

Discourse on gender-fair language in German newspapers

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At the conference's inaugural event, journalist Christine Olderdisen argued that the German media had 'Gendern totgequatscht' – or, in English, 'jawed gender-fair language to death'. This does not mean, however, that the German media have ceased to talk about gender-fair linguistic practices (henceforth *gendern*) in the meantime, given that topics around gender have become a battleground for culture wars around the world (Borba 2022).

Germany is no exception to this development from which gender-fair language cannot be separated. Beyond media debates around usefulness, advocacy, and disapproval, a political dimension has recently emerged, as evidenced by federal bans on certain forms of *gendern* in public institutions across multiple German states – another form of death.

In this context, it is appropriate to examine the representation of the key concept *gendern* in German newspapers, thereby complementing extant research on the use (e.g., Müller-Spitzer et al. 2024) and perception (e.g., Friedrich et al. 2021) of gender-fair German. The present data derive from two German newspaper corpora of all articles from the Nexus Uni database containing the search string **gender**, one from 2013 and one from 2023, which were compiled for a larger dissertation project.

For the current talk, instances of the term *gendern* from the two corpora will be investigated within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2015; Wodak 2002). The investigation will commence with a quantitative analysis, which will be followed by a collocation analysis to inform the qualitative inquiry. In the next step, the concordance lines with the node *gendern* will be systematically analysed and categorised ($n=17$ for 2013; $n=2385$ for 2023).

The primary objective is the examination of coherent conceptualisations of *gendern* in the given corpora, with a main focus on the more recent one. In doing so, I aim to answer the question of whether the public discourse around *gendern* is really about linguistic practice alone, or whether *gendern* has become a straw man for a larger political discourse between freedom and authoritarianism.

References

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