Language Ideologies in the German Discourse on "Gendern"

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„Gendern"   ???

- „Gendern" (Denglish) means to not refer to people with a generically intended masculine term. High „discoursive consciousness" (Kroskrity 1998) is demanded

- Deep ideological struggles in the German speaking countries about traditional and new ways of referring to people.

- the singer   der Sänger, die Sängerin, der/die Sänger*in…. Die Sängerin*

- Der Sänger masc.

- Die Führungskraft   the manager fem.

- Das Mitglied   the member neuter

Structure:

- 1. Language Ideologies
- 2. The phenomenal area of person references in German
- 3. The traditional register and its theoretical/ideological background
- 4. The feminist register and its theor./ideol. background
- 5. The queer register and its …
- 6. Moderate „Gendern" and its …
- 7. Is every position equally ideological?

1. Language 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).

- Lang. ideol. analasis synthesizes an interest in **interrelatedness of linguistic awareness, linguistic beliefs, feelings, and practices, and relations of political economic power** (Kroskrity, 2009, 72)

- They envision and enact **ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology** (Woolard et al. 1998, 3)

- Implicit and explicit metapragmatics

Various notions:

The great devide (Schieffelin et al. 1998)**:**

➤ **Neutral** ideological analysis focusses on culturally shared beliefs and practices (Mannheim 1936; Rumsey 1990…),

➤ Voloshinov (1973, 92): This ideological chain stretches from individual consciousness to individual consciousness, connecting them together. Signs emerge, after all, only in the process of interaction between one individual consciousness and another. **Consciousness becomes consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content, consequently, only in the process of social interaction**.

➤ …………

➤ **Critical** ideological analysis emphasizes the political use of language as an **instrument of symbolic domination (Bourdieu 1991)**.

➤ The Marxist tradition: historically necessary **false consciousness** (Eagelton 1991, 89)

➤ Ling. ideology can represent the **constructions of particular elites** who obtain the required complicity (Bourdieu 1991).

2. The phenomenal area of reforms in the gender language German

Gender in German:

All German nouns are included in one of three grammatical genders: masculine, feminine or neuter. However, gender is not relevant to the plural forms of nouns.

Person reference in English and German:

- "the teacher" = die Lehrerin / der Lehrer

- "the teachers" = die Lehrer / die Lehrerinnen / die Lehrer und Lehrerinnen

- Congruence in the noun phrase: die Lehrerin nahm ihr Buch / der Lehrer nahm sein Buch / die Lehrer nahmen ihre Bücher/ die Lehrerinnen nahmen ihre Bücher

The starting point of the reforms and the debate:

Dissatisfaction arose in the women's movement 45 years ago with being co-masculine in the cross-gender masculine.

Gender concious person reference

- Substantivation of present participles (*those studying/ Studierende*)

- Dual designation (*violinists/Geiger und Geigerinnen*)

- Neutralizing compounds on -force or -person (*Lehrperson/teaching person or agent*)

- **Abbreviations: Morphol. feminine plural with various signs on the morphol. border:** *speakers:*

- **Sprecher -/ innen, Sprecher(inn)en (Councel for Orthography)**

- **SprecherInnen (feminist reform)**

- **Sprecher_innen (queer reforms)**

- **Sprecher*innen**

- **Sprecher:innen** (see e.g. Scheller-Boltz 2022)

STERNTALER*IN

2.1. 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. taylors/SchneiderInnen)
- 3. non-binary inspired (e.g. Schneider*innen)
- 4. selectively gendered (Kotthoff 2020)

Participation of the register in the communicative construction of a social milieu via social symbolism

Overt ideological contestation in the media (on that see Kroskrity 1998)

2.2. Sociosymbolic Indexicality

- Distinctions in language use symbolically form communities around histories of use that sediment in 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.

Typical for language ideologicality

- Overt ideological contestation/metalinguistic discourses
- High discoursive consciousness
- Implicit metapragmatic indicators (less salient features)
- Explicit metapragmatic regimentation (e.g. via guidelines)
- Institutionalzations

A closer look:

- Intersection of language use and structure:

The generic meaning of masculine reference is declining, … (Berlin court 2023)

- Overt ideological contestation/metalinguistic discourses

 (in the academia, the mass media, many institutions, and in the private sphere)

- High salience

Complaints about using „wrong" registers addressing newspapers, broadcasters…

- Implicit metapragmatic indicators

Associations with sexist, prescriptivist, conservative, feminist, queer, green-progressive („woke") …milieus

- Explicit metapragmatic regimentation

Guidelines for every university, most cities, many firms, museums, …

- Institutionalzations

Guidelines for official publications of firms, universities, city administrations…,

2.3. . Questions of our research project (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 phenomenal areas are thematized in debates and interviews on gender-related language? How are language attitudes related to "gendering" shaped, justified, and socially assigned? (P1 Kotthoff)

- Which grammatical and semantic-lexical factors influence gender associations, for example singular/plural (P2 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 Ferstl)

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

3. 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 shall also apply without restriction to person references according to Eisenberg (2017), Bayer (2019) and others.

