

Gendern im Deutschen

Registers of gender conscious person references in German

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Three genders in German for person reference

Der Sänger the singer masc.

Die Führungskraft the executive manager fem.

Das Mitglied the member neuter

- the singer ~~der Sänger, die Sängerin,~~
der/die Sänger*in.... Der/die Sänger_in...
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Structure:

- 1. Gender and person reference in German
 - 1. 1. The subject area of “Gendern“
 - 1. 2. Research on “Gendern“ and person reference
 - 1. 3. Our research project
 - 2. The usual references become (linguistically) conservative
 - 3. The feminist register
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 - 5. Moderate “Gendern“ (“gendering“)
 - 6. Stances, attitudes, language ideologies
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1. “Gendern“ and person reference in German

The Duden reference grammar 4 (1998, 200):

“especially in the case of occupational titles and nouns designating the bearer of an event (nomina agentis), **the use of the generic masculine is increasingly rejected**. When referring to female persons, feminine forms (e.g., on *-in* or corresponding circumlocutions) are often used.” (translation by Kotthoff)

“Gendern“ the term for gender explicit person references

- "Gendern" (Denglish) means to not refer to people with a generically intended masculine term.
- Deep ideological struggles in the German speaking countries about traditional and new ways of referring to people.
- High "discursive consciousness" is demanded for the reform (sign of ideologicality, Kroskrity 1998)
- Identity politics is associated with a reference style.



1.1. The phenomenal area of the reforms in German

- Substantivation of present participles (*Studierende/ those studying*)
 - Dual designation (*Geiger und Geigerinnen/violinists*)
 - Neutralizing compounds on -kraft or -person (*Lehrperson/teaching person or agent*)
 - **Abbreviations: Morphol. feminine plural with various signs at the morphol. border: *speakers:***
 - **Sprecher -/ innen, Sprecher(inn)en (Council for Orthography)**
 - **SprecherInnen (feminist reform)**
 - **Sprecher_innen (non-binary reform)**
 - **Sprecher*innen** „
 - **Sprecher:innen** „
 - Feminising of lexical masculine epicenes (*Gästin, Vorständin*)
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Oral forms:

- **Morph. feminine plural form spoken with glottal stop ʔ before the feminine morphem** [ˈʃy:ləʔɪnən] (pupils/Schüler*innen)

 - Salience of types of “Gendern” ??
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1.2. Research on “Gendern”

- Results of various psychological experiments (tests of first associations, naming tasks, etc.) with academic clientele (university students often) and with very short texts, quite coherent:
 - Masculine-gender cross references make non-male persons recede in mental representation (Rothmund/Scheele 2004, Kotthoff/Nübling 2018).
 - However, in the texts concrete references often appear instead of generic ones (Gygax/Gabriel, 2008).
 - Factors such as number, syntactic function... are rarely captured (Kotthoff/Nübling 2018).
 - Nothing so far on longer texts with unfolding references.
 - No contextualization in the experiments.
 - ~~Social symbolism important for identity politics.~~
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1. 3. Our research project (funded by the German science foundation):

On the diversity of gender-related practices in person references:
Discourse, Grammar, Cognition.

- Which prototypical assignments of gender style and institution (newspaper, radio, platform, university) emerge in the period 2021/22/23? Which arguments and phenomena are addressed in debates and interviews on gender-related language? How are language attitudes related to “gendering” shaped, justified, and socially assigned? (P1 H. Kotthoff)
- Which grammatical and semantic-lexical factors influence gender associations, for example singular/plural (P2 D. Nübling)?
- How is the readability and interpretation of words, sentences, and texts affected by the use of gender-aware language and, in particular, by non-binary forms (e.g., asterisks)? (P3 E. Ferstl)

https://portal.uni-freiburg.de/sdd/personen/ehemalige/kotthoff/index.html/dfg_gender

My project area

- Reconstruction of media discussions on the topic (Paul Meuleneers).
 - Semi-guided guided interviews on the phenomena of “Genderen” (“gendering”) with academically educated vs. **those in blue collar jobs.**
 - Sociolinguistic interest: Finding influencing variables for language attitudes/ideologies in that area.
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Starting point: Four styles of person reference

