



Dr Falco Pfalzgraf

**Attitudes of the purist association
'Verein Deutsche Sprache' (VDS)
towards
gender-inclusive German language**

f.pfalzgraf@qmul.ac.uk
www.pfalzgraf.net

Introduction: VDS

- Founded in 1997 in Dortmund as „Association for the preservation of the German Language“ (*Verein zur Wahrung der deutschen Sprache, VWDS*) by Prof Walter Krämer who has been chairing it ever since.
- In 2000 renamed to „Association German Language“ (*Verein Deutsche Sprache, VDS*)
- The largest & most influential German purist organisation, with 36,000 members
- Started with opposing anglicisms; broadened its field of activity (German music on the radio; political cabaret; German heritage)
- Recently in strong opposition to the use of gender-inclusive language (“*Genderdeutsch*”): Campaign “Stop the gender nonsense!” (*Schluss mit dem Gender-Unfug!*)
- As of 7th September 2022, the VDS had gathered 89,822 signatures

Intro: Gender-inclusive German in a nutshell

- Traditionally: masculine generics = now regarded as problematic
- Morphosyntactical solutions
 - Using pairs: *Studentinnen und Studenten*
 - *substantiviertes Partizip Präsens* (nominalized present participle): *Studierende*
 - Or: general nouns; derivations; past participles; passive
- Orthographic solutions:
 - *Schrägstrich* (splitting): *Student/innen*
 - *Klammern* (brackets): *Student(innen)*
 - *Binnenmajuskel* (capital I): *StudentInnen*
 - *Gendersternchen* (gender star) *Student*innen*
 - *Genderlücke* (gender gap) *Student_innen*
 - *Genderdoppelpunkt* (gender colon) *Student:innen*

Our study

- In the mid-2010s, the debate on how to make the German language more gender-inclusive gained momentum and reached the mass media
- In March 2019, the VDS launched its campaign *Schluss mit dem Gender-Unfug!* (“Stop the gender nonsense!”)
- This most recent activity of the VDS has only just begun to attract the attention of German sociolinguistics
- Hardly any sociolinguistic research has been published yet on the VDS’s opposition to “*Genderdeutsch*”
- Our research project 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

Methodological considerations

- Discourse analysis.
- Not CDA but a German, more ‘philological’ variant, based on the so-called Heidelberg-Mannheim-Group; whose main proponents are Dietrich Busse, Wolfgang Teubert, and Fritz Hermanns
- Imaginary Corpus → Virtual Corpus → Concrete Corpus
- VDS publication *Sprachnachrichten (SN)* with 4 issues per year
- From *SN* 75 (2017/3) special issue “ElefantInnen im Porzellanladen” to *SN* 94 (2022/2) = 20 issues = 5 full years (644 pages)
- Manual keyword identification
- Manual collection of words, phrases, sentences
- Manual, inductive coding
- Discourse analysis & results

Main Discourses

➤ Supporters of gender-inclusive use of German (105 instances)

• Part of a certain group

- feminists (hawkish; inspired [irony]; manic; professional; snappy)

Feministen/Feministinnen (kämpferisch, inspiriert [ironisch], durchgeknallt, professionell, forsch)

- The Greens, the greenies, the ecos, (lifestyle-)lefties, the left-wing radicals, red-green

Die Grünen, die Ökos, die (Lifestyle-)Linken, die Linksradikalen, rot-grün

• Use of pejorative compounds

- Gender- activists, advocates, moved, dogmatists, fanatics, rangers, fraction, freaks, friends, ideologists, fighters, lobby, party, troupe, protectionists, defenders

Gender[...] ~aktivisten, ~befürworter, ~bewegte, ~dogmatiker, ~fanatiker, ~förster, ~fraktion, ~freaks, ~freunde, ~ideologen, ~kämpfer, ~lobby, ~partei, ~truppe, ~verfechter, ~verteidiger

• Abusive names

- nutcases, fools, clowns, gender neurotics, poor beings, language terrorists, gendiots, nags, devil's kitchen

Spinner, Trottel, Clowns, Geschlechtsneurotiker, arme Wesen, Sprachterroristen, Gendioten, Nervensägen, Teufelsküche

Main Discourses

- **What gender-inclusive German is [nouns] (96 instances)**

–gender language (23), gender nonsense (17), *~erei / ~ei* [pejorative German noun suffix, equivalent to English *~ery / ~ry*] (7), [the] genderspeak (5), Gender German (4), gender gaga (3), gender gibberish (2), gender rubbish (2)
Gendersprache (23), Gender-Unfug (17), Genderei (7), Gendern (6)
Gendersprech (5), Genderdeutsch (4), Gender-Gaga (3) Genderkauderwelsch (2) Genderquatsch (2)

