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Deconstructionism And Language Shift – The Scientific Troubles Of Political Correctness

ABSTRACT

Deconstructionism teaches us, that power lies within language, or rather that power decides, what language is supposed to mean. The old question asked in Alice in Wonderland: „*Who decides, what words mean?*" builds up to the discrepancy in any language between the individual speaker's intention and his or her position in the political power hierarchy. In recent decades calls for a more humane language have arisen, giving birth to movements of political correctness in the Western hemisphere, making it an issue of globalisation being fairly paired with left-wing ideology, making everyday conversation a subject of critique, calling for normative changes in language and ultimately facing the same question everywhere: Does it in fact help? This paper will shed light on the empirical linguistic knowledge we possess on the connection between form and content, going back to De Saussure and following the discourse of language and power in an historical manner, thus taking a hard look at the theoretical background of the dynamics of power and language, building a chronology of deconstructivist theorists like Derrida, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Barthes. These theories will be paralleled with the so-called linguistic turn from its beginning to the nowadays so popular Neo-Whorfian approach. Finally the deconstructivist method will be put in contrast to what we know about the connection between language on action following John Austin, circling back to the postmodern discursive approach known in everyday life: The language policing of everyday conversations by individual speakers, representing the deconstructivist movement, comparing it to the empirical data about language and culture, the named and the unnamed, empowerment and the mechanics of language shifting that were subject to studies already more than a hundred years ago, focusing on the shift of meaning and tabooing of vocabulary, dissecting what critics of political correctness call the „*euphemism treadmill*", building up to the effects of political correctness we have come to experience so far. The goal is to finally answer the question, whether language policing and the growing public attention to the use of language do have an egalitarian effect on reality.

KEY WORDS

Deconstructionism. Language shift. Overview. Political correctness. Neo-Whorfianism. Euphemism treadmill.

1. Introduction

For some of us politically correct speech is a way of expressing their concerns with other people's feelings, and we try to abstain from using hurtful speech, it is a way of being humane with words. For others it only appears to be an unnatural corset to naturally grown language. The specific phenomenon of political correctness might not be the only language regulation known to mankind, but one that has emerged extensively in recent decades in the whole Western hemisphere, making it notable on a global scale while soaking into everyday conversation. The questions asked here are supposed to create an overview of what is taught nowadays about the interconnection of language and society. What is the source of all these slogans used to defend the practice of speech policing? Where do the quotes of those correcting other people's language on a day to day basis find their academical pendant? From which academical background do phrases like *„language is power"*, *„language is action"*, *„language is a weapon"*, *„words hurt"* etc. come from? What role does the intention of the speaker take Deconstructionism teaches us, that power lies within language, or rather that power decides, what language is supposed to mean.

2. Methodology

In the first chapter the theories in which political correctness originated will be set in relation to their likewise theoretical predecessors. Where do the slogans come from, and what theoretical background do they have? Here we examine in a historical manner De Saussure and follow the academical discourse of language and power, building a chronology of deconstructivist theorists, starting with Derrida, Lacan, Bourdieu, Foucault, Barthes until finally closing with Said, Butler and Deleuze. In the same chapter we will approach the language of philosophy, following the so-called linguistic turn with the same method, focusing on Wittgenstein, Hegel and Whorf. The deconstructivist method will then be put in contrast with what we know about the connection between language on action following John Austin, circling back to the postmodern discursive approach known in everyday life and a discussion on the connection of these theories.

In the next chapter these theories will be put side by side with the method and results of some of the most infamous studies on language and society: the claims made by defenders of political correctness. What are the studies saying about the theories, where are they contradictious and what are their conditions? Here we will take a look at the Neo-Whorfian approach to language, at the puzzle of the number of genders in a language and the so called euphemism treadmill, closing with the linguistic theoretical bases in which we see the results of these studies reflected, trusting, that the empirical experiment is more reliable than any unproven theory. The discrepancies between those results will be discussed.

