

## Excessive language in German media debates on gender-fair language

Hanna Acke  
Åbo Akademi University

Language is a contested topic in contemporary democratic societies: Individuals in Germany who have publicly stood up for changes to make language more gender-fair have received death threats (see Baum 17.11.2014; Lobin 2021, 16) and every report on the introduction or rejection of language changes to reduce discrimination results in heated debates in print, online and social media (see for example Hentsch 08.08.2014; Röhlig 07.10.2013).

In my presentation, I take a closer look at selected debates that arose in Germany about gender-fair language, for example when the Council for German Orthography dealt with new gender-fair spelling variants such as the *Gendersternchen* in 2018 and when the conservative federal minister of education in Schleswig-Holstein, Karin Prien, commented on the use of these variants in school essays in 2021. The issues were picked up by the national media and controversial discussions about language in newspapers, comment columns of online newspapers and in social media were held, in which offensive speech was used. I will analyse the debates in these media, focussing on the online versions of the newspapers *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *FAZ*, *Welt*, *Zeit* and *Spiegel* as well as the regional newspaper *Kieler Nachrichten* in which the minister's statement first appeared including letters to the editors and comment columns in these as well as ensuing debates on Twitter.

My focus in the analysis will lie on the language ideologies that participants in these debates implicitly presuppose and explicitly reproduce. Methodologically my research is located within qualitative discourse linguistics. In this work-in-process, I undertake a proposition- and text-oriented analysis (see Spitzmüller and Warnke 2011, 84–85) to investigate metaphorical and lexical representations of language ideologies. My main tool to discover implicit instances of language ideologies will be an analysis of presuppositions and implications in the utterances of debate participants (see Bendel Larcher 2015, 78–79; Spitzmüller and Warnke 2011, 84).<sup>1</sup>

Baum, Antonia (2014). *Gendergerechte Sprache. Sagen Sie bitte Profx. zu mir.* Frankfurter Allgemeine (Online) of 11/17/2014. Available online at <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/profx-als-geschlechtergerechte-sprache-fuer-professoren-13268220.html> (accessed 1/20/2020).

Bendel Larcher, Sylvia (2015). *Linguistische Diskursanalyse. Ein Lehr- und Arbeitsbuch.* Tübingen, Narr.

Hentsch, Franziska (2014). *Heftige Reaktionen auf die weibliche Form.* Universität Leipzig. Available online at [https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/universitaet-leipzig-heftige-reaktionen-auf-die-weibliche.680.de.html?dram:article\\_id=294077](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/universitaet-leipzig-heftige-reaktionen-auf-die-weibliche.680.de.html?dram:article_id=294077) (accessed 1/20/2020).

Hill, Jane H. (2007). *Crises of Meaning. Personalist Language Ideology in US Media Discourse.* In: Sally Johnson/Astrid Ensslin (Eds.). *Language in the Media. Representations, Identities, Ideologies.* London/New York, Continuum, 70–85.

Lobin, Henning (2021). *Sprachkampf. Wie die Neue Rechte die deutsche Sprache instrumentalisiert.* Berlin, Dudenverlag.

Röhlig, Marc (2013). *Hannover verbannt die 'Zigeunerschnitzel'.* Tagesspiegel (Online) of 10/7/2013. Available online at <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/panorama/diskriminierung-hannover-verbannt-die-zigeunerschnitzel/8895080.html> (accessed 6/2/2020).

Spitzmüller, Jürgen/Warnke, Ingo H. (2011). *Discourse as a 'Linguistic Object'. Methodical and Methodological Delimitations.* *Critical Discourse Studies* 8 (2), 75–94.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Hill 2007, 73–75 for a discussion of explicit and implicit reproductions of language ideologies.