Currently practiced styles of referring to persons and of the so-called “Gendern” (Diewald/Steinhauer 2018):

- 1. traditional writing practice with “generic masculines”
- 2. feminist inspired practice (e.g. taylor/s/ SchneiderInnen)
- 3. non-binary inspired (e.g. Schneider*innen)
- 4. selective or moderate “Gendern” (Kotthoff 2020)

Participation of the reference style in the **communicative construction of a social milieu and a personal identity via social symbolism.**

Sociosymbolic Indexicality

- Distinctions in language use symbolically formed communities around histories of use that precipitate as specific communicative practices and can then be used to indicate identity (sociosymbolic indexicality). Specific semiotic distinctions are conventionalized as registers and as such become recognizable with their social assignments (Agha 2003, Cook 2008).

Agha, Asif (2003): The social life of a cultural value. *Language and communication* 23, 231-73.

Cook, Haruko Minegishi (2008): *Socializing Identities through Speech Styles*. Berlin/NY: Multilingual Matters.

2. The usual becomes (linguistically)

conservative

Lewandowski (1979, 230) writes under the chapter “Genus” (gender):

Grammatical gender; -grammatical category, characteristic of noun, article, adjective, pronoun, which has generally become almost entirely detached from its tie to natural gender.

This was (and still is) supposed to apply without restriction to person references as well.

Symbolism as (linguistically) conservative and/or critical of bureaucracy and/or...

The very conservative Schweizerische Volkspartei answers the question about its reference politics of Fuchs (Fuchs 2015, 54):

“So everyone should handle it with us as he/she wants. The SVP Switzerland almost always uses the masculine form, except when addressing women and men directly.”(Baer 2015, cited after Fuchs p. 54)

- **Thuringias's CDU and AfD stop genderfair communication (11. 11. 2022)** <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/landtag-thueringen-gendern-cdu-afd-1.5693979> The same again in 2023 and in 2024 in Austria and Bavaria
The authors Eva Menasse, Feridun Zaimoglu and other writers reject the bureaucratic ductus of „Gendern“ (in DIE ZEIT).
 - The left politician Sahra Wagenknecht also rejects gendering in her book "Die Selbstgerechten". (The self-righteous) See also Pfaller 2019
 - Large west-east differences in Germany!
 - For many people the traditional style is still just the normal style.
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Abandonment of “Gendern” with a feminist motivation

"This is what a chemist looks like." (So sieht ein Chemiker aus.) 2018 Symbolic contestation



**Science journalist and chemist Mai Thi Nguyen-Kim 2018,
similar argumentation Pollatschek 2020**

(Eisenberg 2017, Bayer 2019)

Thinking in the Background: Markedness Theory

- “Jakobson's argument transfers to German without restrictions. "Student" and "Studenten" do not imply a commitment to sex and thus to males. These nouns are "unmarked" forms that automatically include reference to female beings who study. Only when emphasizing that one wants to refer exclusively to the female species, "Studentin" and "Studentinnen" come into play. Accordingly, following Roman Jakobson's undisputed linguistic argument, there is no reason to rename the good old *Studentenwerk* (student services) into *Studierendenwerk*.” (Bayer 2019 in Neue Zürcher Zeitung, transl. Kotthoff))

A theory with a solid tradition.

Where does linguistic ideology start? Normatism?

Prescriptivism?

Linguistic ideology

- Many “meanings” that linguistic forms have for their speakers emerge from ‘indexical’ connections between linguistic signs and the contextual factors of their use (Peirce 1931, 58)
- “Speakers’ awareness of language and their **rationalizations of its structure and use**” (Silverstein 1979, 2000)
- Constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group as **morally good** (Kroskrity 2004).
- Can represent the **constructions of particular elites** who obtain the required complicity (Bourdieu 1998).
- **Neutral** ideological analysis focusses on culturally shared beliefs and practices, **critical** ideological analysis emphasizes the political use of language as an instrument of symbolic domination.