This piece is merely a who-said-what of academical graveness in the field, asking: what did the theorists the political movement is built upon actually write and what happens, when we compare it to the empirical work done on the subject on language and society? What is the knowledge we have about language, how do these theories fit with deconstructionism or Whorfism? Are the linguistic facts living up to the theories? This text aims to take a look at the dynamics between language and power by going back to the sources and summarizing their actual content and by putting the great names we are confronted with in discussions about language policing in comparison to one another and subsequently by examining contradictions and similarities. It is merely a short overview on sources and research. The goal is to finally answer the question, whether language policing and the growing public attention to the use of language have an egalitarian effect on reality.

3. Purely theoretical arguments for speech policing

3.1 Language is discourse/power

I have to expose the reader to quite a lot of information up front and put all of it into tiny packages, in a way similar to which students nowadays are confronted with, in a way I was confronted with in Gender- and Cultural studies courses: Jacques Derrida's theories were based on the easily understood division of what a sign is according to Saussure:[1] the connection of arbitrariness, convention, and association. Even onomatopoeia like cock-a-doodle-doo and kikeriki differ from one another. It is the reason, why we have different languages. The word for tree neither looks like a tree, nor sounds like a tree. To break it down: Derrida looked at the structure of society and saw that no meaning is ever fixed.[2]

The idea of the unfixed meaning got taken up by Lacan[3] in the field of psychoanalysis, as well as Bourdieu and Foucault in sociology, with Lacan stating, that without language there would be no meaning of self and Bourdieu noting, that what is meant and understood is a question of the position one occupies in the social field.[4] Meaning, as Foucault and his companions noted, was a manifestation of power and power is therefore reflected in discourse.[5] This is a truly exciting idea that can't be verified or falsified as no one stands outside society or power hierarchies and even academic knowledge exchange takes place inside the web of discourses.

What Derrida originally suggested as a way of interpreting literature and historical texts by finding oppositions and presumptions in it, soon became an instrument to analyse society as a whole: deconstruction. Not only reducing even the most artistic pieces of writing to mere social commentary, but also dissecting everyday speech in everyday life. The premise goes something like this: the powerless must be deconstructing the discourse, not leaving the decision over what something means to the powerful because discourse is language.

3.2 Language is action/performance/violence

Then a new wave of theorists like Deleuze[6,] Said[7], and Butler[8] emerged with their own furthering concepts. These theorists claim or at least strongly suggest, that language is always action, it is always performance. Let's exemplify this with Butler.

That language is always action is supposed to go back to John Austin, but Judith Butler doesn't even quote Austin – not in Gender Trouble[9] anyway where she claims that society inscribes itself into the human body through language. She does not provide a conclusive argument how exactly this happens, there's no empirical work and quite a few paragraphs end

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[1] DE SAUSSURE, F.: *Course de linguistique générale*. Paris, Saint Germain : Éditions Poyot & Rivages, 1997, p. 97.
[2] See also: DERRIDA, J.: *Of Grammatology*. 40th Anniversary Edition. Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016.
[3] See also: LACAN, J.: *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English.* New York : Norton & Company, 2008.
[4] See also: BOURDIEU, P.: *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Cambridge : University Press, 1977.
[5] See also: FOUCAULT, M.: *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*. 3rd Edition. London : Penguin, 2002.
[6] See also: DELEUZE, G.: *Logic of Sense*. London, Oxford : Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.
[7] See also: SAID, E. W.: *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient.* 25th Anniversary Edition. London : Penguin Classics, 1995.
[8] See also: BUTLER, J.: *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York, London : Routledge, 1990.
[9] BUTLER, J.: *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative.* New York, London : Routledge, 1997, p. 149.