- **Further examples (mostly use of pejorative compounds)**

–gendered chitchat, gender hullabaloo, gender fuss, gender fashion, gender newspeak [Orwell] (2), gender hanky-panky, (language) quirk, pettifogging, re-languaging [re-education], quibbling

Gegendertes Gerede, ,Gender'-Gedöns, Gendergetue, Gendermode, Genderneusprech [Orwell] (2), Gendergefummel, Murks, Sprach-(Marotte), Rabulistik, Umsprachung, Wortklaubereien

Main Discourses

- **How gender-inclusive German is described [adjectives] (158 instances)**

Examples:

silly / nonsense/ fooling

exaggerated / odd / grotesque

ridiculous / absurd

ugly / unaesthetic

fashionable [zeitgeist]

dangerous

expensive

dumm / unsinnig / Unfug

übertrieben / seltsam / grotesk

lächerlich / absurd

hässlich / unästhetisch

modern [Zeitgeist]

gefährlich

teuer

Main Discourses

- **Gender-inclusive German as an illness (72 instances)**

Examples:

madness	<i>(Gender-) Wahn / Wahnsinn</i>
lunacy	<i>Irrsinn</i>
hysteria / neurosis	<i>Hysterie / Neurose</i>
cancer / tumour	<i>Krebs(-geschwür) / Tumor</i>
idiocy	<i>Schwachsinn</i>
convulsive	<i>krampfhaft</i>
compulsive	<i>zwanghaft</i>
genderitis	<i>Genderitis</i>
innitis	<i>Innitis</i>
plague / pest	<i>Pest</i>

Main Discourses

- **Gender-inclusive German as a communication barrier (52 instances)**

Example quotations:

- 'Gendered' texts are difficult to read (and can hardly be read out aloud!)
sind ‚gegenderte‘ Texte nur mühsam lesbar (und kaum vorlesbar!)
- makes communication and language acquisition more difficult
erschwert so die Verständigung und den Spracherwerb
- are mostly simply incomprehensible
sind meist schlicht unverständlich
- at the expense of understanding, clarity and truth of information
auf Kosten von Verständnis, Klarheit und Wahrheit der Information

Main Discourses

- **The so-called German ‘generic masculine’ (38 instances)**

Example quotations:

- generic masculine nouns do not refer to biological sex at all

Die generischen Maskulina beziehen sich [...] überhaupt nicht auf das biologische Geschlecht

- Gender language wrongly assumes that grammatical and biological gender are congruent

Die Gendersprache setzt fälschlicherweise voraus, das grammatische und biologische Geschlecht seien deckungsgleich

- The biological sex is one thing, the grammatical gender another

das biologische Geschlecht [ist] das eine und das grammatische Geschlecht das andere

Main Discourses

- **Anti-academic discourse (18 instances)**

Example quotations:

– Hundreds of so-called [male and {first and foremost} female] researchers/scientists

Hunderte von sogenannten Wissenschaftlern und vor allem Wissenschaftlerinnen

– Gender defenders from, for example, the university sector - who are often viewed by critics as extremely ideologized [male and female] “sham scientists”.

Gender-Verfechter etwa aus dem Hochschulbereich – die von Kritikern nicht selten als extrem ideologisierte „Schein- WissenschaftlerInnen“ angesehen werden.

– While a mathematician who claims $2 + 2 = 5$ is immediately dismissed for early retirement, his counterpart in linguistics is given a chair in gender studies at a German university.

Während aber ein Mathematiker, der behauptet, $2 + 2 = 5$, umgehend in die Frühpension entlassen wird, erhält sein Pendant in der Linguistik einen Lehrstuhl für Genderforschung an einer deutschen Universität.

Main Discourses

- **Discourse on violence & destruction (93 instances)**

Examples:

attack, harassment, damage, walkover, frontal attack, gender attacks, close gender combat, inflict violence, fight, destroy, collateral damage, cultural waste, maltreat, mistreat, murder, disgrace, social tinderbox, empty phrases, language adulterers, language-damaging, language debris, language distortion, language impoverishment, language mucking, language mutilation, decline, corruption, decay, rape, devastating, campaign of annihilation, mutilation, disfigurement, destruction

Angriff, Belästigung, Beschädigung, Durchmarsch, Frontalangriff, Genderattacken, Gendernahkampf, Gewalt antuen, Kampf, kaputt machen, Kollateralschaden, Kulturabfall, malträtieren, misshandeln, Mord, Schande, sozialer Sprengstoff, Sprachhülsen, Sprachpanscher, sprachschädigend, Sprachtrümmer, Sprachverdrehung, Sprachverarmung, Sprachverhunzung, Sprachverstümmelung, Untergang, Verballhornung, Verfall, Vergewaltigung, verheerend, Vernichtungsfeldzug, Verstümmelung, Verunstaltung, Zerstörung