Prescriptivist and normative ideology   ?

Symbology as (linguistically) conservative and/or critical of bureaucracy and/or elitism …

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, zitiert nach Fuchs S. 54)

- **Thuringias's CDU and AfD stop genderfair communication (11. 11. 2022)** https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/landtag-thueringen-gendern-cdu-afd-1.5693979

But:

- Eva Menasse, Feridun Zaimoglu and other writers reject the bureaucratic ductus of „Gendern" (in DIE ZEIT).

- The left member of parliament Sahra Wagenknecht also rejects „Gendern" in her book "Die Selbstgerechten". (The self-righteous) as being elitest.

- Large east-west differences in Germany!

Abandonment of "Gendern" with a feminist motivation

„So sieht ein Chemiker aus."

This is what a chemist looks like.

Similar politics as in Iceland (Friðriksson 2017)

Science journalist and chemist Mai Thi Nguyen-Kim 2022

Ideological contestation on political meaning (progressivity vs. conservatism)

Thinking/ideology 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 der NZZ, translated by Kotthoff)

Where does linguistic ideology start? Hypostasis? No attention to psycholinguistic studies?

4. The feminist register

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

- Prominence of internal capital I at the morphem boundary (*Leser*I*nnen*/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.)
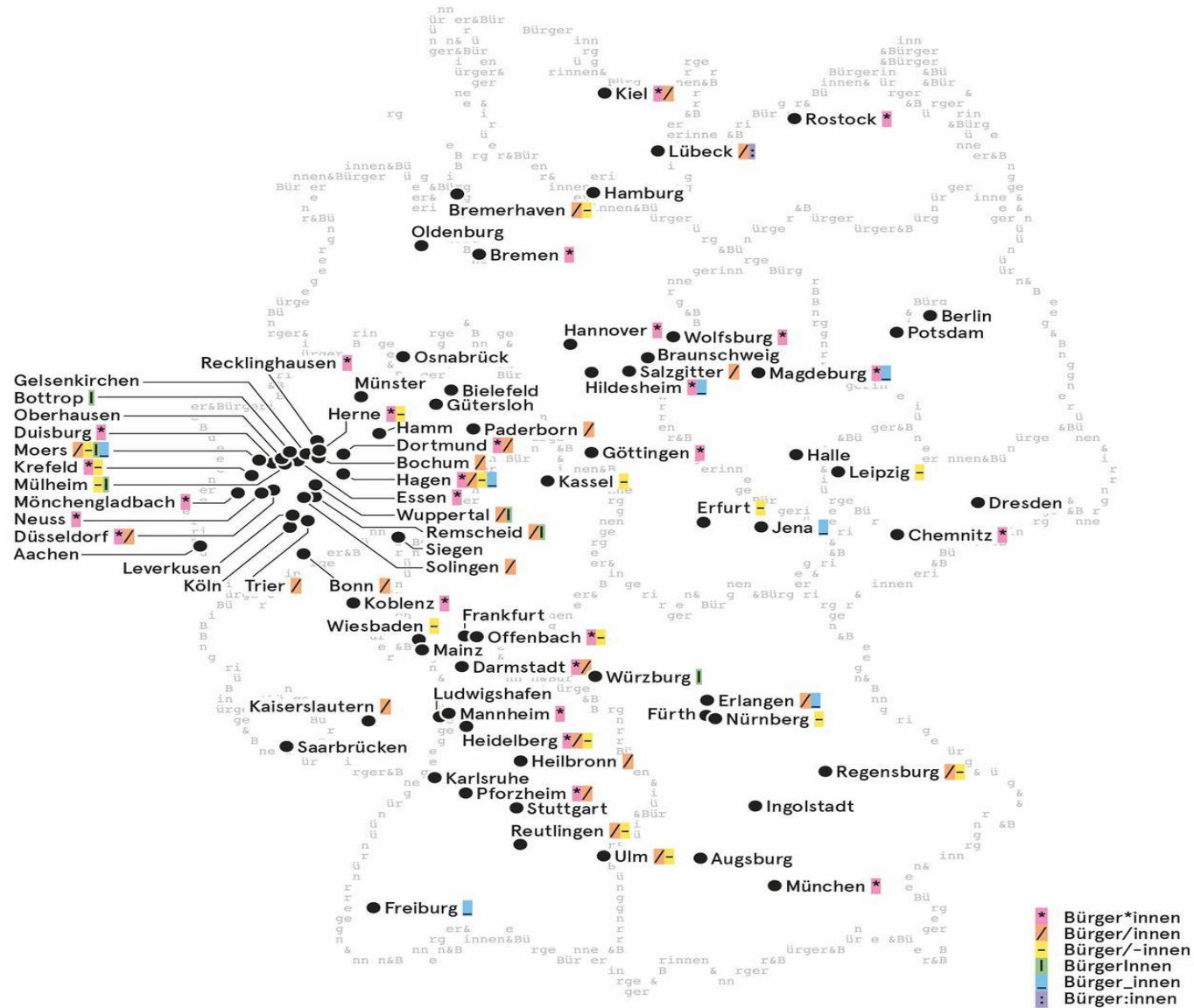
Feminist journals such as EMMA, left newspapers such as WOZ, TAZ