with a question mark. She quotes Bourdieu and Derrida. Even in her work Excitable Speech[10] she rather presents everything originating from Austin with the interpretations of later theorists. Even though she puts one quote from Austin at the front of her work: *„Infelicity is an ill to which all acts are heir which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial, all conventional acts“.[11]* From this she deduces on the first page of Excitable Speech, that all language is acting. Something that this quote logically simply can't confirm. But what was it, that Austin actually said?[12] Speech acts are acts of phones, which are the sounds coming out of one's mouth, and they are not only constative or performative, but they can be both, much like on a scale between describing the world (constative) and acting with speech (performative). If a ship is named, the performance is clearly visible, but also statements about the world can have a reason, why they are said, which is often only to be found in their context. Even if someone talks to himself, there might by psychological reasons, but does that change the world in any manner? You'd have to be a strong believer of the butterfly effect to agree with a statement like this. Today speech acts are still classified by Austin's system. This means ignoring something he was fully aware of, by calling the centre of his science *„acts of phones“* – it's the sound you hear, the form it takes. Everything else, the statement about the world, the action itself and the intentions of the speaker are different parts of speech. The form takes a special place in every theory of speech and communication. The one thing, that can only be judged aesthetically if it can be judged at all. Making this crucial distinction is the very foundation of twentieth century linguistics, because it reflects Ferdinand de Saussure's signifiant and signifié.

While Austin, when read closely, can't serve to legitimize language policing, he might still be seen as an authority on language philosophy, people throwing his name around tend to ignore his work: intention as part of his speech act classification is then substituted by convention which is seen as more powerful in e.g. Butler's Excitable Speech.[13] The act of phones on the other hand gets simply ignored. The highly selective method of reading early theorists, philosophers and empirical fieldworkers on the subjects leads to arguments built on authority, even though the authority never might have written anything closely to lead to nowadays conclusions. Even his closest predecessor John Searle writes in the 1990s, that the borders of meaning are the borders of the speaker's intentions and that analysis shows, what can be done with language is limited.[14] So, John Austin never claimed that every utterance in every situation is performance and therefore action, he just played with the thought that we can't draw an exact border between the description of the world and acting with words. The premise of the deconstructivist theory nevertheless narrowed it down to this: the powerless must be deconstructing the discourse, not leaving the decision of what anything means to the powerful. Discourse is language, language is action, and therefore language can be violence.

3.3 The recipient produces the text/message

The final purely theoretical argument is delivered by Roland Barthes, who took care of any intention or convention altogether, giving the recipient full authority over the meaning.[15] Barthes' writing denies all of this: convention, context, intention. But if the recipient is the one mostly

[10] See also: BUTLER, J.: *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative.* New York, London : Routledge, 1997.

[11] BUTLER, J.: *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York, London : Routledge, 1997, p. 1.

[12] See also: AUSTIN, J. L.: *How to Do Things with Words.* The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955. London : Oxford Clarendon, 1962.

[13] BUTLER, J.: *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative.* New York, London : Routledge, 1997, p. 34, 51, 168.

[14] SEARLE, J. R.: *Geist, Sprache und Gesellschaft.* Frankfurt a. M : Suhrkamp, 2004, p. 179.

[15] See also: BARTHES, R.: *The Death of the Author*. London : Taylor & Francis, 2018.

producing the text, that doesn't always make individual interpretation righteous, but makes it rather a mere question of what most people read into something. Also if the recipient is the one producing the meaning, this very same theory could be used as legitimization that the writer or producer of speech is always free of guilt and any misunderstanding is the recipient's fault. As we know the truth lies rather in between, as human miscommunication tends to happen, but can be dealt with. Barthes was also criticized for this approach in Foucault's "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" in[16] 1969 in front of the Société Française de Philosophie. It is highly doubtful that Derrida would recognize his own thinking in the politicized strategies his successors knitted out of them.

The premise of the deconstructionist theory therefore narrows even more: The powerless must be deconstructing the discourse, not leaving the decision of what anything means to the powerful. Discourse is language, language is action, and therefore language can be violence. The recipient of speech is always right about its meaning, so if the recipient feels offended the speaker has to be condemned.

