



UNIVERSITÄT
LEIPZIG

“USING GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS EASIER IN GERMAN” OR WHEN LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES MEET MULTILINGUALISM

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“Attitudes towards gender-inclusive language. A multinational perspective”

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1) WHAT IS THIS TALK ABOUT?



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INTRODUCTION

- Research on gender-inclusive language in French-speaking and German-speaking countries is **growing** (e.g. Brauer & Landry 2008; Schröter, Linke & Bubenhofer 2012; Burnett & Pozniak 2021; Diewald 2018; Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser 2016; Steinhauer & Diewald 2017; Stefanowitsch 2018 + many talks here!)
- BUT! The **effects of multilingual practices** on this question have remained largely unexplored (for an early exception, see Piller & Pavlenko 2001)
- Today: qualitative exploration of the language ideologies of Francophones living in Berlin based on twenty-five interviews with French-speaking women who learnt German in adulthood

GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE AND THE NOTION OF ‘STANDARD’

- “Do speakers of different languages exhibit **different degrees of attachment to a standard language ideology?**” (McLelland 2020: 119)
 - Speakers orientate towards a **different understanding of ‘standard’** in French and German
 - Almost all respondents have a **positive attitude towards gender-inclusive language** in all languages equally
 - BUT! They consider it to be **unmarked and ‘natural’ only in German, their L2’**
 - The L2’ is often learnt in specific social contexts without becoming associated certain types of speakers
 - L2’ speakers integrate **gender-inclusive language as being ‘the norm’ in German**, while it rather is one of the standards in the elitist professional and socio-cultural ‘bubble’ they use German in

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) Are language ideologies expressed similarly in the L1' and L2'?
- 2) What role do language ideologies play in the L1' on the L2' and vice versa?
- 3) Can we speak of a transfer of language ideologies (and in which direction)?

THE PLAN FOR TODAY

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Data and method: Interviews with French speakers in Berlin
- 3) Data analysis
- 4) Summary

Supplementary slides: Examples in French

2) INTERVIEWS WITH FRENCH-SPEAKING WOMEN IN BERLIN



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THE INTERVIEWEES

- recruited via a Facebook group for French speakers in Berlin (mainly women), of which I am a member myself but not very active; very open and helpful community
- great interest and great need, 25 interviews within 3 weeks (May-June 2020)
- only women, 18 to 75+, different lengths of time in Berlin (6 months to 40 years), all studied, many in culture/education
- mainly French women, only two Swiss women

3) “USING GENDER- INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS EASIER IN GERMAN”

Picture from naeim a on Pixabay

“USING GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS EASIER IN GERMAN”

- one argumentation line occurs again and again: “using gender-inclusive language is **easier in German**”
- the argumentation is **language-immanent** -> with reference to the language system, not the speakers
- controversies about gender-inclusive language in the German-speaking world recede into the background or are not mentioned at all

EXAMPLE 1: ENGLISH TRANSLATION

AURÉLIA, ~ 18 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2019 (FRENCH/GERMAN/ENGLISH)

in German, well I noticed that
that's what the Germans use it's always written in the masculine
and then they add the *-in* for the feminine [e.g. *Lehrer* -> *Lehrerin*]
and I don't know, I don't think it's that much of a debate
well, I have the impression that it's a bit different
because for example for adjectives that come from verbs
like for example in French we'll say
he is crazy [*il est fou*] she is crazy [*elle est folle*]
whereas in German it's going to be the same thing in the end for both [*er/sie ist verrückt*]
I have the impression that there isn't really this question on that

COMMENTS ON EXAMPLE 1

AURÉLIA, ~ 18 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2019 (FRENCH/GERMAN/ENGLISH)

- **German would be morphologically ‘easier’** to allow for gender-inclusive practices than French
 - “they add the *-in* for the feminine [e.g. *Lehrer* -> *Lehrerin*]”
 - adding a (gender) marking through a single morpheme is perceived as easier than more substantial/various changes (*écolier/écolière*; *acteur/actrice*) BUT! *professeur/professeure* exists as well
 - “in German it’s going to be the same thing in the end for both [*er/sie ist verrückt*]”
 - adjective agreement in French for adjectives seen as more difficult, often disregarding that epithet adjectives in German as well (*die verrückte Person*)

EXAMPLE 2: ENGLISH TRANSLATION

PIERRETTE, ~ 25 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2019 (FRENCH/ENGLISH/GERMAN/SPANISH)