Thinking/ideology in the background

- **Making** women **visible** through explicit referencing (supported by findings from psychological experiments on first associations).

- Language change through 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).

- Very **high clarity requirements** pervade this discourse.

- **Ideological potential?** Reliance only on tests on first associations? No recognition of the pragmatic function of inferencing in texts?

5. The non-binary register: _ * :

- We find this register e.g. in public broadcast internet platforms, at universities and cultural institutions, also in publications of many cities and companies, in journals such as "Missy," on internet platforms such as "change.org," in the German and Swiss Green Party, often in left wing newspaper such as TAZ and WOZ. Since the magazine "Missy" often distinguishes itself from "Emma," this results in a mutual contouring of "feminist" and "queer" register. In the last years many guidelines recommending this type.

- A palette of diverse reference functions is asserted for the graphemes: to nonbinary persons but also to sexual identitites such as homosexuals (Kolek 2019, Scheller-Boltz 2022).

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 of person reference was again changed to the "generic feminine" with the addition (a) *all*

Does the wrongness of this claim make it ideological?

Construction of the optimal language with the suffix "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 person 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)

Artificiality as a clear case of ideology?   !!

Radical constructionism/ Discourse idealism/ Determinism

Hornscheidt (2012) and Gygax et al. (2021) attribute to language a **supremacy in the production of reality**. See also 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 register" goes along with a strong pedagogical orientation (trainings, guidelines).

The group which should become associated with a sign is too big (LGBTQA....)

High ideological potential!

Petterson (2010) and Kotthoff/Nübling/Schmidt 2018

7. Moderate „Gendern"

- Now and then both forms or a morphol. Feminine with a special sign "to show respect", otherwise generic masculine person references (Feilke 2022)

- Many neutral forms such as "die Führungskraft"

- Alternation of generic feminines and masculines, e.g. in series (Regiseurinnen, Schauspieler und Kameraleute / directrices, actors, and camerapeople…)   Gradually pronounced gendering

- Represented e.g. at public broadcast radio stations and liberal newspapers such as:

SWR, Ö1, SRF2, Wochenzeitung DIE ZEIT, Süddt. Zeitung, Tagesanzeiger, Standard

Thinking/ideology in the background

- Text linguistic perspectives: both forms are not necessary in permanence and text aesthetically problematic.

- "Gendern" can be done gradually differently depending on the context.

- Experimental results of the study by Rothmund/Scheele (2004) confirm this.

Low ideological potential?   !!

Rothmund/Scheele (2004): Personenbezeichnungsmodelle auf dem Prüfstand. Lösungsmöglichkeiten für das Genus-Sexus-Problem auf Textebene.

7. Is every position equally ideological?

Many components are involved in a reform that affects person references:

- e.g. questions about language change (who drives it? what role does pedagogical instruction play?),

- processing reference in a textual context

- evocation of first associations

- the role of background knowledge

- text stylistics

The more is taken into account, the least ideological are the practice and the theoretical backing

High ideologicity:

- Norm-grammatical perspective and markedness theory only.
- Artificial construction of optimality
- Hardly any text and context sensitivity
- High pedagogical input

Low ideologicity:

- Mediation of language history and cognition
- Text and context taken into account
- Text stylistics taken into account
- …

Thank you for your attention

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