3. The feminist register

Pointed out in many guidelines of the 1.st generation (beginning 45 years ago):

- Prominence of internal I (*LeserInnen/readers*).
- The Green Parties of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (Fuchs 2015), for example, initially used the internal I:

"The Green Party is the party of equality. [...] Accordingly, we are also committed to equality issues, which for us clearly include gender-appropriate language. That is why our texts are written in a gender-appropriate way, i.e. including both the masculine and feminine gender. For us Greens, it is a great concern not to discriminate against women in terms of language. In certain cases, we even use the female gender exclusively, as in our party statutes [...]. To include the female form, we often use the suffix -Innen, as with migrants." (Kamm 2015, nach Fuchs. 95f.)

Feminist journals such as EMMA, first university guidelines

written / oral

- Much use of both forms (*tenant: Mieter, Mieterin*)
 - Shorthand writing with / and I (*MieterIn*)
 - Participles (*Mietende*)
 - Neutral formulation as a compound (*renting party: Mietpartei*)
 - Glottal stop in oral communication: *bakers* (*bakers: BäckerInnen* [ˈbɛkɐʔɪnən])
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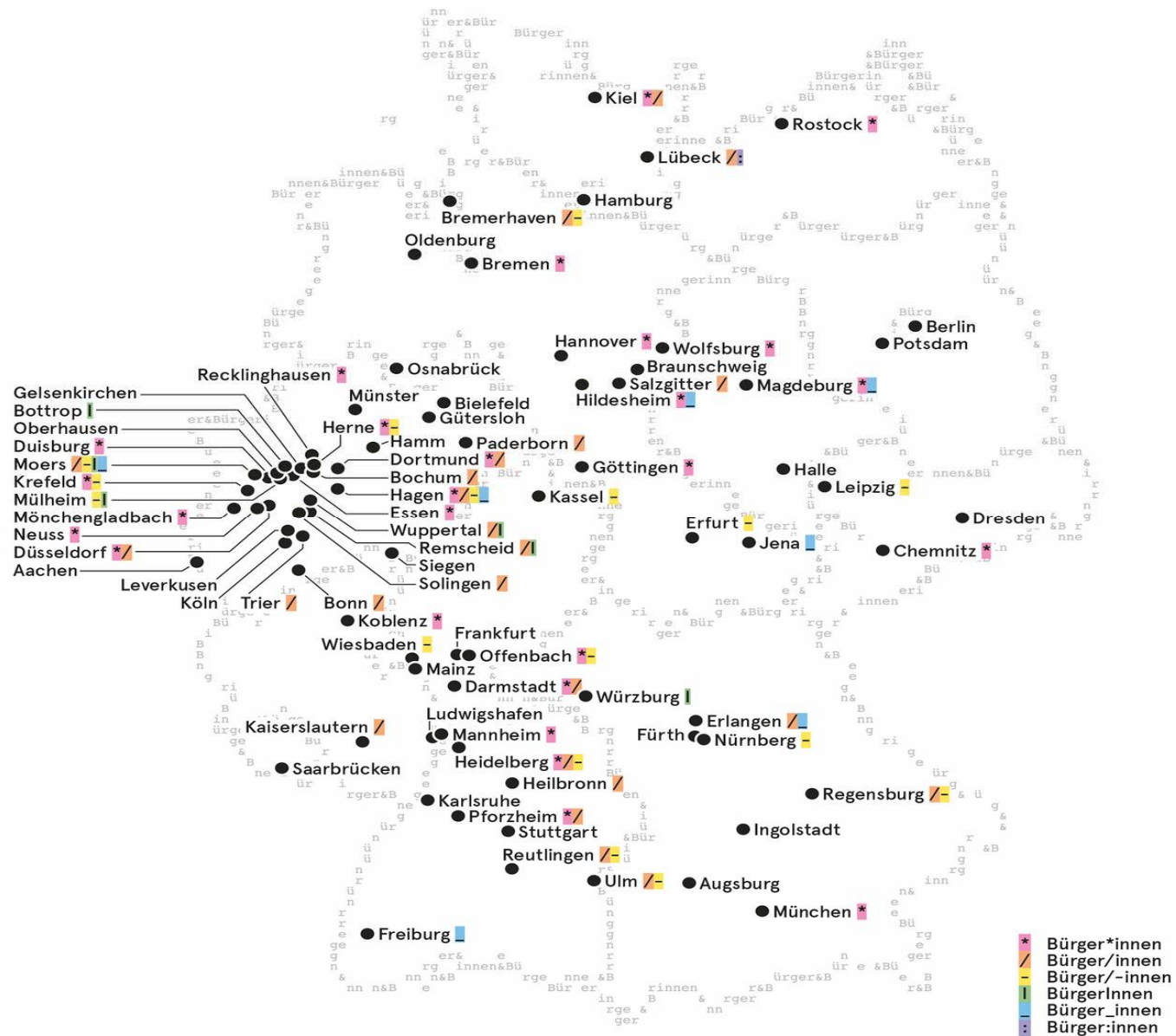
Thinking in the background