That's a rather short summary of how we got from understanding, that the form is not shackled to its content, to quite a significant amount of people in academia being sure that changing forms would change the world. So the basic premise seems right even if unverifiable, but in Austin's writing, circumstances, purposes and intentions have to result in a certain situation. While early Deconstructionism logical arguments are followed (Derrida, Foucault, Bourdieu) they don't provide arguments for language policing. Later theorists (e.g. Butler) rather depend on claims and suggestions, reproducing concepts as slogans in a highly selective manner; however none of them did any empirical fieldwork.

4. The so-called linguistic turn

In an historical context this development might partially be related to parallel theories of what is called the linguistic turn, which ironically hasn't got a lot to do with linguistics, but rather with philosophy about language. Ludwig Wittgenstein is supposed to be the predecessor of this movement. The idea was pretty trendy at the time: The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus[17], trying to put the world in final formal order, stating that the borders of the mind are those of language. Instinctively that may sound right, as in our human experience we believe we can say just about anything. It doesn't matter if we need to describe or define something to make ourselves clear. We have managed fine so far, haven't we? He was actually not the first to stumble onto that idea. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel[18] also put a little something about this topic together once upon a time. Wittgenstein is often considered the one to have kicked off the linguistic turn. Austin and Saussure are often considered to be part of it, even though most of their work predated the Tractatus, and philosophical viewpoints were not their only focus, but rather empirical data and especially in Austin's philosophy it was not an ideal language, but the reality of language that took the main stage. The adamant reality of language later caused Wittgenstein to withdraw from his previous theories in the Tractatus, in his lectures resulting in the so called Blue Book,[19] as he realized, that language doesn't always follow the most logical

16 FOUCAULT, M.: „Was ist ein Autor?". In JANNIDIS, F. et al. (eds.): *Texte zur Theorie der Autorschaft*. Stuttgart : Reclam, 2000, p. 198–229.

17 See also: WITTGENSTEIN, L.: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Asheville : Chiron Academic, 2016.

18 See also: NIEGOT, A.:*„Es ist in Namen, dass wir denken." Sprache und Denken bei Hegel*. Duisburg-Essen : LINSE, 2004.

19 See also: WITTGENSTEIN, L.: *The Blue and Brown Books*. New York : Harper Torchbooks, 1965; BRIDGES, J.: The Search for *„The Essence of Human Language"*. In VERHEGGEN, C. (ed.): *Wittgenstein and Davidson on Language, Thought, and Action.* Toronto : Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 139-159.

path, in a similar way that Hegel threw his philosophy of language out the window, as we know from his posthumous published notes.[20] Sadly, barely anyone seemed to notice within the discourse of language policing. While Wittgenstein and Austin were racking their brains to figure out how meaning evolves in speech, nowadays it is common that people demanding politically correct speech, assume that their interpretation is right at any time and the speaker often just doesn't realize, what is meant by his words, but the recipient does.

5. Arguments with listed empirical evidence

5.1 Language influences everyday culture

Let's look at arguments for which we do have empirical evidence: the claim that language influences everyday culture.

One more reason that makes the „*language constructs our world*"- credo so attractive, might be found in Benjamin Lee Whorf's writing.[21] He was a contemporary of Wittgenstein and built his ideas from one theory, sticking to it until his very end: If a culture has no word for something, said culture doesn't have (un)said thing. Did you know, that the Italians have a single word for the little ring of spilled coffee on a coaster or table when you take the cup away? It's called „*culaccino*". We instinctively do know this „*thing*". We wipe it away with a napkin. Do we have a word for it in English, German or Russian? No. But believing in language being functional, I'm quite sure I did a sufficient job expressing, what I mean. There also needs to be considered that Whorf was not being exactly the empirical working type. He claimed that Eskimos, as they were called in his days have hundreds of words for snow.[22] That is simply not true, there are only two lexems, from which all other words derive from. It is a highly complex language after all. But barely anyone bothered – the idea was so tempting, lifting language up into being even more powerful than it is, that even in 1980 Dale Spender just assumed he is right in *Man Made Language.*[23]

