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Gender and Text: How Societal Awareness of Gender and Identity Diversity Changes the Production of Texts – Illustrated with the Example of German

Abstract

Societies that need to deal with diversity also need to deal with the ways in which their members use texts, conventions for different text types and, consequently, with the production of texts itself. As societies change and become more diverse, texts will have to reflect this change eventually. Yet, how exactly does this social diversity affect our minds? How does the awareness of diversity influence our texts and their production? In this article, I will examine – primarily on the basis of general observations in the press and the media – the current developments in changes in German society. I will discuss social diversity and illustrate the different ways in which these factors influence speakers of German when they produce texts. By using examples from three categories of texts – oral texts, forms of address, job advertisements – I will show changes in text types and their conventions. The result of this study will be that a mix of different denominations or labels can increase the number of people reached, that language can perform substantially more functions and be substantially less discriminatory than is usually assumed, and that at the end of the day, generic masculine forms almost always address male persons exclusively. We will see that text types and their conventions are subject to change, and that this change is still evolving. Where this evolution of text types and their conventions will lead, remains to be seen.

Keywords: gender, gender linguistics, text conventions, text production, masculine generics, gender-fair language, language policies

1. Introductory Remarks

As a subject, gender-fair language in German-speaking countries appears to not yet have exhausted its potential to provoke public controversy. The debate still polarises society. So far, public opinion seems to be divided into three groups that are by no means consistently homogeneous. The classification of the

members of German society given below is based exclusively on this author's observations made during the past few years and must be definitely seen as an overgeneralised description of society. Moreover, since the classification below must not be seen as strict and homogeneous, the exact delineation of the groups as well as the transition from one group to the other are obviously blurred. However, by following and interpreting the ongoing debates and discussions especially in the press and the public media, we can divide German society into more or less the following three groups. One group is in favour of gender-fair language. Its supporters use gender-fair language themselves wherever and whenever they can. They create new, innovative variants of written language – and recently of spoken language, too (*cf. e.g.*, Diewald, Steinhauer 2020, 2017; Hornscheidt 2021; Hornscheidt, Oppenländer 2019; Hornscheidt, Sammla 2021; Kotthoff, Nübling 2018; Scheller-Boltz 2022, 2020). Not only in the public media but also within society at large, this group calls for increased sensitivity to and awareness of language use in the context of gender and identity. The second group rejects gender-fair language. Its adherents do not think that gender-inclusive language makes sense. In order to justify their position, they routinely voice their concerns that gender-fair language is inefficient and makes communication more difficult. Some also evoke aesthetic reasons for their opposition, calling gender-fair language a deliberate deformation of language. In this context, this group also emphasises that it will stick to traditional gender stereotypes and roles and their accompanying heteronormativity – an insistence that more often than not reveals an underlying heterosexist attitude and an unwillingness to part with old clichés and stereotypes regarding gender, identity, and roles (*cf.* contributions to linguistics by Andresen 1991; Guentherodt 1981; Guentherodt, Hellinger, Pusch 1981; Kalverkämper 1979; Schoenthal 1985; Stickel 1988; Trömel-Plötz 1981; Ulrich 1988 as well as Mairhofer 2013; Mairhofer, Posch 2017; Posch 2015, 2014a, 2014b; Scheller-Boltz 2022, 2020; Wetschanow 2017, w.y.). The third group is characterised by indifference and indecisiveness. People who belong to this group have no particular opinion as to gender-fair language. They neither accept nor oppose gender-fair language and remain steadfast only in their lack of passion for the topic. This indecisiveness is based firstly on the fact that the members of this group feel no need for gender-fair language because they identify predominantly as cis-persons. As a consequence, they consider traditional linguistic structures to be sufficient – primarily with regard to themselves and their own familiar environment. The belief that the generic masculine form constitutes a general, supra-individual way of designating people – a way that is above all detached from *sexus* – and that therefore includes women and additionally non-binary persons, too, is a widely held belief in this group. If members of this group use gender-fair language, they usually do not do so by their own conviction. Rather, their use of gender-fair language is motivated by societal expectations – expectations that are mediated either implicitly by the constant representation of social conditions in the media or explicitly by increasing social pressure, which they, too, start to feel – by requirements or at least strong incentives arising from their personal and/or work environment, or by other social factors, above all the media, which seem to influence their behavior to such a degree that they simply start using gender-fair language without being aware of it or thinking about it. This attitude is the logical and inevitable result of a lack of interest in dealing with ideas about gender such as *diversity*, *gender variety* and *non-binarity* and thus with the power of language, with the potential effects of speech acts, and with the interaction of language and reality, above all the construction of identity.

The debate about gender-fair language shows the divisions and differences within German society. As a consequence, these debates are present everywhere in the country (to some extent, this can also be

said about Austria and Switzerland). They take multiple forms and directions. Modes of implementation are continuously discussed in public media and society itself – as are options to make language even fairer and more inclusive. While these debates are far from over, one thing cannot be denied: concepts of gender-fairness and gender-neutrality have already noticeably impacted the German language, its structures, and consequently, written and spoken communication. What remains to be seen, is how gender-fair language will evolve and which new and innovative paths it will follow in the future, or in other words, what form linguistic gender-fairness will take in the future. Above all, it remains to be seen if there will be official and legally-binding guidelines as to gender-fair language use.

The question with which we need to deal at this point is: how does gender-fair language – or rather, its continuous implementation – affect texts? Society cannot avoid the ongoing debate about gender. The usage of certain gender-fair expressions and language structures, or rather a certain gender-fair language use, has been becoming customary for some time now and is required in public social life. Not only language use in general but also awareness of language in particular are changing as a result.