Main Discourses

- **Violation of the rules of the language (39) and of the law (7)**

Example quotations:

–A breach of the rules of grammar | Violates the basic rules of the language |
wrong German

*grammatische Regelwidrigkeit | verletzt [...] sprachliche Grundregeln |
falsches Deutsch*

–contradicts the Federal Court of Justice

widerspricht dem Bundesgerichtshof

–a dereliction of an official duty which can lead to disciplinary measures

eine Dienstpflichtverletzung [...], die disziplinarisch geahndet werden kann

Main Discourses

- The “equality lie” (50 instances)

Example quotations:

–has nothing to do with feminism or women's equality

hat nichts mit Feminismus oder Gleichstellung der Frau zu tun

–counterproductive. Doesn't help the cause, divides society

kontraproduktiv. Bringt nichts in der Sache, spaltet die Gesellschaft

–While our gender lobby likes to bask in supposed philanthropy, the truth is that they always trample down human rights whenever they really matter.

Zwar sonnt sich unsere Genderlobby gerne in einer vermeintlichen Menschenfreundlichkeit, aber in Wahrheit tritt sie die Menschenrechte immer da mit Füßen, wo es wirklich zählt.

Main Discourses

- Language and the mind (25 instances)

Example quotations:

- The aim is to turn the mind and language use of citizens inside out
Das Bewusstsein und der Sprachgebrauch der Bürger sollen umgestülpt werden
- Who rules the [use of] the language, dictates the thinking
Wer die Sprache beherrscht, bestimmt das Denken.
- George Orwell's 'Newspeak'
George Orwells ,Neusprech'

Main Discourses

- **It's a German thing (11 instances)**

Example quotations:

- nowhere in the world [...] as [strong/much as] in the German language area
nirgends auf der Welt [...] wie im deutschen Sprachgebiet
- The whole world would shake their head uncomprehendingly about Germany
Die ganze Welt würde über Deutschland [...] den Kopf schütteln.
- the notoriously oblivious Germans could take a leaf out of the Grande Nation's book
könnten sich die notorisch selbstvergessenen Deutschen von der ‚Grande Nation‘ eine Scheibe abschneiden

Main Discourses

- **The use of gender-inclusive German as an oppressive ideology (400 instances)**

It is merely a tiny minority (*eine Mini-Minderheit*) that advocates the use of gender-inclusive-German, while at least two thirds of Germans (*mehr als zwei Drittel aller Bundesbürger*) do not support it (46). However, as people are spineless (*rückgratlos*), apathetic (*teilnahmslos*) and chickenhearted (*feige*), they do not oppose it. This is opportunism, bootlicking, or simply thoughtless collaboration (*Opportunismus / Anpassung / Mitläufertum*) (8).

The use of gender-inclusive German is (state / elite / minority / by unknown powers) controlled ideology (*ideologisch gesteuert*); part of a wider ideological programme (*Teil eines ideologischen Programms*); ideologically motivated (*ideologisch motiviert*); genderism (*Genderismus*); a doctrine (*eine Doktrin*); demagoguery, agitation, and propaganda (*Demagogie / Agitation / Propaganda*) (78)

The promotion of gender-inclusive German is state-supported language policy (*staatliche Sprachpolitik / Sprachlenkung*) with political aims (*politische Ziele*). However, the state must not intervene in language matters (*Der Staat besitzt nachweislich kein Recht, regulierend in die Sprache einzugreifen*), as language must not be used for political purposes (*Politik hat in der Sprache nichts zu suchen*) (19).

People who promote the use of gender-inclusive German are referred to as the language police (*Sprachpolizei*) (30), are compared to the Gestapo and the KGB, and try to achieve their aims by means of terror (*Genderterror / Sprachterror*) and hostage-taking (*Geiselhaft*) (9).

Main Discourses

- **The use of gender-inclusive German as an oppressive ideology (400 instances)**

The use of gender-inclusive German is achieved by force (*Zwang*), as common in dictatorships (*wie auch in Diktaturen üblich*) and totalitarian systems (*mit totalitärem Anspruch*); it has the character of a secular religion (*hat den Charakter einer säkularen Religion*); it is Orwellian Newspeak (*Orwellschem Neusprech*); censorship (*Zensur*) and an oppressive (*unterdrückerisch*), paternalistic (*bevormunderisch*) re-education programme (*Umerziehung*) (123).