The discrepancy of what is proven and what isn't, is not even noticed in the 1990s when Deborah Cameron in „*Feminist Linguistics*" quotes Saussure's theory of the sign and Whorf in the same breath. She just concludes that they would not be likely to agree with one another.[24] Let's take another example: In Gender Studies there is plenty of talk about how amazing this tribe of Quechua south of the Titicaca lake is, as they have ten social genders. Isn't that amazing? Looking Quechua up in The World Atlas of Language Structures[25], which was originally published by the Oxford University Press in 2005 and is now being digitally maintained by departments of the Max Planck Society in Leipzig, there is something odd to be found: The Quechua have no distinction of gender in their language. But there exist languages with „*five genders or more*". Zulu for example. But in their culture they recognize exactly two genders – not even a third one. My pick of samples here would suggest, that less gender in a language might allow for

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[20] See also: NIEGOT, A.: „*Es ist in Namen, dass wir denken." Sprache und Denken bei Hegel.* Duisburg-Essen : LINSE, 2004.

[21] See also: WHORF, B. L.: *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf.* Cambridge : MIT Press Ltd, 2012.

[22] MCWHORTER, J. H.: *The Language Hoax. The World Looks the Same in Any Language.* New York : Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 50.

[23] See also: SPENDER, D.: *Man Made Language.* Ontario : Pandora, 1980.

[24] CAMERON, D.: *Feminism & Linguistic Theory.* 2nd Edition. London, Hampshire : Macmillan, 1992, p. 194.

[25] *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online.* [online]. [2020-03-30]. Available at: <http://wals.info/chapter/31>.

more gender possibilities in cultures, but don't be misled by any confirmation bias, it isn't true: A hundred more examples will show that the connection is arbitrary.[26]

But, and here comes the exciting part: with the help of surveys and computerized tests we are nowadays in a position to check up on theories like that in the most precise way. Today you can watch a TED-talk video from Lera Boroditsky (a cognitive scientist) who takes a Neo-Whorfian approach, claiming, that nowadays we do have all the data we need.[27] We know, she explains, that people whose language order puts time vertically rather than horizontally, are faster to orientate the vertical way, or orienting by directions as north and south changes how they put things in order. So, yes, there is data. Yes, it is empirical. It also might have something to do with the writing direction in these cultures but, as John McWhorter shows impressively in The Language Hoax,[28] often the differences are about milliseconds and therefore without measurable influence on the everyday lives of people, because in the end, every language can express anything and we are more similar than we are different. From an egalitarian point of view this could be considered the preferable outcome. Boroditsky also talks about something that got hold of German public language: gender in language and how it shapes thought. She explains that in languages such as German a bridge has a female article and in tests people characterize it with female stereotypes: beautiful, elegant, etc. In languages in which bridge has a male article, people would say strong, robust, etc. She suggests the article is changing the view of the world. But is it really? Isn't it rather a chicken-egg-problem and the meaning was there before the word even existed, as so often happens? Because maybe history of language might tell us,[29] that articles in Indo-Germanic languages had other dimensions of indicating meaning attached to them as e.g. in the Germanic language things of use around the household would have a female article, no matter which language they originated from, or what article or gender they might have been used with in another language? The historic development, parts of comparative linguistics and the arbitrariness of language is ignored in Neo-Whorfianism. Well: Words don't arise out of a vacuum, and their history is a muddy one.

5.2 Reframing to raise awareness

The second argument brought forward with empirical work done on it is that language raises awareness and challenges prejudices. Now we arrived not only at the researching but also the consulting part: linguists try to raise awareness and „*reframe*".

There seem to exist quite a number of linguistic consultants in the world of media and politics like e.g. George Lakoff and Elisabeth Wehling.[30] Suggesting new terms, as McWhorter noted about Lakoff, or even new phrases or framing, works only for a limited period.[31] Steven

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[26] CORBET, C. G.: Number of Genders. Sex-based and Non-sex-based Gender Systems. Systems of Gender Assignment. In DRYER, M. S., HASPELMATH, M. (eds.): *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online.* Leipzig : Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, 2013. [online]. [2018-03-30]. Available at: <http://wals.info/chapter/31>.