At the same time, people continue to produce texts with the purpose of exchanging information and communicating (*cf. language functions*), regardless of their form, be it written or spoken. In doing so, they can hardly escape the debate on gender and society's guidelines and requirements (which are so far mainly a social obligation), no matter what personal opinions or convictions they may hold. Debates and developments in the area of gender-fair language thus influence the production of every text either consciously or unconsciously. Not only does this change the texts or, to be more precise, the text types. It also affects the conventions underlying these text types. If we compare a text type from the 1970s (*e.g.* a CV or a recipe) with the same text type as it exists today, we will find modifications, changes and other modern and socially required adaptations to this text type.

When it comes to text production and gender-fair language, the generic masculine has been the pivot and the primary object of contention to this date. Today, it is no longer possible, or it is at least not that common any longer (as it conveys a rather traditional, conservative attitude) to exclusively use the generic masculine form of person nouns in texts. In some cases, the use of the generic masculine form has become questionable with regard to the certainty of legal definitions. In some text types, the formerly acceptable use of the generic masculine is – excluding in exceptional cases – no longer possible (*e.g.* job advertisements). A variety of guidelines have been put forward by scholars (linguists) and by numerous organisations, institutions, and departments. Many institutions – universities, companies, authorities, and state departments – have issued guidelines on gender-fair language use for their own internal and external communications (*cf. e.g.*, Braun 2000; Dietrich 2000; Diewald, Steinhauer 2020, 2017; Hellinger 2004, 1997, 1981; Hellinger, Bierbach 1993; Hellinger, Pauwels 2007; Hornscheidt 2021; Hornscheidt, Sammla 2021; Kegyes 2005; Kersten-Pejanić 2016; Kotthoff, Nübling 2018; Mills 2008, 1995; Pauwels 2010, 1997; Rajilić, Kersten-Pejanić 2010; Voglmayr 2008). Currently, there are no statutory regulations, however. Hence, language use continues to chiefly be based on social consensus. This is also true for text production (*cf.* Hornscheidt 2021).

For the reasons stated above, this article has the objective of examining current developments and tendencies in text production influenced by gender, diversity, social diversification, and social change; and to illustrate changes in text production and, above all, in text type conventions. I will present tendencies in text production that can be observed in written and spoken language and that illustrate a change in text-type conventions or suggest that such change may occur in the future. Comparing guidelines on

gender-fair language with real-life text samples of different text types can be instructive in this context, because such comparisons show whether recommendations set out in these guidelines are implemented by language users. However, comparisons of this kind are explicitly not the central focus of this article and, in any case, will take up only a small part of it.

With regard to changes in spoken language – changes that require closer examination of a phenomenon encountered with increasing frequency, the emergence of a glottal stop (Germ. *Glottisschlag*) – I have chosen examples from conversations, debates, and news of all kinds found in different German political talk shows aired on TV channels owned by public broadcasting companies *ARD* and *ZDF*. These talk shows include *Maybrit Illner*, *Sandra Maischberger*, *Anne Will*, *HartaberFair*. Examples from news coverage were found on news programmes *heute Xpress*, *Tagesschau* and *Tagesthemen*. All these examples will be marked accordingly.

As for changes and tendencies in written language, the material I used for this article was primarily taken from news magazine *Der Spiegel* and newspapers *Die Zeit* and *Berliner Zeitung*. Almost all the examples of job adverts come from the online job market of weekly newspaper *Die Zeit – ZEIT Online* (<https://jobs.zeit.de>). They were collected in the period between January 2020 and October 2021. In total, I analysed 3,000 job adverts, which were not selected according to any predetermined criteria, professions, or roles.

Therefore, the following description of my findings should not be understood as an empirical study. Nor can they be generalised. My findings are based on phenomena observed in different sources found in spoken and written language. They are meant to illustrate tendencies in the German language with regard to the relationship between language, text, and gender. In order to verify or falsify the observations and connections described in this article, further studies will be required in future.

2. Gender and Diversity: a Challenge for Society?

In spite of the ongoing debate on gender and of the many diversity initiatives, an objective observer of current German society can hardly escape the conclusion that German people in general still have a social and a linguistic problem with diversity. Since December 22, 2018, the law on the civil status of persons (*cf.* § 22 Abs. 3 Personenstandsgesetz ‘Law on Civil Status’) allows for the sex of a child to be registered as neither male or female but *divers* ‘diverse’. The new law implements a recommendation that the German Ethics Council (a body advising the German parliament on ethical or moral decisions) had given legislators several years before (Seibring 2012). Yet, this legal innovation still awaits a corresponding linguistic innovation. How are speakers of German to render *divers* in formal and informal language? In Sweden, the artificial pronoun *hen* – *cf.* here the Finnish pronoun *hän* – was invented to name diverse, unknown, or ambiguous, undefined genders and sexes. Speakers of English have the option of using the pronoun *they* in a gender-inclusive context (*e.g.*, *If someone does not feel well, they are allowed to leave the room*). Besides *they*, there are numerous other non-heteronormative designations, most of which can be categorised as occasionalisms, or exhibit markers of a specific sociolect (*cf.* Scheller-Boltz 2022, 2020). Compared to this, it is safe to say that the German language has yet to catch up with the legal situation in the country (*cf.* for examples Hornscheidt, Sammla 2021).

The same delay can be diagnosed in the area of homosexual emancipation, in particular when it comes to marriage. Since 2017, gay couples can marry in Germany. This includes the right to adopt children. Yet, many official legal documents and forms still have to catch up with this development, offering only boxes for *Mutter* “mother” and *Vater* “father” or addressing couples as *Ehegatte* “husband” and *Ehegattin* “wife”. In contrast, the Spanish, for instance, have switched to addressing parents as “parent A” and “parent B”.