- **Making** women **visible** through explicit naming.
 - Language change through discursive awareness.
 - Language shapes thinking: W. v. Humboldt tradition of the shaping of thinking by language (e.g. in Rothmund/Scheele (2004, p. 41) and Gygax et al. (2008) explicit commitment to linguistic relativism à la Sapir/Whorf). Relativism à la Sapir/Whorf).
 - **Identity politics: “Doing being a feminist.”**

 - Linguistic ideology? Functions of vagueness or
inferencing underestimated? Too strong relativism?
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4. The non-binary register: _ * :

- We find this register e.g. in journals such as "Missy," on internet platforms like "change.org," in the German and Swiss Green Parties, often in left wing newspapers such as TAZ and WOZ, at universities and cultural institutions, also in publications of many cities and companies (Kolek 2019, Müller-Spitzer 2023). Since the magazine "Missy" often distinguishes itself from "Emma," this results in a mutual contouring of "feminist" and "queer." In the last years many new guidelines recommend this type.
 - A palette of diverse reference functions is asserted for the arbitrary graphemes: to non-binary persons but also sometimes to sexual identities such as homosexuals
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<https://www.zeit.de/zeit-magazin/2021/01/gendern-staedte-schreibweise-sprache-deutschlandkarte>

Campaign of the Freiburg equality office concerning the underscore (2021) referring to LGBTQ+ (here homosexuals). In 2022 this style was changed again to the “generic feminine” with the addition (a) all, from 2024 on usage of * (Freiburger*innen)



Many instructions or guidelines for gender-fair language
(Schneider 2022)

Construction of the optimal language with the morpheme "ens"?

2021: Lann Hornscheidt & Ja'n Sammla: Wie schreibe ich divers? Wie spreche ich gendergerecht? Ein Praxis-Handbuch zu Gender und Sprache.

Abolition of gender in personal reference. Therein proposal on ending "ens" ("ens" also as gender-neutral pronoun, "dens" as definite article, **citizen:** "**Bürgens**" instead of Bürger/in) .

SRF (Swiss radio and television) gives instructions on its Instagram channel, introducing the pronouns "they/them," "xier/xien," and "hen" for nonbinary people designation in German.

(12. 6. 2022)

Linguistic ideology?

High artificiality!

Background: Radical constructionism/ Discourse idealism/ Determinism

Hornscheidt (2012) and Gygax et al. (2021) attribute to language a supremacy in the production of reality. Jakiela/Ouzier (2018): Whether a language has gender shapes women's engagement in the professional world.

Intrinsic structure and the historicity of a language are not taken into account.

The “queer registers” go along with a strong pedagogical orientation (trainings, guidelines).

Clear language ideological potential!

Identity politics: Doing being queer/progressive/up to date.

Petterson (2010) and Kotthoff/Nübling/Schmidt (2018)

Problems: Undermining of custom formation

- The non-binary register is continuously graphemically enriched and modified. New signs at the morpheme boundary, whose semantics are set and disseminated via explanatory guidelines (currently recommending the colon *Lehrer:innen*).
 - Language change without custom formation ??
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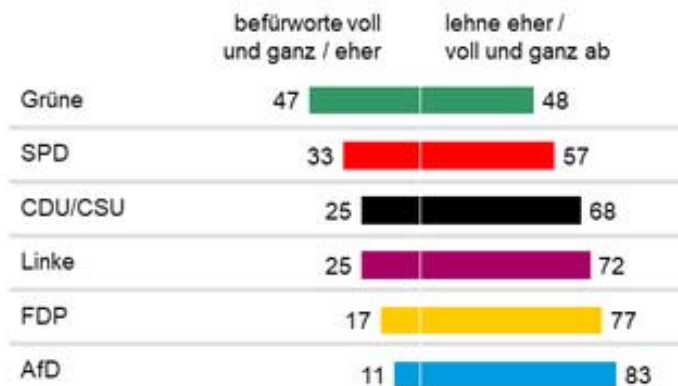
Survey results