Understandably, state ideologies prefer to hide their true goals (*Staatsideologien verbergen verständlicherweise gerne ihre wahren Ziele*): to turn an entire cultural nation upside down (*eine ganze Kulturnation sozusagen umzupolen*). To achieve this change of the society (*Gesellschaftsveränderung*), rhetorical tricks (*rhetorische Tricks*), short-lived tricks (*kurzlebige Tricks*), defensive lies (*Schutzbehauptungen*), other trickery (*Tricksereien*), diversionary tactics (*Ablenkungsmanöver*), and brain-washing (*Gehirnwäsche*) are used. The final aim is the disintegration of family structures, and ultimately of society as a whole (*Zersetzung familiärer und letztendlich gesamtgesellschaftlicher Strukturen*). Who is actually behind this, and who would benefit from it? (*Wer steckt eigentlich dahinter? / Wem käme das wohl zupass?*) (35).

In any case, while all of this is closely connected to political correctness (20), the wokeness movement (*Wokeness-Bewegung*) and the cancel culture (*Cancel-Culture*) (2), people who oppose the (over-)use of gender-inclusive German are afraid to be perceived as right-winged (*Angst davor, dass man in die rechte Ecke gedrängt wird*) and worried that they will be defamed as right-wing extremist, anti-feminist, homophobic, racist, anti-social, anti-democratic, xenophobic and a political die-hard (als rechtsradikal, antifeministisch, homophob, rassistisch, antisozial, antidemokratisch, fremdenfeindlich und ewig gestrig verleumdet).

Comparison: VDS on *Anglizismen* & ‘Genderdeutsch’

- Extremely similar (not to say ‘identical’)
 - aggressive-derogative expressions for the users and the usage (*absurd, albern, dämlich, dumm, Flausen, Idioten, lächerlich nachplappern, peinlich, Unsinn, Unfug*)
 - statements about aesthetics (*hässlich, scheußlich, grauenhaft*) and fashion (*Anbiederung, modern, Zeitgeist*)
 - discourse on violence & destruction (*gefährlich, kaputt machen, misshandeln, Sprachpanscher, Sprachverhunzung, Sprachverstümmelung, Verfall, Zerstörung*)
 - discourse on language and the mind (*Sprache beherrscht das Denken, das Denken der Anderen zu manipulieren, Umdeutung der Wortinhalte, Unwahrheiten*)
 - discourse on communication barriers (*den Sprachfluss / die Verständigung behindern / beeinträchtigen / trüben, unverständlich, Verkomplizierung*)

Comparison: VDS on *Anglizismen* & ‘*Genderdeutsch*’

- notion of it being specific to (or nowhere else worse than in) Germany
- France as a model state that has for laws against this ‘decay’ of the language
- At the same time, the idea that the state should not get involved or make laws when it comes to prescribing the use of ‘Gender German’
- A very strong political / ideological discourse (*Ideologie, Polizei, Terror, Gestapo, KGB, DDR, Orwell, Religion, Zwang, Diktatur, ‘unbekannte Mächte’ / Verschwörungstheorien*)

Core Bibliographie

- Busse, Dietrich und Wolfgang Teubert (1994), "Ist Diskurs ein sprachwissenschaftliches Objekt? Zur Methodenfrage der historischen Semantik". In: Dietrich Busse, Fritz Hermanns & Wolfgang Teubert (eds). *Begriffsgeschichte und Diskursgeschichte. Methodenfragen und Forschungsergebnisse der historischen Semantik*. Opladen: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 10–28.
- Hermanns, Fritz (2012), "Sprachgeschichte als Mentalitätsgeschichte. Überlegungen zu Sinn und Form und Gegenstand historischer Semantik. Nachdruck des Originalaufsatzes aus dem Jahr 1995". In: Heidrun Kämper, Angelika Linke & Martin Wengeler (eds). *Der Sitz der Sprache im Leben. Beiträge zu einer kulturalanalytischen Linguistik*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 5–36.
- Pfalzgraf, F. (2006). *Neopurismus in Deutschland nach der Wende*. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang. (Specifically chapter 3.1.1 on pp. 68–91 on the VDS.)
- Pfalzgraf, F. (2009). "Linguistic Purism in the History of German". In: Geraldine Horan, Nils Langer & Sheila Watts (eds). *Landmarks in the History of the German Language*. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang. (British and Irish Studies in German Language and Literature Vol. 52), pp. 137–168. (Specifically pp. 158–164 on the VDS.)
- VDS (2022). *Sprachnachrichten*. <<https://vds-ev.de/sprachnachrichten/>>.
- Wirth, K. (2010). *Der Verein Deutsche Sprache. Hintergrund, Entstehung, Arbeit und Organisation eines deutschen Sprachvereins*. Bamberg: Bamberg University Press. <https://fis.uni-bamberg.de/bitstream/uniba/241/2/Dokument_1.pdf>.

**Thank you
for your attention**