For the most part, German society still uses a person’s (perceived) sex or gender as a point of reference for the purpose of categorisation. Most people’s perception of others is still shaped by the gender binary and its strong emphasis on heteronormativity. This perception allows for male and female persons and leaves no room for the option of a third gender or sex. It is hardly surprising that *divers* has yet to be acknowledged by, let alone accepted by, society at large. From the perspective of cognitive science, this is surely due to an aversion to ambiguity and insecurity (cf. *heterosexism*). For most of society, having a concrete, familiar gender and/or sex still appears to be of enormous importance.

3. Gender and Language: What is Language to Accomplish and What Can It Accomplish?

This raises the question of whether it is sufficient for a modern language to give room only to the linguistic representation of men and women. Today, the range between men and women is considerably wider and more intransparent than it used to be. As public awareness of this development mounts, it is becoming increasingly hard to ignore this range. The predominant gender ideologies, however, are still based on an androcentric view of the world and on a strict gender binary shaped by heteronormativity.

One would be mistaken to believe that all identities could ever be comprehensively represented by language and that all people, regardless of their gender, would ever feel included. The rather confusing seeming acronym *LGBTIQ*FAGPBDSM*, which developed from the more familiar acronym *LGBT*, is but one example of the elusiveness of perfect inclusion (Scheller-Boltz 2022, 2017). Asterisks, gaps, occasionalisms – much has been tried and proposed in the past few years. Yet, no general consensus on gender-fair language has been reached. In 2020, the editors of Germany’s most prominent dictionary *Duden* dedicated parts of the 28th edition of this important reference work to the subject of gender-fair language. Yet, even they shied away from making a bold proposal, opting for recommendations instead, as they felt that gender-fair language was still more of a sociopolitical topic and less a question of language norms.

It is important to note in this context that language fulfills different functions (cf. the *organon model* by Karl Bühler 1934). Language does not only transport information. It also works as a means of identification. Only those who are identified by language, can feel they have been perceived, addressed and included. In contrast, those who are not or cannot be identified by language are irrelevant to society and, as a consequence, do not need to be identified.

The identification function of language has the purpose of naming concrete objects, issues, and persons and to make them identifiable. Only something or someone that or who has been named and become identifiable through naming, can become relevant for reality and be implicated in the construction of reality. (Translated from Scheller-Boltz 2020: 148)

Examining language as a whole, one can conclude that language has the potential to do a lot more than is customarily assumed. Frequently, norm is brought forward as an argument against this observation. We should keep in mind, however, that norms are not a natural phenomenon. The generic masculine, for instance, has never turned itself into a norm, as it did not have the capacity to do so (*cf.* Scheller-Boltz 2022, 2020). The generic masculine is not, as some have claimed, a natural language norm. At some point, a group of language users chose to turn the generic masculine into a language habit. This, in turn, led to the generic masculine becoming a collective norm (*cf.* Doleschal 2002). In and of itself, language or, more specifically, language users cannot define norms. Moreover, *language* does not discriminate. Language *use* discriminates. “Language is not a neutral medium, but a discursive instrument of social action. Language is a mirror of social reality, but at the same time it is also a place where social protest and conservative resistance can be expressed” (translated from Hellinger 2004: 276). What follows from this is the conclusion that the generic masculine must be regarded as sexist and discriminatory (*cf.* *overt sexism* in Mills, Mullany 2011). Hence the harsh criticism of the generic masculine (Frank 1992; Hellinger, Pauwels 2007; Trömel-Plötz 2007, 1981).

The predominance of the masculine and the discrimination of other gender identities resulting from it – above all, non-heteronormative gender identities – has been shown on the level of cognition. Tests involving speakers of various languages have shown that the claim that women feel included by and are included in generic masculine forms is not substantiated. The following experiments provide sufficient evidence for this conclusion: a) for English (Cameron 1985; Gabriel *et al.* 2008; Gastil 1990; Gygax *et al.* 2008; Hamilton 1997, 1988; Hardin, Banaji 1993; Khan, Daneman 2011; Kusterle 2011; McGillicuddy-De Lisi, De Lisi 2002; Mills 1995), b) for French (Gabriel *et al.* 2008; Gygax *et al.* 2012, 2008), c) for Italian (Cacciari, Padovani 2007), d) for Spanish (Nissen 1997), e) for Finnish (Braun 1997; Pyykkönen, Hyönä, van Gompel 2010), f) for Dutch (Backer, Cuypere 2012), g) for Polish (Belczyk-Kohl 2013; Dalewska-Greń 1994; Dąbrowska 2008; Jaworski 1986; Karwatowska, Szpyra-Kozłowska 2010; Łaziński 2006; Nowosad-Bakalarczyk 2009, 2003; Pycia 2007; Scheller-Boltz 2020; Szpyra-Kozłowska 2012; Szpyra-Kozłowska, Karwatowska 2004, 2003), h) for Russian (Doleschal 2004, 2000, 1997, 1995; Doleschal, Schmid 2001; Gurevich *et al.* 2006; Gusejnova 2001; Kempe, Brooks, Kharkhurin 2010; Kitajgorodskaja 1976; Krongauz 2015, 1996; Krysin 1974; Martyniuk 1990; Panov 1968; Scheller-Boltz 2020; Schmid 1998; Suprunchuk 2010), and i) for Czech (Valdrová 2015). Cognitive studies for the German language arrive at the same conclusion (*cf.* Braun *et al.* 2007; Braun *et al.* 1998; Doleschal 1992; Eichhoff-Cyrus 2004; Fischer 2004; Gabriel *et al.* 2008; Gygax *et al.* 2008; Heinrich, Hasenhüttl, Paseka 2008; Irmen, Köhncke 1996; Irmen, Kurovskaja 2010; Irmen, Linner 2005; Irmen, Schumann 2011; Klein 2004; Kusterle 2011; Mayer 2002; Scheller-Boltz 2020; Stahlberg, Sczesny 2001; Steiger, Irmen 2011, 2007).