I thought yeah, we were making a big deal out of nothing in France

okay not like that ((laughs))

but the fact that it exists in Germany and is commonly used

at least I think it shows that it's possible

yeah well that it's possible and that it puts so much ((incomprehensible 00:01))

in the language on the contrary but then

I have the impression that it's less a debate in Germany than in France

maybe because there is already a part of it in place

COMMENTS ON EXAMPLE 2

PIERRETTE, ~ 25 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2019 (FRENCH/ENGLISH/GERMAN/SPANISH)

- **Weakened perception of language-ideological debates in the L2'**
 - “I don't think it's that much of a debate” (ex 1)
 - “I have the impression that there isn't really this question on that” (ex 1)
 - “we were making a big deal out of nothing in France” (ex 2)
 - “I have the impression that it's less a debate in Germany than in France” (ex 2)
 - “it exists in Germany and is commonly used” (ex 2)

EXAMPLE 3: ENGLISH TRANSLATION

CORALIE, ~ 35 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2014 (FRENCH/GERMAN/ENGLISH/SPANISH)

for me it started with German clearly much earlier
because the language is different
and there are many words that are perhaps more easily feminized
by the structure of the words like I take an example
Mechaniker and then it will be *Mechanikerin* you add an *in* and it's over
in French it is much more complicated [...]
in Germany I have the impression that the subject well
the society has appropriated the subject a little more quickly
but on the other hand the difficulties were quite similar
there was a whole period when people raised their eyes to the sky [...]
but on the other hand it happened for me earlier in German

EXAMPLE 3: ENGLISH TRANSLATION

CORALIE, ~ 35 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2014 (FRENCH/GERMAN/ENGLISH/SPANISH)

and that influenced my representations
but a little in the sense that the subject is important
and I discovered it in Germany
and I said to myself that's true, I never asked myself that question
but yeah it's really good and it's important to do it
and that influenced my judgment or my opinion of France
by saying two years later we're going to do it

COMMENTS ON EXAMPLE 3

CORALIE, ~ 35 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2014 (FRENCH/GERMAN/ENGLISH/SPANISH)

- same **morphological / language-immanent arguments**
 - “there are many words that are perhaps more easily feminized”
- similar language-ideological debates
 - “but on the other hand the difficulties were quite similar”
- **impact of multilingualism crucial in developing language-awareness + (perception of) language change in the L1’**
 - “for me it started with German clearly much earlier”
 - “it happened for me earlier in German”
 - “and that influenced my representations” / “and I discovered it in Germany”
 - “we’re going to do it” [in French]

EXAMPLE 4: ENGLISH TRANSLATION

AMÉLIE, ~ 40 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2005 (FRENCH/SPANISH/GERMAN/ENGLISH)

I thought that in German it was more elegant the way with the *-innen*

it was more readable, there were fewer word breaks

I also found that in German it was easier to ((unintelligible))

*Mitarbeiter*innen* you didn't have to write *Mitarbeiterinnen*

in French you didn't necessarily have this linguistic ability

the *collaborateurs trices trices* I found that a little bit but here it is

I got used to it when you start to practice it

after a while you start to get used to it and you don't even notice it anymore

COMMENTS ON EXAMPLE 4

AMÉLIE, ~ 40 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2005 (FRENCH/SPANISH/GERMAN/ENGLISH)

- **different perception of language change in the L1' vs L2'**, although the example refers to the exact same morphological process
 - “in German it was more elegant the way with the *-innen*” / “the *collaborateurs trices trices* I found that a little bit but here it is”
- **needs practice / adjustment in the L1'** -> language change comes more easily in the L2'
 - “after a while you start to get used to it and you don't even notice it anymore”

GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN FRENCH AND GERMAN

- Multilinguals do not follow language (purism) debates equally in all communities
- They **experience controversies in the L2' as less virulent**, partly because they are less emotionally charged for them
- Hypothesis: They live in a certain bubble in Berlin, which was less marked for their L1' (more contact with variation in the L1'?)
- They deal with newer (lexical) forms in language acquisition more 'loosely' than in the L1' or integrate them as part of the learning process -> **openness correlates with identity as a learner**

4) SUMMARY



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RESEARCH DESIDERATA & FIRST ANSWERS

1) Are language ideologies regarding gender-inclusive language **expressed similarly** in the L1' and L2'?

- partly: **more open understanding of standard in L2'** but basically similar (progressive) language ideologies towards gender-inclusive language, although argued differently

RESEARCH DESIDERATA & FIRST ANSWERS

2) What **role** do language ideologies in the L1' play on the L2' and vice versa?

- language ideologies play a more important role in the L1' or are more deeply anchored
- in the L2' language-immanent arguments are more frequent
- critical (conservative, purist) debates on gender-equal language are hardly received in the L2' or are constructed as simpler/less problematic

RESEARCH DESIDERATA & FIRST ANSWERS

3) Can we speak of a **transfer of language ideologies** (and in what direction?)?

