

Recommendation

on gender-sensitive
language at TROPOS

Leibniz
Leibniz
Gemeinschaft



Leibniz-Institut für
Troposphärenforschung

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What is gender-sensitive language?

When masculine forms of speech are used in everyday German language, women are often "included". But socio-psychological studies show something different: this so-called generic masculine excludes women and persons of other genders mentally.¹

Even a short self-test makes this effect of language clear: formulate a text entirely in the female form of speech ("All female scientists are invited to...") and reflect on how much men would feel addressed here.

Gender-sensitive language therefore attempts to address and represent all persons equally – regardless of their gender. In this way, TROPOS would like to contribute, among other things, to promoting the visibility of women in academic and scientific contexts and to enabling equal opportunities.

Why gender-sensitive language?

Language is one of our most important tools of expression and communication. It depicts social structures and has a direct influence on how we perceive, think, and ultimately act in the world. This active shaping dimension of language is also effective in relation to our understanding of gender and has long been the subject of research.²

Thus, gender-sensitive speech can contribute to counteracting stereotypes, discriminations and disadvantages and to broadening the individual space of possibilities for all people.³

TROPOS is therefore committed to overcoming gender norms and traditional role thinking. Women in particular are affected by these structural inequalities, but so are people who do not find themselves within the binary gender classification of "male" or "female".

The actual gender diversity should therefore also be reflected in language.

¹ vgl. Heise, Elke (2001) and Sczesny, Sabine/ Stahlberg, Dagmar (2001)

² vgl. Günthner, Susanne et al. (2012)

³ vgl. Vervecken, Dries/ Hannover, Bettina (2015)

This guide is intended to show how this can be implemented in the German language in concrete terms. These are only current recommendations – language is always in constant transformation, and new research findings also require active reflection.

It is therefore not about perfection or "political correctness", but above all about developing an eye for discriminatory language. If we discover some of these words or language patterns in ourselves, this is not a personal criticism of us as persons - it is rather an invitation to deal with ourselves, our environment and our power to shape it.

The goal of TROPOS is to enable non-discriminatory and respectful cooperation at the Institute for all.

Reservations & Counterarguments

» *This is going to be very confusing*«

In fact, gender-sensitive language even makes it possible to designate genders unambiguously. For example, female students can be prevented from applying for a scholarship if it is addressed to all "students". At the same time, an event that is explicitly aimed at men can be identified as such. In this way, gender-sensitive language prevents misunderstandings rather than causing them.

The fact that the comprehensibility of a text does not suffer when it is written in gender-sensitive language has now also been proven by various scientific studies.⁴

» *Language cannot be changed just like that*«

Language evolves and adapts to changing social conditions and needs. For example, words like "googling" first came into use with the invention of search engines on the Internet – they are now listed in the German dictionary. At the same time, there are words that are hardly used today because the terms no longer fit the current reality of life. Language has always changed, it is the flexible result of our daily use. We can all actively shape it and choose to make it more inclusive again and again.

» *What's next*«

Linguistics also aims to better understand and improve our environment and our interactions. Gender-sensitive language wants to contribute to reducing current social inequalities.

Perhaps one day there will no longer be a need for it, because equal opportunities and real equality have been realized for all people in our society – regardless of their gender.

⁴ cf. e.g. Braun, Friederike et al. (2007)

Recommendations

1 Gender-neutral wording

Often a gender-neutral variant is possible, which includes all people. In this case, no gender is explicitly named – especially in tables, graphics or shorter texts, this is an elegant solution.

In concretely, this works in the form of noun phrases or reformulations:

Lehrer etc.	➔	<i>Lehrende Interessierte Lesende Studierendenrat</i>
Herausgeber Vertreter Verfasser unklar	➔	<i>herausgegeben von vertreten durch es ist unklar, wer das Werk verfasst hat</i>

Likewise, personal names or possessive pronouns can often be avoided:

Abteilungsleiter etc.	➔	<i>Fachkraft Abteilungsleitung Vertretung</i>
sein oder ihr Antrag	➔	<i>der Antrag</i>

Even though it must be said that even with the neutral form, it is often mainly men who are associated with it as other genders are not made explicitly visible.

2 Gender-inclusive wording

In addition to the possibility of using gender-neutral wording, there are two variants that are particularly well suited for the linguistic representation of gender diversity – the colon and the gender asterisk*. When used in documents and publications, TROPOS recommends the former.