[27] BORODITSKY, L.: *How language shapes the way we think.* TEDWomen 2017. New Orleans : Ted Conference 2017. (Full Video) HD. [online]. [2020-01-08]. Available at: <https://www.ted.com/talks/lera_boroditsky_how_language_shapes_the_way_we_think#t-405269>.

[28] MCWHORTER, J. H.: T*he Language Hoax. Why the World Looks the Same in Any Language.* New York : Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 37.

[29] See also: ALVANOUDI, A.: Aspects of the meaning of gender. In *International Journal of Language and Culture,* 2016, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 56-67.

[30] See also: JOHNSON, M., LAKOFF, G.: *Metaphors We Live By.* London : University of Chicago Press, 2003; WEHLING, E.: *Politisches Framing. Wie eine Nation sich ihr Denken einredet – und daraus Politik macht.* Bonn : Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2017.

[31] MCWHORTER, J. H.: *The Language Hoax. The World Looks the Same in Any Language.* New York : Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 230.

Pinker coined the term „*euphemism treadmill*". This refers to the simple fact that people are not supposed to use one word, so they will use another to replace it and in no time it will fulfil the previous one's function, fill the semantic hole and sound as tainted as the original one. But what is it, that „*sound*"? It is the everlasting game between connotation and denotation. And we knew those things – which mean they have been checked empirically – before all of those theories above evolved.

In 1880 a book was published in Germany by the linguist and lexicographer Hermann Paul who put the German language under close examination. It was called "The principles of the history Language".[32] One of the most intriguing chapters is called Language shift, examining the question of how language changes. He also (with quite some casualness) made a distinction between change of phones, of the form and how a word sounds differently than in earlier stages of the language, and the shift of meaning. For example he takes the German word for woman „*Frau*": If a word is overused it is likely to lose connotations, and the meaning will widen, the word derived from the medieval „*frôwe*", which in the beginning meant a noble woman, and later became the word for all women, pushing aside the word „*wîp*". So it lost the connotation of aristocratic heritage. Was there a powerful uprising of women in the Middle Ages we somehow missed? By no means. But minstrels and poets started to use the word in their songs for common women, to express how special they were in their eyes. The habit got picked up by common people and voilà: The meaning changed. To fill the semantic gap for aristocratic women, „*noble*" had to be explicitly added after this change.

What happens, if a word gets lost or prohibited? Attempts to change language forcefully are to be found all through history, the phenomenon is nothing new. Does the meaning disappear? We know that words disappear, if whatever they named goes out of existence or use. But the other way around? The connotation just happily hops onto the next best thing. People just would use the next best word in the previous sense and that's what it would become. We might just overuse words like „*cunt*" or „*nigger*" and the connotation will wash out eventually, if we try to use it in an alternative context, it might just lose the connotation of being an insult. A strategy adapted for example by the Hip-Hop group N.W.A („*Niggaz With Attitudes*"). The effect was rather small as language change only happens when applied from the great mass of speakers of any language. Alternatively applied only to whites the word might lose the meaning of referring to what nowadays seems to be called „*POC*". With „*cunt*"we have the connotations of an insult, female and genitalia. Would we only apply it to men, then most likely it would lose connotation of referring to females. Applied in a more neutral sense or even pet name it might lose its insulting quality. So we can see now how it works, but is this helpful? What happened, when the new Soviet regime in Russia introduced the word „*activist*" in a positive manner? It became a slur.

Also something else happens with phrases of inclusion, as it is happening with singular words that are prone to another common misbelief: Just by telling everyone the word they are using is a racist or sexist insult, they will stop using it, and both those things will be abolished in perpetuity. Sometimes the terms are then used in ironical ways – even in polite form unfriendly content can appear, as e.g. in Vienna even the word „*person*" can be used as an insult. If there is meaning to be expressed, it will find its expression. The trouble with framing and substitution of phrases by linguistic consultants is that they are not long lived, because of the euphemism treadmill.

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[32] PAUL, H.: *Principien der Sprachgeschichte.* 2nd Edition. Halle : Max Niemeyer, 1886, p. 66.

