

***Man* between ‘human’ and ‘man’ – On the sex reference of the German generic pronoun *man* from a diachronic perspective**

In recent years, the German generic pronoun *man* has been in the centre of public attention in the context of the German discussion on gender-sensitive language. Its prototypical reference aims at a non-specified population of individuals (e.g. *Man lernt nie aus*. ‘One never stops learning.’) but can also be used for definite referents (*Man hat dich angerufen*. **One has called you*.). (cf. Zifonun 2000, Haspelmath 1997) Despite its masculine gender, which is reflected in the use of the masculine possessive pronoun *sein* (e.g. *Man muss sich sein Geld schon verdienen*. ‘You have to earn your money.’) *man* can refer to all humans in contemporary German (cf. Zifonun 2000: 238). Even though, feminist language critique has questioned its genericity since the 1980s. A main argument, apart from its masculine gender, is that *man* is homophonic to the noun *Mann* which denotes male humans. Therefore, it is claimed that women are at best indirectly included. The homophony of *man* and *Mann* is a relic of the historical origin of both words in the Old High German noun *man*, which designated ‘man’ as well as ‘human’ (cf. Giacalone Ramat/Sansò 2007). This early period of the pronominalisation process as well as the further development of *man* have not yet been investigated empirically and from a diachronic perspective.

Against this background, this talk poses the question, whether and to which extent *man* has (had) reference to male sex. The question is addressed by a corpus-based study of two stages of German to trace, if (and how long) semantic restrictions concerning sex of the root lexeme retain and if *man* could be used in reference to men and women respectively. The first part examines the process of pronominalisation of *man* on the basis of Old and Middle High German reference corpora. The second part analyses usages of *man* in comedies of the Early Modern period and focuses on the question, whether *man* can be used by female characters in a self-referential way. This talk presents first exemplary findings and hypotheses of the first study.

All in all, the talk gives a first insight into two stages of the historical development of the pronoun *man*. Against this background, the gender-linguistic criticism can be assessed in an empirically founded and historically informed way.

References

- Giacalone Ramat, A./A. Sansò (2007): The spread and decline of indefinite ‘man’-constructions in European languages: An areal perspective. In: Ramat, P./E. Roma (Hg.): Europe and the Mediterranean as Linguistic Areas: Convergences from a Historical and Typological Perspective. Amsterdam, 95–131.
- Haspelmath, M. (2017): Indefinite pronouns. Oxford University Press.
- Pusch, L. (1984): Das Deutsche als Männersprache. Suhrkamp.
- Trömmel-Plötz, S. (1997): Linguistik und Frauensprache. In: Heinz Sieburg (Hg.): Sprache - Genus, Sexus. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 49–68.
- Zifonun, G. (2000): „Man lebt nur einmal.“ Morphosyntax und Semantik des Pronomens *man*. DS 28, 232–253.