(more conservative)

language ideologies in **L1'**



language ideologies in **L2'**

are **not**

taken over

(progressive)

language ideologies in **L2'**



language ideologies in **L1'**

influence

OPEN QUESTIONS

- Role of **transfer between language ideologies** still unclear (e.g. if someone is (already) positive about gender-inclusive language in L1', it might favor adoption in L2')
- Question of **what counts as 'standard'** still insufficiently answered: It is likely that speakers perceive gender-inclusive language as the norm *in their milieu*, so that e.g. occupation/social class or gender are more important parameters than multilingualism

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

Language ideology research (on gender, but not only) needs to include L2' speakers much more:

Language ideologies circulate in a multilingual, globalized society in which not only L1' speakers shape language use and change as well as language ideologies



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MERCI / DANKE / THANK YOU!

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SUPPLEMENTARY SLIDES: EXAMPLES IN FRENCH



Picture from Pexels on Pixabay

EXAMPLE 1: ORIGINAL IN FRENCH

AURÉLIA, ~ 18 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2019 (FRENCH/GERMAN/ENGLISH)

en allemand ben j'ai remarqué que
c'est ce que les Allemands emploient c'est toujours écrit au masculin
et après ils rajoutent le *-in* pour le féminin
et je sais pas j'ai pas l'impression que ça pose tant débat que ça enfin c'est
j'ai l'impression que c'est un peu différent
parce que par exemple pour les adjectifs qui vont venir de verbes
comme par exemple en français on va dire il est fou elle est folle
alors qu'en allemand ça va être la même chose au final pour les deux
j'ai l'impression que y'a pas vraiment cette question là-dessus

EXAMPLE 2: ORIGINAL IN FRENCH

PIERRETTE, ~ 25 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2019 (FRENCH/ENGLISH/GERMAN/SPANISH)

j'ai pensé que ouais qu'on faisait tout un foin pour rien en France
okay pas comme ça ((rires))
mais le fait que ça existe en Allemagne et que c'est communément utilisé
en tout cas j'ai l'impression ça montre que c'est possible
ouais enfin que c'est possible et que ça met tant le ((incompréhensible 00:01))
dans la langue au contraire mais après
j'ai l'impression que c'est moins un débat en Allemagne qu'en France
peut-être parce qu'il y a déjà une partie qui est en place

EXAMPLE 3: ORIGINAL IN FRENCH

CORALIE, ~ 35 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2014 (FRENCH/GERMAN/ENGLISH/SPANISH)

pour moi ça a commencé avec l'allemand plus tôt clairement beaucoup plus tôt parce que la langue est différente et qu'il y a plein de mots qui sont peut-être plus facilement féminisables par la structure des mots genre je prends un exemple *Mechaniker* et après ce sera *Mechanikerin* tu rajoutes un *in* et c'est terminé en français c'est beaucoup plus compliqué [...] en Allemagne j'ai l'impression que le sujet enfin que la société s'est approprié le sujet un peu plus rapidement mais par contre les difficultés elles ont été assez similaires y a eu toute une période où les gens levaient un peu les yeux au ciel [...] mais par contre ça arrivait pour moi plus tôt en allemand

EXAMPLE 3: ORIGINAL IN FRENCH

CORALIE, ~ 35 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2014 (FRENCH/GERMAN/ENGLISH/SPANISH)

et ça a influencé mes représentations
mais un peu dans le sens où le sujet il est important
et je l'ai découvert en Allemagne
en me disant c'est vrai ça je me suis jamais posé la question
mais ouais c'est vachement bien et c'est important de le faire
et ça a influencé mon jugement ou mon opinion de la France
en disant deux ans plus tard on s'y met

EXAMPLE 4: ORIGINAL IN FRENCH

CORALIE, ~ 35 YEARS OLD, IN BERLIN SINCE 2014 (FRENCH/GERMAN/ENGLISH/SPANISH)

je trouvais qu'en allemand c'était plus élégant la manière avec les *-innen*
c'était plus lisible y avait moins de coupures de mots
je trouvais aussi qu'en allemand c'était plus facile aussi de ((incompréhensible))
*Mitarbeiter*innen* t'avais plus besoin d'écrire *Mitarbeiterinnen*
en français t'avais pas forcément cette capacité linguistique
les collaborateurs trices trices je trouvais ça un peu mais voilà
je m'y suis fait quand tu commences à le pratiquer
au bout d'un moment tu commences à t'habituer et tu le remarques même plus