5.3 Solid data?

Taking a hard look at the empirical research also means taking a closer look at all the studies out there, claiming to have figured out exactly how language and society influence each other.

In Germany's official state communication people are now obligated to use the male and the female form in any reference to humans, to make the female part of a group „visible". Not only does this already seem troublesome for those who are neither male nor female, but we have already taken a look at the Quechua. There are a lot of people doing research on this, there are more than 80.000 articles with the subject of gender and language on academia.eu, a lot of them purely theoretical reproducing the theoretical claims I've already talked about in the first parts of this article and quite a view thousand, empirical research papers.

We are left with some hard methodological troubles in any case: firstly some papers stay purely theoretical on the weak legs I examined, but there are also questions about the quality of research: participants are often from the own peer group of those creating the surveys and are therefore trying to prove the point about the power of language, students from the very same field or within the same ideological bubble. As we always have trouble finding participants for empirical work, this has remained something challenging for a pretty long time. In fact people in the linguistic field themselves complain about it.

Secondly the time frame between theoretical work and empirical study is sometimes worrisome. Is data fully reliable, if a theory (e.g. language shapes the world) is propagated for thirty to forty years in a certain social field and afterwards data is collected in exactly that field, asking women, if they might have the feeling, that they are not included, if they are not mentioned? This circumstance has been discussed in academia at least since the 1960s, and at least since the 1980s in the media. I was invited to participate in a study, that was much more a questionnaire than a survey even in 2019 when awareness in the media for these subjects already broadly exists. In this flood of articles I've mentioned before, the earliest surveys asking these questions can be found in the 1980s.[33] Possible solutions would be to repeat surveys in intervals to research the influence of academical framing of what language is supposed to, as much as language shift requiring diverse groups of participants, which means to look for new ways to find participants or to observe language in the sociotope of social media, where speech acts are not academically framed at all. Our data is not exactly rock solid.

Thirdly the surveys and studies mentioned in books claiming, that language influences culture in a certain way, as in Elisabeth Wehling's[34] or Guy Deutscher's[35] work, do seem to have enormously low replication rates and in psychological journals a quite unsettling dominant publication bias seems to exist:[36] What doesn't prove the theory but contradicts it, will simply not get published. From a purely methodological, scientific point of view this is catastrophic.

There is no solution to terms and phrases being coined to make them last longer, especially since the internet language shift goes ever faster and in turn the treadmill turns faster with it. Still, the correlation of reframing and language shift would be an interesting field to research on its own. Bias in the academical field has to be worked on with a higher priority.

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[33] This claim is due to the fact, that in all the online sources I checked looking for answers, I could not find any studies trying to answer this question before the 1980s. If you happen to find early studies on the subject please feel free to contact me.

[34] See also: WEHLING, E.: *Politisches Framing. Wie eine Nation sich ihr Denken einredet – und daraus Politik macht.* Bonn : Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2017.

[35] See also: DEUTSCHER, G.: *Through the Language Glass. Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages.* New York : Metropolitan Books, 2010.

[36] BARGH, J. A.: *Estimating Reproducibility of Psychology (No. 140): An Open Post-Publication Peer-Review.* [online]. [2020-02-25]. Available at: <https://replicationindex.com/category/priming/>.

6. Conclusion

I am not claiming that language shouldn't be changed, out of crude conservativism, and that language would deteriorate simply because of change. Language has always changed, even though it might have been slowed down by the invention of printing techniques and sped up again by the internet. When an expression for something is necessary in a society, words will appear and the more people are using them, the better the chance the words will stick around for a while. There is definitely a chance for the they/them pronoun for example, especially because it already is historically grown.[37] None of the purely theoretical arguments hold up, as they seem to collide with other theories and empirical work can't back them up. No matter how much research is invested in the subject, we don't have exact knowledge about language and its influence on culture or the thinking human being. Therefore the claim that speech policing will provide certain predictable influence in reality remains unproven.

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[37] See also: BARON, D.: *What's your pronoun?*. London : Liveright, 2020.

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