Gendergerechte Sprache – KW 19/2021
Bewertung genderechter Sprache

WELT AM SONNTAG



Parteianhänger



Nun eine Frage zu einer geschlechterneutralen Sprache, also der sogenannten Gendersprache. Dafür wird beispielsweise beim sogenannten 'Binnen-I' nicht von 'Wählerinnen und Wählern', sondern in einem Wort von 'WählerInnen' gesprochen, d.h. mit kurzer Pause vor dem 'i'. Außerdem werden beispielsweise aus den Zuhörern die Zuhörenden. Wie stehen Sie zur Nutzung einer solchen Gendersprache in Presse, Radio und Fernsehen sowie bei öffentlichen Anlässen? Befürworten Sie dies voll und ganz, eher, lehnen Sie dies eher ab oder voll und ganz ab?

Grundgesamtheit: Wahlberechtigte in Deutschland
Werte in Prozent / Veränderungen in Prozentpunkten zu Mai 2020
Fehlende Werte zu 100 Prozent: Weiß nicht / keine Angabe

- <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/deutschland/gesellschaft/gendern-journalist-sprache-geschlecht-100.html>
 - At 38 percent, 16- to 29-year-olds are significantly more positive about the use of gender-sensitive language than those over 65, at seven percent.
 - Non-representative but weighted survey of 25,731 people from the East German countries Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia.
 - Relevance attribution: 86 percent stated that this debate and reform is unimportant. Only 14 percent believe that the concern to make all genders audible and visible in the German language is important.
 - Similar are results from Jäckle (2022)
 - **East-West diatopic** relevance, **diaphasic** relevance, **diastratic** relevance
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5. Moderate „Gendern“

- Now and then both forms or a feminine form including a special sign, otherwise generic masculine person references (Feilke 2023)
 - Many neutral forms
 - Alternation of generic feminines and masculines, e.g. in series (actresses, directors and cameramen...) Gradual “Gendern.”
 - Strongly represented e.g. at radio stations like SWR, Ö1, SRF2, newspapers such as Wochenzeitung DIE ZEIT, Süddt. Zeitung, Tagesanzeiger, Standard
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Thinking in the background

- Text-linguistic perspectives: both forms are not permanently necessary and are text-aesthetically problematic.
- “Gendern” can be done differently depending on the context.
- Results of the study by Rothmund/Scheele (2004) confirm this.

Doing being liberal, modern and seeking high agreement.

Rothmund/Scheele (2004): Personenbezeichnungsmodelle auf dem Prüfstand.

~~Lösungsmöglichkeiten für das Genus-Sexus-Problem auf Textebene.~~

Association with life style/stance/attitude

Bourdieu (1983): Styles as recognizable factors of distinction!

Localization of “Gendern” in academic, urban and green-liberal milieus (various surveys by Infratest Dimap, Allensbach, mdr, Jäckle 2022).

Internal distinctions within these milieus (doing being progressive?
Kotthoff 2020, 2023)

6. Stances, attitudes, language ideology

Carrying out qualitative interviews about “Gendern” we expect:

Expressions of attitudes as

- relevance-based stocks of knowledge,
 - active constructions of meaning in context,
 - and at the same time relatively stable believe systems,
 - involving positioning, aesthetic value, and affective stance (Purschke 2014).
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6.1. Guided Interviews

Interview guidelines were developed in a seminar (Kotthoff 2023) that ask people without a high school diploma questions about:

- 1. whether the person particularly likes or dislikes some trends in the public use of the German language,
 - 2. about their professional environment and range of activities,
 - 3. how the interviewee obtains information. As a thematic introduction, the interviewer then explains
 - 4. that at the university reference is now always “Studierende/those studying” and no longer “Studenten/students” as previously and we ask for the opinion of the interviewee. Then she also asks
 - 5. whether she, as a future teacher, should write in a letter to parents “The Lehrerinnen and Lehrer of our school invite you to the parents' evening” or whether “Lehrer/teachers” is sufficient here. After that, three short texts from the travel literature using different styles of “Gendern” are presented for free comments.
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6.2. On the method of qualitative guideline interviews