Nevertheless, it is society that determines how language is used, and it is its various authorities and institutions that influence language and shape the ways in which language evolves. When the world changes, language should change, too. This should be self-evident. Yet, this change does not always occur. Without a doubt, language in its present form and usage does not render reality adequately. The example of *divers* was already mentioned in this context. Yet, there have been attempts to change this or to at least show ways in which language could be changed. The *Duden* provides a good overview of currently available options. The tool box of modern German contains the following variants:

- Using the feminine and masculine form of person nouns equally and at the same time. This has become customary today in various forms of address (e.g. *Liebe Kolleginnen und Kollegen* “dear colleagues”). In written language, this form of denomination can be shortened by using a slash (e.g. *Kolleginnen/Kollegen* “colleagues”).
- Using slashes or dashes (e.g. *Mitarbeiter/-innen* “male and female employees”, *Mitarbeiter/innen* “male and female employees”), or brackets – with the motion suffix in brackets – (e.g. *Lehrer(in)* “male/female teacher”, *Mitarbeiter(innen)* “male and female employees”, *Kolleg(inn)en* “male/female colleagues”).
- However, the use of slashes or dashes has limits, for instance, in those cases when a vowel changes with the gender of the word (e.g. *Arzt/Ärztin* “male or female doctor” (**Arzt/in*), *Bischof/Bischöfin* “male or female bishop” (**Bischof/in*)) or in the case of a syntagma (e.g. *Wir suchen eine erfahrene Bilanzbuchhalterin/einen erfahrenen Bilanzbuchhalter* “We are looking for an experienced accountant, male or female”) (Duden 2020: 113).

In order to underline diversity and to avoid binary gender structures, the *Duden* refers to deconstructivist ways of spelling. These include:

- using the asterisk (e.g. *Schüler*innen* “male and female pupils”),
- capitalising the *I* at the beginning of the motion suffix within a word, termed the *Binnen-I* “interior I” (e.g. *SchülerInnen* “male and female pupils”) (cf. moreover Posch 2015),
- using an underscore before the motion suffix, humorously known as the Gender-Gap (e.g. *Schüler_innen* “male and female pupils”) or a colon (e.g. *Schüler:innen* “male and female pupils”).

In spoken language, this way of designation is produced by making glottal stop before the motion suffix (*Glottisschlag* in German). Moreover, the *Duden* (2020: 113) points out various other ways of non-heteronormative naming or gender-neutral variants, such as:

- Gender-neutral expressions (e.g. *Mensch* or *Person* “human being”, *Mitglied* “member”, *Gast* “visitor”),
- Names of roles or functions (e.g. *Staatsoberhaupt* “head of state”, *Leitung* “management”, *Kollegium* “group of colleagues”),
- Nominalising participles or adjectives (e.g. *Studierende* “students”, *Gewählte* “elected persons”, *Verwitwete* “widowed persons”). It is pointed out that nominalisation is effective when it is used as a gender-neutral plural form with or without an article. (Note: in German, plural forms of nominalised adjectives or participles are neutral because they cannot be identified as either male or female; this is not true, however, for the singular form, which requires the article of a specific gender and thus is not neutral, e.g. *ein Studierender* “a male student”, *eine Studierende* “a female student”).

Apart from person nouns, the *Duden* (2020: 114) also highlights the option of using gender-fair alternatives to person nouns. These include:

- Constructs with adjectives (e.g. *ärztlicher Rat* vs. *Rat des Arztes* “medical advice” vs. “a doctor’s [masc.] advice”, *verfasst von* vs. *Verfasser* “written by” vs. “author [masc.]”),
- Forms of direct address (e.g. *Bitte schließen Sie Ihre Tasche ein* “Please, use our lockers for your bags” vs. *Besucher werden gebeten, ihre Tasche einzuschließen* “Visitors [masc.] are asked to use the lockers for their bags”),

- Passive forms (e.g. *Es muss Folgendes beachtet werden* “The following needs to be heeded” vs. *Mitarbeiter müssen Folgendes beachten* “Employees [masc.] must heed the following”),
- Constructs with the first person plural *wir* “we” (e.g. *Wir müssen Folgendes beachten* “We have to heed the following” vs. *Mitarbeiter müssen Folgendes beachten* “Employees [masc.] must heed the following”) and
- Relative clauses (e.g. *Alle, die teilnehmen* “all who participate” vs. *Alle Teilnehmer* “all participants [masc.]”, *Wer studiert hat* “Those who have graduated” vs. *Akademiker* “tertiary graduates [masc.]”)

The values we cherish as a society and our concepts of society become visible in the language we use. This becomes particularly evident in the context of gender. It is here that we notice which ideologies become manifest in language and how language becomes “a place of repression” (Reiss 2007: 64). Language is charged with political and social ideologies and reflects socially stable stereotypes with a long history. Since language works as a social medium, it substantially contributes to conserving these ideologies and stereotypes and to making them visible in each act of communication (Scheller-Boltz 2022).

4. Text Types, Conventions, and Gender

Text types can be categorised according to their function and purpose. Yet, this is not the only conceivable form of categorisation. We can also distinguish different types by using features such as their design, content, topics, and the cause of their production (cf. Fix 2008). Text types are determined by certain criteria, characteristics, and patterns that are the basis for the production of texts. These features provide orientation to their audience – orientation that helps readers to read and understand the text – and they are necessary for adequate text reception, because the design of texts has a – predominantly cognitive – influence on text reception (Göpferich 2008: 108; Heinemann, Heinemann 2002: 140–156).

These criteria, characteristics, and design guidelines are based on what are known as text type conventions. In general, conventions are “norms that contain a collective assessment of behaviour (in the sense of how things should and should not be) but that do not entail a sanction of non-conforming behaviour” (translated from Mauritz 1996: 47).

