

Attitudes of the purist association 'Verein Deutsche Sprache' towards gender-inclusive language

My exhaustive survey of research on German Sociolinguistics since 2008 for the chapter “German” in *The Routledge Handbook of Sociolinguistics around the World* (2nd ed) revealed some gaps in the literature, particularly in the area of *Genderlinguistik*, which will be addressed here.

In the early 1980s, the use of the *I-Binnenmajuskel* aka camelCase (Akmajian et al, 2017:35) for nouns in written German was one of the first consequences of older feminist demands to make female forms more visible in the German language. For example, *AkademikerInnen* was used to include both male and female academics – instead of the generic masculine *Akademiker* or the combination *Akademiker und Akademikerinnen*. This use, however, had been restricted to mainly feminist and academic circles for about three decades, until the debate on gender equality in the German language gained momentum, and reached the mass media in the mid-2010s.

At that time, an increasing number of opinion pieces on the question of gender equality in German began to appear in the quality print media, as well as in broadcasting. While earlier pieces in broadsheets such as *Die Welt* still referred exclusively to developments in the academic world (Ginsburg 2014), later contributions, e.g. on *Deutsche Welle* (Danhong 2017) showed that the gender debate had finally reached the general public. Well-known German Linguists began to voice their views, for instance Peter Eisenberg (2017) from the Academy of the German Language in *Deutschlandfunk*, and Helmut Glück (2018) from the Grimm Prize Committee in *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. Around the same time, *Duden* published a guidebook on how to improve gender visibility in German (Diewald & Steinhauer 2017).

In March 2019, the “Verein Deutsche Sprache” (VDS), a purist association of more than 36,000 self-declared guardians of the German language, launched its campaign *Schluss mit dem Gender-Unfug!* (“Stop the gender nonsense!”). By November 2021, the VDS had collected signatures from almost 40,000 supporters, among them celebrities and many other public figures.

The VDS was originally founded in 1997 to combat a perceived overuse of anglicisms in the German Language. Over the decades, the association also fought against other phenomena which were regarded as an imminent danger to the German language, such as the decreasing use of genitive constructions. The VDS’s most recent concern is the so- called *Genderdeutsch* (“gender German”) which they firmly oppose.

This most recent activity of the VDS has only just begun to attract the attention of German sociolinguistics. Apart from Nübling’s (2020) article on gender and sex, which rebuts some of the association’s arguments, and apart from a recently published PhD thesis (Neusius 2021) in which the VDS’s opposition to “gender German” is merely mentioned in relation to language protection activities in Germany and France, no sociolinguistic research has been published yet (i.e. May 2022).

My paper aims to understand the motivation of the VDS when it comes to their firm opposition to gender-related adjustments in the German language, and to link the association’s current anti-gender activities to the wider field of linguistic purism. I will undertake a discourse analysis, using the quarterly VDS print publication *Sprachnachrichten* as a source of primary data. I will identify and analyse relevant content since including 2017, i.e. the starting point of the wider debate. Relevant material will be gathered in a text corpus and analysed, using inductive coding. Concerning the theoretical framework, I will be using a German variant of linguistic discourse analysis, well-established since the founding theoretical works of e.g. Dietrich Busse & Wolfgang Teubert (1994) and Matthias Jung (1994 & 1996).

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