Honer (2003) justifies the use for social scientific topics in the following way:

In the interview, the interviewee is challenged to actively reconstruct events, experiences and knowledge. Qualitative interviews are not conducted under the heading of representativeness, but aim to get very close to subjective experience. A social typology is at stake. The interviewees are assumed to have specific experiences that one wants to get at. The interviewer stimulates her/his interviewee to "come out of her shell". On the basis of a transcript, it is necessary to catch up with the hermeneutic challenge, not only an understanding, but also an "understanding of understanding," for example, by sequence analysis (local reproduction of meaning). One often reaches the limits of linguistic explicability. Coding as a first approach to the material. (Translation Kotthoff)

Einblick in zwei Interviews

U30mD der Grüne **pro** I: Lisa Discher

- B: Also wo Klausuren ausgegeben wurden, die halt nicht gegendert wurden und so, **was ich dann schon krass finde**. Und da war ich dann auch **bisschen entsetzt** darüber, dass das an ner Schule noch nicht. Also ich dachte so in der Gesellschaft, ja okay, da ist das (lacht) schwierig, aber in 'ner Bildungsinstitution hätte ich dann doch gedacht, **dass es fortschrittlicher wäre**.
 - I: Mhm.
 - M: Aber da war das wirklich ein Kampf. Also über die vier Jahre hinweg, also in den letzten Jahren hat's dann so ein bisschen gefruchtet.
-

9 u30mD **contra**

Soldat

I: Adam

Kürth aber ich finde, **keine Ahnung**, Studierende find ich noch halbwegs okay, ja? (-) Aufs Gendern bezogen, also auf dieses Thema, ehm, weil das jetzt **nicht so ein Riesendrama** is ja, also ich kann mir vorstellen, dass da irgendwelche Leute sich da diskriminiert fühlen, weil nicht genau detailliert wurde, okay, wer ist jetzt gemeint und wir müssen das jetzt gendern, aber ich weiß nicht, ich find **ehrlich gesagt**, is (-) n **bisschen übertrieben**, jegliche, angenommen es gibt ne Nationalhymne und die dann zu gendern, das ist, **keine Ahnung**, da bin ich, **meine persönliche Meinung**, bin ich jetzt nicht der größte Fan von.

I: Okay.

B: Weil eh, es gibt halt Dinge, die sind halt einfach, **keine Ahnung**, traditionell, ja? Ohne, aber mit dem genannten sag ich das, ohne wie gesagt jetzt irgendjemanden bloßzustellen, zu verhöhnen, oder schlecht zu machen. Ich finde einfach, das sind Dinge, die haben oft was mit Tradition zu tun oder einfach mit Kultur, weißt du?

I: Ja.

B: Ich find das dann **ehrlich gesagt** (-), ich denke mir persönlich, es gibt größere Probleme auf dieser Welt, um jetzt (-) eine Nationalhymne zum Beispiel zu gendern, ja?

What we got:

- Thematization of subjective language experience
 - Lay linguistic metalanguages around “Gendern”
 - Access to language consciousness, ideologies, backgrounds, stances (Jaffe et al. 2009)
 - Language attitudes in discursive context
 - Positionings (of ego and alter, Langenhove/Harré 1999)
 - Hermeneutic effort of the researcher
 - Coding and categorization of the meta-linguistic utterances (Kotthoff 2023)
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6.3. First findings

- Access to thinking about the German language (and oneself as a speaker, Kotthoff 2023).
 - Access to knowledge in the thematic area.
 - This language change takes place on the level of consciousness.
 - Often a critical attitude is taken to the reform phenomena and somehow formulated, also to the ways of the public transmission.
 - More or less pronounced weighing.
 - Language-aesthetic preferences are formulated.
 - Findings go beyond correlation.
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7. Open questions

The registers of “Gendern” have a high significance for “doing being progressive.”

What else is associated with these ways of speaking/writing?

Thank you for your attention!



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