Hence, text type conventions can be described as rules or widely recognised, standardised norms that govern our response to a text. In other words, conventions are guidelines for formulating and designing texts (Göpferich 2008: 359), which ensure that we can easily recognise text types. As a consequence, texts that diverge from their given and thus expected text type conventions are often harder to understand. The reason for this is that their primary effect on their readers is one of continuous surprise. Considerable effort is required to overcome this effect cognitively, which causes a delay in the reception of the content and in the perception of the function and intent of the text (cf. Fix 2000: 29–31).

Text type conventions “become manifest on the level of an individual culture and they are bound to a particular time and age” (Nord 2009: 20). This means that text type conventions differ from one culture area to the other, but that they can also be adapted to the needs of their particular time and place. The process of adaptation and the time-bound adaptability of text type conventions take place on a cultural level, as changes that happen within a socioculture lead to changes in text types and their underlying conventions (cf. Fix 2008).

When it comes to the interplay of gender and text, it can be stated that gender is mainly of relevance to the pragmatic dimension of language (Nord 2009: 55–61). Consequently, gender aspects become pertinent whenever persons need to be addressed and named. Addressees are made identifiable by being mentioned and named concretely (Nord 2009: 5). Identifying persons is a basic function of texts. This is true for self-identification in particular. The result is that gender aspects exert a substantial influence on text design and text reception, which eventually produces a modification of the text type. This change does not render the old text type conventions obsolete. Rather, these conventions are preserved as possible, meaning contextually and situationally conceivable, parallel alternatives.

In view of the subject at hand, this means that we need to highlight three facts:

1. Text types are highly conventionalised sociocultural patterns, which are at the disposal of a language community.
2. Diversity is a subject to which German society has paid considerable attention for quite some time. Diversity is highly visible in the media and its relevance is steadily growing.
3. To date, a variety of guidelines has been created. These guidelines propose different ways in which diverse identities can be rendered by language, with their particular focus, preferences, and design depending on the institution that has published them.

Texts help create and shape identity. Because of this and due to the facts listed above, the following questions must be asked: How do a given text type and its conventions affect the ways in which text producers handle identity? How do text producers use, exploit, and implement the linguistic means of creating any required identities creatively? For certain text types, it has already become obvious that text types and conventions are changing. This is why we need to question how text types are being altered by the growing influence of gender.

Finally, I would like to mention that I regard the practice of making texts gender-fair or gender-neutral as a culture-specific phenomenon, as this practice varies across cultures – unless a culture has not developed a specific practice of gender-fair language (Scheller-Boltz 2022). Consequently, modifications of a text type caused by the influence of gender-fair language are culture-specific, too – not least because text types themselves are culture-specific. The following observations are thus exclusively relevant to the German cultural area. It is not possible or only partially possible to transfer them directly to other cultural areas.

5. How Gender Modifies Text Types: Examples

I will now describe how sensitive to the issue of gender modern text production in German has become. I will present my observations of the use of person nouns in selected text types from selected media. They will show that:

There are texts, the authors of which have used gender-neutral language with a high degree of competence, then there are such texts, from which we can infer a corresponding intention [by their authors], and there are texts, [the authors of] which openly refuse to participate in the project of gender-neutral language. (Translated from Diewald, Steinhauer 2020: 238)

I will show that changes of and within texts cannot be attributed uniformly and consistently to one text type, as there can be variations even within a text type. Moreover, sociolect is a factor that can have a

significant impact on the choice of person nouns. A study of job advertisements will provide further illustrative examples as to the use of person nouns companies use when looking for suitable candidates.

The material I have used for this study was sampled from the websites of German newspapers and magazines *Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit*, and *Berliner Zeitung*. Examples from spoken language were gathered from discussions on German political TV talk shows *Maybrit Illner*, *Sandra Maischberger*, *Anne Will*, *HartaberFair* and newscasts *heute Xpress*, *Tagesschau*, and *Tagesthemen*.

5.1. Spoken Texts: the “Glottisschlag” as a Means of Gender-Fair Language

The German website *www.genderleicht.de* is an online source of information on gender-fair language. The website contains information not only on using gender-fair language in written texts but also on adopting gender-fair language when speaking. For readers who want to make diversity visible in their verbal communication, the authors of the website explicitly suggest using a glottal stop directly before the motion suffix (e.g. *Mitarbeiter_ : innen* [ˈmitɛbaɪtɐʔɪnnən]). They add that gender-fair language is no longer limited to written language and that it can also be used when speaking. Using pairs of the male and the female form equally throughout a text is, for instance, an effective means to underline binarity. In many cases, gender-neutral variants can be created to name persons, which helps with including various identities.

Gender-fair language is becoming increasingly common in spoken German. This is not to say that it is in any way predominant yet, or that the traditional generic masculine form is no longer used by speakers of German. The opposite is true – in particular in the case of idiomatic expressions (e.g. *Also ich bin kein Freund von* “I am not a friend [masc.] of”, *Ich bin da kein Experte* “I am not an expert [masc.] in this field”, *Maria ist hier der Fachmann* “Maria is our specialist [masc.] for this”, *Sie ist doch hier der Weinkenner* “She is our wine connoisseur [masc.]”) and the naming of roles, titles, and offices (e.g. *Ich als Lehrer denke* “As a teacher [masc.] I think”, *Als Verleger kann ich nun nicht...* “As a publisher [masc.] I can’t...”, *Maria arbeitet als Möbel-Designer* “Maria works as a furniture designer [masc.]”, *Sie ist der Bäcker in der Familie* “She is the baker [masc.] in the family”, *Sie ist seit vergangenem Monat Oberleutnant* “Last month, she was promoted to first lieutenant [masc.]”).

