

# Gender (de-)construction in the discourse about trans people's voices

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Research into the voice of trans people is still in its beginnings. Although studies in this area have made significant progress for English (see e.g., Zimman 2018), comparable findings in German are scarce. So far, only medical research has been carried out (Neuschaefer-Rube et al. 2008). Sociophonetic research—analogous to that conducted in the Anglo-American area—is still pending. Beyond the necessary medical findings, little is known about the voices of trans people—which, from a performative perspective, can also be described as “trans” voices. Nevertheless, “trans” voices are written about in public discourse. Thus, there is a need for research, which this talk addresses.

To analyze how “trans” voices are discursively negotiated and how this relates to conceptualizations of gender, we use data from the QLK (Queer Linguistic Corpus) project. The sub-corpus “Transstimmen” (Sörries-Vorberger 2024) contains texts that address phonetic aspects of the voices of trans people and were taken from various online sources, such as advertising and information texts from speech therapy facilities, as well as journalistic articles, sampled by conducting key word searches.

Quantitative methods (keyword analysis and co-occurrence analysis with Sketch Engine, Kilgarriff et al. 2014) show interesting tendencies concerning the construction of gender. For instance, many keywords constituting personal noun compounds with *Trans-* as a first part (e.g. *Transfrau*, *Transmann*, *Transperson*) show that in some texts, instead of using *trans* as an adjective, a new category is created (i.e., *Frau* vs. *Transfrau*). This conveys gender as a biological category from which trans people, linguistically marked with a new personal noun, deviate. Moreover, co-occurents of the two adjectives *weiblich* ‘female’ and *männlich* ‘male’ differ: While co-occurents of *weiblich* indicate the discussion of femininity with regard to the body (*Rundung* ‘roundness, curve’, *Brust* ‘breast, chest’), *männlich* co-occurs with attenuating adverbs like *ziemlich* ‘quite’, pointing to conceptualizations of gender beyond a rigid binary.

Starting from the quantitative results, a qualitative analysis reveals that the adjectives *weiblich* and *männlich* are often used to express a contrast between gender identity and voice. As a majority of the texts focuses on trans women, this often includes contrasting a ‘feminine’ body with a ‘masculine’ voice. This contrast is constructed in different ways. On the one hand, it focuses on the outside perspective and constructs the voice as an important element of ‘passing’. On the other hand, an inside perspective is taken, linking voice training to finding one’s true voice and matching it to one’s gender identity. While some articles construct *männlich* and *weiblich* as two contrasting, contradictory categories, others allow for a more fluid view of gender identity and voice. These exploratory observations point to complex and differing constructions of gender identity and voice. In our talk, we will present an analysis of the “Transstimmen”-corpus, using quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the (de-)construction of gender in the discourse about “trans” voices.

# References

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