Many of the same grammatical categories and distinctions appear in language after language, leading us to wonder whether they might be part of some human genetic endowment. But many show intriguing cross-linguistic differences. One of these is what seems at first to be a routine gender system in Mohawk, an Iroquoian language indigenous to New York State, Quebec, and Ontario. Mohawk has three basic genders, marked on both nouns and verbs: masculine, feminine, and neuter/zoic. In fact, however, women can be referred to by either of the last two categories. The first, often referred to as feminine/indefinite, is used for generic persons (‘one, someone, anyone, people, they’) and some female persons. The second, referred to as feminine/zoic, is used for most animals and other female persons. Factors behind speaker choices between the two are subtle and fascinating, even to speakers themselves. It appears at first that the language provides a revealing window on culture. Iroquoian society has always been matrilineal and matrilocal, so it comes as no surprise that the term used for generic persons is the same as for women. The actual story behind the system, however, is much more interesting.