It cannot be denied, however, that a growing number of German speakers have begun to experiment with gender-fair language and are increasingly reluctant to use the generic masculine form. The usage of pair forms is spreading. Pair forms have already proven that they are an easy-to-use means of gender-fair language, which enjoys acceptance across the board. It has been common for a long time to address an audience with *Meine Damen und Herren* “Ladies and Gentlemen”, *Liebe Zuschauerinnen und Zuschauer* “Dear female and male viewers” – at the beginning of TV shows), *Liebe Leserinnen und Leser* “Dear female and male readers”, or to speak of *die Abonentinnen und Abonnenten* “female and male subscribers”, *Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter* “female and male employees”, *Anlegerinnen und Anleger* “female and male investors”, *Politikerinnen und Politiker* “female and male politicians” (cf. Scheller-Boltz 2022 for further examples from this field).

Now the glottal stop is on the rise.

Many young people make this pause, they are practiced users of this technique. Those who want to speak in this fashion want to make a tiny pause between the male root of the word and the female motion suffixes -in or -innen, without adding a further stress. As the suffixes begin with a vowel (the “i”), the word is pronounced with what is known as a ‘glottal stop’. We all know very well how this

stop works: This pause happens quite frequently in German words, for example in words such as Spiegelei [fried egg], Telefonanruf [phone call] or Tagungsort [conference venue]. (Translated from www.genderleicht.de/sprechen)

Today, many speakers of German consider the glottal stop as practical, easy, and appropriate for verbal communication. Even mainstream broadcasters give their employees permission to use this gender-fair language technique when they are on air. Journalists, anchormen and anchorwomen of TV and radio shows are known to implement the glottal stop. This characteristic pause can also be heard in newscasts and political talkshows. It will surely take time before the audience as a whole gets used to this new 'sound'. Yet, it will probably spread even further, although I am sure that it will not become ubiquitous. In contrast, other gender-fair language techniques – the use of pair forms, for instance – are likely to obtain broad consensus, to be socially accepted, and to meet little opposition in the future.

5.2. Forms of Address

The form of address we choose when writing a letter or e-mail depends on various factors: on the one hand, conventions and social acceptance play a role. On the other hand, we are influenced by social factors such as our target group, being a member of a certain group (*in-group talk*), our generation or age, gender/sex, and place of origin. At this point, speakers of German can find it problematic to select an appropriate and acceptable form of address. This is especially true for correspondence via e-mail, in particular in those cases, when the sex/gender of the person to whom one intends to write is not known or when they have a unisex name, meaning that the person could be either male or female (*cf.* Scheller-Boltz 2022 for examples). In this situation, addressing someone always involves the risk of being considered maladroit.

In contrast to other languages, such as Danish or English, modern German remains a language that still emphasises formality. In some cities, Berlin for example, this penchant for formality has become weaker in recent years. People tend to quickly switch to so-called *duzen* (i.e. using the informal form of *you* instead of the more formal and polite *siezen*) in everyday conversation. One should note, however, that these developments are still considered rather unconventional. Most members of the German language community will still begin a letter with the formal form of address *Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren* 'Dear Madam or Sir'. It must be said that this form of address has always been a bit awkward in situations when writers are aware that there is no *Dame* or *Herr* among the people to whom they are writing. Yet, how can this form of address still reflect a social reality that includes transgender and intersex people? The scholar lann hornscheidt [sic] offered for a long time an opinion on this problem in a text on the website www.lannhornscheidt.com:

My concept of self is that of a human being and for that, I do not need gender. This means that I have left gender as a category of identity behind, that I do consider myself to be beyond gender. [...] When people address me, I am happy when I am perceived as a being who is free of gender. To this end, one can use the linguistic means of using my name "Lann" and the gender-free pronoun "ens". To give you an example: "Lann loves dealing creatively with language. Ens is happy to discuss ens' forms of language with others." When it appears necessary to underline that one is abandoning gender as a system of categorisation, it is also possible to use "ex" as an ending or pronoun. This signals a departure from gender, Exit Gender. An example: "Lann loves to find linguistic means of expression, that enable ex to feel at home in this language. Ex continuously discusses this with others and together they experiment with language that feels right. Lann is an Erfindex [noun created from

the word *Erfinder* “inventor” and the neo-suffix *-ex*] of gender-free and ex-gendering language forms.
(Translated from www.lannhornscheidt.com)

This text passage has changed now. However, the content, the perspective on language use, and the understanding of gender still remain the same in the new text variant.

Forms of address that pay respect to diversity can be used in German, but they are reserved for certain text types and, because of this, are marked from the point of view of pragmatics. In July 2021, the Berlin-based bakery *Hopffisterei*, for example, addressed its customers on its account on the social media network Instagram in the following fashion: *Liebe Berliner:innen* (www.instagram.com/p/CQx6fPHJXWB/?utm_source=ig_embed). The company used the colon as a variant to render gender inclusion. Some might object to this usage, arguing that using this punctuation mark as a means to separate the masculine lexeme from the feminine motion suffix highlights the gender binary. Normativists and the *Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung* “Council of German Orthography” have expressed concerns with regard to orthography, because punctuation marks may not be used within words. Notwithstanding these objections, the use of special characters such as *;*, *!*, *~*, */*, *_* before the motion suffix is increasing, as it signals a willingness to make diversity visible in written texts (cf. moreover Hornscheidt, Sammla 2021).

Currently, there are various ways in which gender diversity can be made visible by use of linguistic means. It is certainly not wrong to build on the traditional model of gender binarity. Thus, pair forms like *Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren* “Dear Madam or Sir”, *Liebe Kolleginnen und Kollegen* “Dear female and male colleagues”, *Liebe Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter* “Dear female and male employees” are possible linguistic options that can be implemented in written and/or spoken language. They reflect conventions and language norms and will not become outdated in the near future.

Writers who are sure about the sex/gender of the person to whom they are writing can continue to use expressions such as *Guten Tag Herr Meyer* “Good morning, Mr Meyer”, *Sehr geehrter Herr Dr. Schneider* “Dear Dr Schneider”, *Lieber Herr Müller* “Dear Mr Müller”.

