

# Gender-fair language in the German political discourse

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The topic that dominates the discourse on language in the German public sphere is the discussion on the use of gender-equitable language (so-called 'Gendern'). Beyond the academic discourse, the topic is taken up in media coverage and political discourse. The public debate on gender-inclusive language has hardly been studied from a discourse linguistic perspective, with the exception of Becker's (2022) contrastive study of Spanish and German argumentation patterns against the use of gender-inclusive language in linguistics. Building on this work, in our presentation we will address the question of which argumentation patterns can be found in political discourse with regard to the use of gender-inclusive language. To this end, we examine the election programs and press releases of the German Bundestag parties that address the topic of gender-fair language in their programs for the Bundestag elections. After reviewing the election manifestos (of the parties represented in the Bundestag in the 2021 – 2025 legislative period), only two parties – AfD and CDU/CSU – address the topic; both reject the use of gender-fair language.

The current Bundestag program and press releases of the parties from 2022 to 2024 serve as the sample for the study. In this sample, 33 assertive statements on gender-fair language can be found for the AfD and 39 for the CDU/CSU, which can be assigned to five general argumentation patterns (in some cases, individual statements realize several patterns):

Table 1. Argumentation patterns attested in the sample.

Argumentation pattern	AFD	CDU/CSU
<i>Gender-fair language is ideological</i>	19	11
<i>Gender-fair language has negative consequences</i>	12	29
<i>Gender-fair language is rejected by the majority of people</i>	4	4
<i>Not using gender-fair language has negative consequences</i>	---	7
<i>Gender-fair language does not have any positive effects</i>	---	2

Three statements per party cannot be assigned to any pattern. The quantitative data shows that the CDU/CSU has a greater breadth of argument overall with regard to the rejection of gender-fair language and that both parties differ in terms of the frequency of the individual patterns. The AfD focuses on the fact that gender is ideologically motivated (politically associated with parties from the left-green spectrum). This also plays a role for the CDU/CSU, but negative consequences of the use of gender-fair language (e.g., for the comprehensibility of language, society or children) are emphasized more strongly. The CDU/CSU position is characterized by the fact that – unlike the AfD – it also focuses on the negative consequences of not using gender-fair language and denies the supposed positive effects of its use (e.g., wrt gender equality). The argumentation patterns differ from those identified by Becker (2022) for the linguistic discourse. It is striking that the ideological critique means that a science-sceptical argument in particular also plays an important role in the political discourse.

In our talk, we will focus on the micro-level of the individual argumentation patterns and compare which specific argumentations can be found in the parties. An initial analysis of the data shows that the arguments of the CDU/CSU, but not the AfD, refer at least in part to linguistic arguments (e.g., official German spelling), but that the rejection is generally not motivated by language. A systematic discussion of the argumentation patterns and a general classification in the wider political context will be provided in the lecture.

## References

Becker, L. (2022). Ideologeme und Argumentationsmuster gegen genderneutrale Sprache in der spanischsprachigen und deutschen Linguistik. In G. Diewald & D. Nübling (eds.). *Genus – Sexus – Gender*, 319-348. Berlin: De Gruyter.