2.1 Colon

The colon can be used as a symbolic placeholder to represent all gender identities – including people who do not classify themselves as male or female, such as non-binary persons. The linguistic representation of gender diversity is thus a major advantage of this variant.

The form is formed by placing a colon after the German word stem:

der:die Wissenschaftler:in
die Doktorand:innen
jede:r
keine:r
Mitarbeiter:innengespräch

Aufmerksamen Leser:innen fällt auf,...
der:die Gutachter:in achtet darauf,....
Sehr geehrte Absolvent:innen,....
Wer Hilfe braucht, der:die melde sich bitte bei...

2.2 Gender asterisk*

The so-called gender asterisk* has also become increasingly popular in recent years. Like the colon, it serves as a symbolic placeholder for all gender identities. The short, spoken pause is also the same here.

This variant is formed by placing an asterisk* after the stem of the word:

*der*die Wissenschaftler*in*
*die Doktorand*innen*
*jede*r*
*keine*r*
*Mitarbeiter*innengespräch*

In spoken German language, a short pause in speech is inserted at the position of the Colon or the gender asterisk*. This so-called *glottal stop* is already found in other terms, for example in the German words "Theater" or "erinnern".

3 Tips

3.1. Form of address

Concluding a person's gender on the basis of a name or external characteristics can quickly lead to a false assignment. Unless the other person has already made a statement in this regard, it is therefore recommended that neutral formulations be used first.

For the (written) form of address, for example, this would be:

<i>Guten Tag</i> first name last name <i>Sehr geehrt*</i> first name last name	<i>Sehr geehrte Mitarbeitende</i> <i>Sehr geehrtes Team der Bibliothek</i> <i>Sehr Geehrte</i>
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3.2 Pronouns – inclusion of all genders

When speaking or writing about a third person, instead of using the binary pronouns "she/her" or "he/his", it is useful to repeat the name of the person until the pronoun is known. This is because the external attribution does not always match the actual gender.

Marion is missing today. Do you know what <u>she</u> wanted to talk about? ➡ Do you know, what <u>Marion</u> wanted to talk about?

In addition, some gender-neutral neopronouns exist in the meantime, which extend the binary pronouns by another option. Examples are the combinations of "sie" and "er" to "si*er" or "si:er", the English "they/them" or the "hen" taken from Swedish.

Wer ist die Person dort hinten? Ist si:er neu am Institut?
Ist Oscar auch hier? Ich habe hen lange nicht gesehen.
Ich werde Marion fragen, ob they es mir erklärt.
Marion hat diese Studie angefordert, ich bringe sie them.

The email signature is an easy way to make your personal and possessive pronouns recognizable to others:

<p>Karla Kolumna (she/her) Head of Department Phone: 0431/ 12345</p>	<p>Jarle Jacobsen (hen) Accounting E-Mail: j@tropos.de</p>
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3.3 Title

In order to increase the visibility of women in academic and scientific contexts, the addition of the superscript ending "-in" in the German title is an idea.

There is also a variant with gender asterisks*. This is often used to additionally express criticism of the standardizing two-gender system.

<p>Prof.ⁱⁿ Dr.ⁱⁿ Dipl.Ing.ⁱⁿ Dipl.Psych.ⁱⁿ Mg^a</p>	<p>Prof.^{*in} Dr.^{*in} Dipl.Ing.^{*in} Dipl.Psych.^{*in} Mg^{*a}</p>
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3.4 English

Nouns are often already gender-neutral in English. In addition, attempts are made to reduce or replace gender-specific words – for example, via the imperative or the passive voice.

Please send the documents to ...
The relevant documents should be sent to ...

With regard to pronouns, the plural pronouns "*their*" and "*them*" and the general pronoun "*one*" are currently the most common variants.

Everybody has to choose the career that suits them best.
To be a careful scientist, one has to check one's data.

„*Person*“ can usually replace the suffix "man". Likewise, the function of the person can be named. Often, gender-unspecific formulations even sound more elegant.

businessman	→	<i>businessperson, business manager</i>
policeman		<i>police officer</i>
husbands/ wives		<i>partners</i>

Links to more comprehensive english language guidelines can be found on page 14.