The situation has slightly changed for contexts in which women are addressed. In this case, titles, degrees, and offices can be feminised (Diewald, Steinhauer 2017: 90). It is thus possible to address a woman who is a professor as *Frau Professorin Carola Müller* (with the feminine motion suffix *-in* added to the title of the masculine *Professor*). *Liebe Frau Doktorin Schneider* is also an acceptable form of address (with the feminine motion suffix *-in* added to the title of *Doktor*). *Frau Obergefreitin Müller* (with the feminine motion suffix *-in* added to the title of *Obergefreiter* ‘private first class’) is appropriate from the point of view of linguistics and can be encountered with increasing frequency in the media.

However, gender-neutral forms of address pose less of a risk of social indiscretion. *Liebe Mitglieder* “Dear members”, *Liebe Gäste* “Dear guests”, *Liebe Kinder* “Dear children”, *Liebe Eltern* “Dear parents”, *Liebes Team* “Dear team”, *Hallo Leute* “Hello everybody”, *Liebe Fans* “Dear fans”, *Liebes Publikum* “Dear audience” are examples for this. Creating neutral denominations for existing person nouns is not at all impossible, as is demonstrated by the following examples, which all comply with the norms of German word formation: *Liebe Studierende* (nominalised participle of *studieren* “to study”), *Liebe Besuchende* (nominalised participle of *besuchen* “to visit”), *Liebe Anwesende* (nominalised adjective *anwesend* “present”), *Liebe Teilnehmende* (nominalised participle of *teilnehmen* “to participate”), *Liebe trauernde Gemeinschaft* “Dear grieving community”.

Conventions can change. This is also true for the conventions governing forms of address. In order to avoid discrimination, various companies have gone the extra mile to adapt the ways in which

they address customers and business partners to the needs of a changing social reality. One German transport company addresses its customers only with the word *Hallo* “Hello”. A sample phrase from a dialogue format can look like this: *Hallo, Dennis Scheller-Boltz! Vielen Dank für Deinen Ticketkauf* “Hello, Dennis Scheller-Boltz! Thank you for buying a ticket”. A promoter writes *Guten Tag Scheller-Boltz* “Good morning, Scheller-Boltz”. In a similar fashion, an Austrian airline writes *Guten Tag, Dennis Scheller-Boltz!* “Good morning, Dennis Scheller-Boltz!”. A German bank wanted to convince me of opening a savings account with them with the following slogan: *Dennis, komm, jetzt sparen!* “Dennis, come on, save money now!”. And a charitable organisation writes: *Vielen Dank, Dennis Scheller-Boltz! Toll, dass Du Dich sozial engagierst!* “Thank you, Dennis Scheller-Boltz! Great to see you get involved”. Finally, the *Gesellschaft für Angewandte Linguistik* “Society for Applied Linguistics” chose not only to use its acronym *GAL* for a pun by addressing its members as *GALier*, reminiscent of the German word *Gallier* “Gauls”. It also highlighted its commitment to inclusion by using the asterisk: *Liebe GALier*innen*.

All of this shows: the debate on gender influences the German language, even forms of address. As a consequence, modern German abounds with examples of linguistic creativity and experiments in search of new inclusive, polite, and anti-discriminatory forms of address. These new forms may seem unconventional, but one would have a hard time condemning expressions such as “*Hallo, Tina Schmidt!*”, “*Danke, Dennis Scheller-Boltz, für deinen Einkauf!*” or “*Nadja Schneider, ich grüße Dich!*” as violations of language norms, as the language system can produce them without grammatical, syntactical, or morphological problems. It remains to be seen how forms of address will continue to change in a society that keeps diversifying.

5.3. Job Advertisements

In Germany, companies and organisations are required by law to ensure fair and equal treatment of all job applicants. This obligation begins with the requirement to avoid explicit and implicit discrimination in job advertisements. As for gender, this means applicants may not be discriminated against or excluded from applying because of their social identity. HR professionals must use gender-neutral language when advertising positions and roles in their organisations.

Legal requirements and societal expectations have resulted in considerable change in the field of recruiting. I have already mentioned that there is a new third gender, *divers* ‘diverse’, but that the language system still needs to undergo changes and modifications to reflect this new gender. It is for this reason that recruiters have to manage with other linguistic means. The pair form, for instance, is still a widely used option in this context. This form can appear either as a juxtaposition of the male and the female job title – as in the case of *Bankkaufmann/Bankkauffrau* “bank clerk” – or as a combination of the male and female job title – as in *Mitarbeiter/in* “employee, worker”, or *Journalist(in)* “journalist”. In the latter case, the slash or brackets indicate that the word can be read either way as a male job title (*Mitarbeiter*) or as a female job title (*Mitarbeiterin*). The problem with the pair form is that it is based on gender binarity and is thus incapable of ensuring inclusion of other genders. In order to solve this problem, recruiters have started adding (*m/w/d*), an abbreviation of *männlich/weiblich/divers* ‘male/female/diverse’.

Examples:

- *Die VKR sucht zum 1. März 2022 oder früher den/die Geschäftsführer/in (m/w/d)* ‘VKR is looking for a managing director who can start on March 1, 2022 or earlier’

- *Wir suchen für unsere Stiftung eine/n Programm-Manager*in (m/w/d)* “We are looking for a programme manager for our trust fund”
- *Leitende/r Planer/in (m, w, d)* “senior planer”
- *Wissenschaftsmanager/in (m/w/d)* “science manager”

(All examples as published in the appointments section of the newspaper *Die Zeit*)

This variant has become quite popular recently. This is hardly surprising, as it seems to be the panacea to the problem of reconciling the requirements of inclusive, anti-discriminatory language with other requirements of recruitment language (e.g. established job titles, search engine optimisation, or limited space for the advert). However, the development looks much more ambivalent on closer inspection, as it has also led to a rise in the number of advertisements exclusively using the generic masculine, with the abbreviation (*m/w/d*) being added almost like an afterthought. Against this backdrop, it is justified to ask the question of whether this form of denomination does not constitute – in a way – a comeback of the generic masculine, the use of which is spreading again, this time under the guise of gender-fair language (cf. Scheller-Boltz 2020).

