper nouns by the person vs. non-person criteria. Thus, personal names always express the absolutive with particles *a/ø* and the ergative with *e*, while the proper nouns of animals could also be formed in the same way or specifically with the particle *e* in absolutive and the particle *he* in ergative; example: *Ti ita ai e Feke ke he Kumā* ‘And Octopus (absolutive) became angry with Rat (dative)’, where this use of *e* as absolutive and *ke he* as dative would not have been possible if people’s names had been used. This language also has a series of classifiers among which we can mention those of *toko* (classifier for people – human sphere) as belonging to the present article, for example: *e toko fā (e) tagata* ‘four people’, but *fua* (classifier for fruits – natural sphere), for example: *e fā fua niu* ‘four coconuts’).

In Abkhaz, which, we have already noted, classifies nouns by human/non-human, numbers are in turn distinguished in two ways for humans/non-humans. 1 to 10 are as follows:

	Non-humans	Humans
1	акы	азэы
2	ѳба	ѳыѳба
3	хѳа	хѳык
4	ѳшьба	ѳшьѳык
5	хэба	хэѳык
6	ѳба	ѳѳык
7	быжьба	быжьѳык
8	ааба	ааѳык
9	жэба	жэѳык
10	жэаба	жэаѳык

Arabic, a Semitic language, distinguishes the agreement with adjectives between the plural of nouns referring to humans with those agreeing in gender, number, and case, and the plural of nouns referring to non-rational elements or non-humans (animals, inanimate objects, objects, and abstract concepts), with those agreeing with the feminine singular. For example:

اللطفاتُ المُعلِّماتُ [Al mualimatu al latifatu] ‘The friendly teachers’

الجميلةُ الوريداتُ [Al uraidatu al Yamila] ‘The pretty little roses’³

Sumerian, an isolated dead language of Mesopotamia, also distinguished personal (human) and impersonal (non-human) nouns, where the type of personal noun included those referring to human beings while impersonal nouns encompassed animals, places, inanimate objects, or collectives. This distinction affected certain third person pronouns, the formation of the plural, and the formation of the personal dative. Thus, apart from other resources for forming the plural, such as that of redoubling the noun with the sense of totality (“all the...”), in Sumerian we find that one of the forms of addition is the suffix *-(e)ne* in the case of personal nouns (*lugal* ‘king’/*lugal-ene* ‘kings’), while the suffix *-hi-a* was used for impersonal nouns (*anše* ‘donkey’/*anše-hi-a* ‘donkeys’) and more precisely had the meaning of “mixture” or “range of” (in the case of *anše-hi-a* it may mean ‘several asses of different ages and sexes’).

Other examples in Sumerian within the personal group would be the third person pronoun *ane* ‘he’ (not used for non-persons), the possessive *-ani* ‘his’, the element *-n-* in the verb chain, or the interrogative *aba* ‘who?’. For non-personal elements, we find the possessive is *-bi* ‘its’, using the element *-b-* in the verb chain, with the interrogative *ana* ‘what?’.

The human/non-human distinction in Sumerian also affects the system of cases, as some of these were restricted to personal nouns (the dative *-ra*) and others were restricted to non-personal nouns (locative *-a*, locative-terminative *-e*, ablative-instrumental *-ta*); the other cases may appear both as personal and non-personal. Compare: ^d*Gilgameš en Kul-aba^{ki}-ke₄ ur-saġ[~]bi-ne-er(a) gu₃ mu-na-de₂-e* ‘Gilgamesh, lord of Kulaba, speaks to his warriors’ (where *ur-saġ[~]* ‘hero, warrior’—personal noun—has the dative *-er*) y *E₂ gibil lugal kalam-ak-ene-ak-a* ‘in the new house of the kings of the country’ (where *e₂* ‘house’—impersonal noun—is determined by the locative *-a*).

5. Conclusions

Human languages tend to distinguish the same element, phenomenon, animal or plant based on whether the speaker considers them as belonging to the human sphere or to the natural sphere (non-human). The set of linguistic resources for establishing this distinction leads to a true linguistic category or semantic-functional field that we call *humanity*.

The linguistic resources that languages have are very diverse and varied and are present at the different levels of the language (morphological, lexical, and syntactic). Additionally, as we have seen in the article, they vary greatly from one language to another. Furthermore, they are not a systematic set of resources (not constituting, for example, a nominal category or verbal mode), manifesting discretionally, not having a dominant resource (polycentric semantic-functional field), and in certain cases (for example the use of the preposition *a* as a direct object in Spanish), are not consistent or homogenous in their use. The linguistic phenomena studied in this article of course

appear in the descriptions of different languages, but there has not yet been a global study of this category as a whole, beyond the numerous studies on subjectivity, linguistic anthropocentrism, etc., which nevertheless, as we have mentioned, are much broader concepts than what has specifically been studied here.

Notes

- 1 As a curiosity, we can indicate that these would be the basic colours classified by Spanish speakers. The traditional assignment of seven colours to the rainbow originating from Isaac Newton is due to his belief in the Law of Sevens, according to which the universe was always governed by seven elements (seven planets, seven metals used in alchemy, seven musical notes, etc.). In truth, strictly speaking, for native Spanish speakers there are six basic colours plus white and black; colours such as azure, indigo, etc. are tones of blue. This does not occur for Russian speakers, who distinguish between *голубой* (light blue or azure) and *синий* (dark blue or indigo) as two different basic colours.
- 2 Nevertheless, for the logophoric use of these pronouns, see Helasvuo and Campbell, 2006, pp. 193-195.
- 3 Examples taken from the Lengua Árabe blog < <http://lenguarabe.blogspot.com/2008/11/gramatica-12-el-plural-femenino.html> >.

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About the author

Enrique J. Vercher García (evercher@ugr.es) is an assistant teacher at the University of Granada, a linguist, and writer. He has a doctorate in Translation Sciences (University of Bologna), a doctorate in Slavic Philology (University of Granada, Extraordinary Doctorate Award), a degree in Hispanic Philology, a degree in Slavic Philology (University of Granada, Extraordinary Degree Award), and a degree in Russian Philology—speciality of Russian as a Foreign Language (Saint Petersburg State University). He has carried out teaching and research work in Russia, Italy, the UK and Spain, and has written several monographs and articles in the field of translation, linguistics, and philology.