3.5 Vacancies and calls

TROPOS is very interested in competent scientists and employees. Therefore, all qualified persons should feel addressed by job titles and advertisements and be encouraged to apply. Thus, no stereotypical gender concepts should be activated in the text of the call for proposals. The title should already reflect openness towards any gender:

» *Research Assistant (m/f/d/n.a.)* «

m	= male	d	= diverse
f	= female	n.a.	= no answer

In addition, the following note is recommended at the end of a call to make the openness to all genders visible:

TROPOS values the diversity of its members and pursues the goals of equal opportunity. The institute strives to increase the proportion of women in research and therefore invites qualified women to apply. Persons with severe disabilities will be given preferential consideration if equally qualified.

3.6 Images and representations

The visual representation of people can also reproduce discrimination – in terms of gender, but also in terms of racist or other stereotypes. Therefore, it is recommended to pay attention to an equal visual language that avoids hierarchies and depicts the actual diversity of people. This includes reflection on:

- Selection of the image section
- Positioning and size of the persons
- Facial expressions, gestures and clothing of the persons.

Glossary

- binäre Geschlechterordnung* – Gender is thought of as either male or female, genders (binary) outside of it are hidden. A binary gender order is usually accompanied by a hierarchy between male and female and brings with it further contrasts (e.g. strong vs. weak, rational vs. emotional).
- cis* – Also *cisgender*. Conformity of a person's actual gender and gender assigned at birth based on medical and normalizing classifications. Contrast to *trans*.
- divers* (diverse) – Since 2019, legal option in Germany for entering gender in the civil status register ("third option"). Also used as umbrella term for different genders, e.g. inter and non-binary persons.
- dyadisch* (dyadic) – The gender of a person (e.g. chromosomes) can be assigned to one of the binary medical norms "female" or "male". Contrast to *inter*.
- inter* – Also *inter**. The gender of a person cannot be unambiguously assigned to one of the binary medical norms "male" or "female" (e.g. by chromosomes).
- nicht-binär (non-binary) – People whose gender is outside of the binary gender system. Their gender is neither male nor female, between male and female or as both male and female.
- trans* – Also *trans**. People who were assigned the wrong gender at birth based on medical and normalizing classifications.

Useful links

1. More comprehensive German language guides:

- Guide of the TU berlin:
https://www.tu-berlin.de/zenfrau/menue/informationen/gendersensible_sprache/
- Guide of the TU dresden (Professur Medienwissenschaft und neuere deutsche Literatur):
https://tu-dresden.de/gsw/slk/germanistik/mwndl/ressourcen/dateien/studium/Gendersensible_Sprache_Professur_neu.pdf
- Guide of the university of cologne:
https://gb.uni-koeln.de/e2106/e2113/e16894/2019_Leitfaden_GendergerechteSprache_19022020_32_Poster_Webausgabe_ger.pdf

2. Gender-sensitive writing in English:

- European Parliament – Gender-neutral language in the European Parliament:
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwif_63Nh6PxAhWk5eAKHS0sAUgQFjADegQIF-BAF&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.europarl.europa.eu%2Fcms-data%2F151780%2FGNL_Guidelines_EN.pdf&usg=AOvVaw2ycW8KdRCO6Bbt8SrZcf6u
- UN-WOMEN – Gender-inclusive language guidelines:
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwinq6_SIKPxAhWZwAIHHb9YCpoQFjALegQIChAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.uni-kassel.de%2Fhochschulverwaltung%2Findex.php%3FeID%3DdumpFile%26t%3Df%26f%3D378%26to-ken%3D2c496cdb2d302e879aa4f089ee012938080d2809&usg=AOvVaw3Aip74clopa5DJfyk0wee
- University of Hamburg – Academic-Writing:
<https://englishexplorations.check.uni-hamburg.de/academic-writing-how-do-we-use-gender-inclusive-language-in-academic-writing/>
- University of North Carolina – The Writing Center:
<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/gender-inclusive-language/sdfg>

3. General

- Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency:
<https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/DE/ueber-diskriminierung/diskriminierungsmerkmale/geschlecht-und-geschlechtsidentitaet/geschlecht-und-geschlechtsidentitaet-node>
(also available in english)
- <https://www.genderleicht.de/>
- <https://geschicktgendern.de/>
- <https://queer-lexikon.net/glossar/>

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