

Geschlechtsübergreifende Personenbezeichnungen

Eine Referenz- und Relevanzanalyse an Texten

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Abstract

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This thesis deals with patterns of variation in the usage of gender-inclusive personal nouns in contemporary German texts. The aim is to examine the existence and shape of such patterns on the basis of textual analyses. The approach is qualitative; the theoretical point of departure is text linguistics and reference-semantics. A functional and social perspective on language is crucial, as well as the notion of relevance.

The main strategies for referring to female and male persons with personal nouns are 1) the gender-inclusive masculine (der Lehrer = the teacher), 2) splitting forms (e.g. der Lehrer und die Lehrerin = the male and the female teacher) and 3) gender-neutral forms (e.g. die Lehrenden = ‘those who teach’).

The material consists of texts from different contexts, mainly from feminist and academic discourses, but also from popular magazines and newspapers. The texts studied contain a variation between at least two of the three referring strategies.

Two main patterns of variation are proposed in the thesis. The first pattern is described in chapter 5 and concerns the art of reference of the current personal noun. Two variation subtypes are distinguished. The first one contains the notion that personal nouns with specific reference are more likely to appear as a splitting form, whereas personal nouns with non-specific reference are more likely to appear in the masculine. The second subtype suggests that personal nouns with reference to the recipients of the current text are more likely to appear as a splitting form. This is considered as an ambition for explicitly including every reader of the text and furthermore as a manifestation of the interpersonal metafunction of language (in the sense of Systemic Functional Linguistics).

The second type of variation is described in chapter 6. Here, the concept of relevance is crucial. Focus is on the relevance of pointing out the gender of the referents. The first variation subtype concerns the fact that gender-inclusive masculine nouns are used for denoting groups of people who are stereotyped as male. The second subtype concerns texts where mainly masculine forms are used for gender-inclusive reference. In these texts, splitting forms occur when women are thematically important.

The study argues that the patterns found manifest an underlying principle which is central in verbal communication and rhetoric in general: the tension between closeness and distance.

Key words: gender, feminism, German, language change, text linguistics, reference theory, relevance theory, semantics, pragmatics, media discourse, systemic functional grammar, evaluation