Pair forms are not the only linguistic means of anti-discriminatory language in job advertisements. Gender-neutral job titles can also be found in this field. In this case, the point of reference for the job title is not the person who is to fill the role or position in question, but the role or position itself. Although gender of the job title in these job advertisements is ambiguous, the addition of (*m/w/d*) is still mandatory.

Examples:

- *Juniorprofessur (m/w/d) für Wirtschaftsinformatik mit Schwerpunkt Umwelt und Nachhaltigkeit* “professorship in information management with a focus on environmental issues and sustainability”
- *Künstlerische Direktion (m/w/d): Die Stiftung Museum Schloss Moyland, Museum für moderne und zeitgenössische Kunst und internationales Forschungszentrum zu Joseph Beuys, sucht eine Künstlerische Direktion (m/w/d)* “artistic management: The trust of Museum Schloss Moyland, museum of modern and contemporary art and an international research centre on Joseph Beuys is looking for someone for artistic management”
- *Gesamtleitung Fachklinik für Abhängigkeitserkrankungen (m/w/d)* “head of general management of a clinic specialising in treating addiction”
- *Abteilungsleitung (m/w/d) Biotop- und Gebietsschutz* “head of the department of biotope and habitat protection”
- *Wir suchen für unser Bürgermeisteramt eine Abteilungsleitung Kommunikation (m/w/d)* “we are looking for a head of the department of communication within the mayor’s office”
- *Wissenschaftlicher Vorstand zu besetzen* “academic chair to be filled”
- *Museumsleitung (m/w/d)* “head of museum management”
- *Professur Raumlufttechnik* “professorship in ventilation technology”

(All examples as published in the appointments section of the newspaper *Die Zeit*)

In order to ensure gender-neutral communication, many media have the tendency to use alternative forms of spelling or naming. The asterisk is one of these alternative forms.

Examples:

- *Ausbildung Journalist (m/w/d) an der Henri-Nannen-Schule [...] Journalist*in werden! [...]* “journalist training at Henri Nannen School of Journalism [...] Become a journalist!”
- *Leiter*in des Forschungszentrums* “head of the science centre”
- *Akademiedirektor*in (m/w/d)* “academic director”
- *Leiter*in Personalabteilung (m/w/d)* “head of HR”

(All examples as published in the appointments section of newspaper the *Die Zeit*)

- *Für unser ca. 12-köpfiges Redaktionsteam suchen wir ab sofort Volontär*in und Redakteur*in (Voll-/Teilzeit), freie Redakteure*innen* “We are looking for a trainee and editor (full-time and part-time) and freelance journalists to complement our team of 12 editors”

(As published in the trade magazine *Journalist* 09/2017, p. 9)

The incidence of these different approaches to gender-fair, non-discriminatory language is not at all even. This is demonstrated by a small and by no means representative study of job advertisements, which were analysed with regard to the job titles they contained. Between January 1, 2020 and October 1, 2021, I gathered and subsequently analysed 3,000 job offers from the online ad section of the weekly newspaper *ZEIT Online* (<https://jobs.zeit.de>). I selected the samples arbitrarily, with no bias towards any particular economic sector, function, profession, activity, or gender.

The analysis returned the following results: in 1,482 of the 3,000 job advertisements, the job title was given in the generic masculine form with *(m/w/d)* as the obligatory complement. 987 job adverts did not include a job title or profession, but a word or expression describing the position, function, or office in a gender-neutral, activity-oriented fashion. In the following text, however, the pair form was used frequently, e.g. *die zukünftige Stelleninhaberin/der zukünftige Stelleninhaber* “the man or woman filling the role in the future” and *die/der Bewerber/in* “the male or female applicant”. 193 job advertisements used gender-neutral language, including (participle-based) designations without a concrete gender such as *Mitarbeitende gesucht, Auszubildende gesucht, Wir suchen Verstärkung*. 234 job advertisements used pair forms based on the gender binary – apparently, recruiters had only women and men as suitable candidates in mind. 90 job advertisements contained an explicit feminine (in most cases, this exclusive use of the feminine form was probably not generic). Only 14 job adverts in the corpus relied on the generic masculine form of the job title without *(m/w/d)* as a complement.

6. Conclusion

Society’s growing awareness of explicit and implicit gender-related discrimination has resulted in a need for anti-discriminatory techniques such as gender-fair language. As I have demonstrated by use of sample text types, forms of address, job advertisements, and examples from verbal communication, this awareness has already influenced text production in Germany. In many cases, this is not due to legal requirements, but rather is the result of a sociopolitical consensus.

To be sure: using gender-neutral language consistently in all texts and all text types is a challenge, and may prove to be difficult or impossible. The examples given in this article provide only a small insight into current text production and do not include all text types. The potential of gender-neutral language for other text types still needs to be explored. Is it possible, for instance, to write a novel in gender-fair

or gender-inclusive language? How can we use gender-neutral language in press releases or newspaper articles – that is, in text types that are characterised by high information density and restrictions on their length?

How will text production evolve and continue to be influenced by the discourse on gender? This remains to be seen. However, the fact that awareness of these issues has affected text production can no longer be denied. Gender-inclusive forms of naming persons are becoming increasingly common in spoken language and in selected text types.

Texts, text types, and text-type convention will inevitably change in the long run. Text production is always subject to the specific social processes and developments shaping it. Identity politics is a factor in this context. With regard to the German language, the question of what linguistic means producers of texts will choose in order to reflect the wider social discourse on inclusion when addressing their audience has not yet been conclusively answered.

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