Call for contributions

Linguistic intersections of language and gender: Of gender bias and gender fairness

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"Stop teaching kids pronouns and start teaching them grammar!" – The current backlash against efforts to make language more gender-inclusive gives rise to strong, sometimes absurd, demands. But what exactly is gender and how is language gender-(non)inclusive?

From a grammatical perspective, the concept of *grammatical gender* constitutes noun classes which are reflected in the behavior of associated words (Hockett 1958), dividing the nominal entries of a language into two or more distinct classes (Siemund 2008). Nouns and their gender classes trigger the appearance of certain formal exponents in their syntactic surroundings (e.g., in articles, adjectives, pronouns; Corbett 1991).

From a social science perspective, the concept of *social gender* constitutes the social, psychological, cultural and behavioral aspects of a given gender identity (Haig 2004). In this regard, gender may include social structures, i.e., gender roles and gender expression (Lindqvist, Sendén & Renström 2021; Bates, Chin & Becker 2022). Many cultures, especially those dominating the global north's cultural interactions, have traditionally used a gender binary, and people are considered to fall into one of two categories (cf. Maddux & Winstead 2019). Those who find themselves outside the binary defy such traditional systems and are often subject to aggression due to their gender (e.g., Richards et al. 2016).

Most linguists will agree that, in one way or another, *grammatical gender* is not independent of *social gender*. The assignment of, e.g., a noun to a pertinent grammatical gender class may be determined by a variety of notional distinctions. One such distinction frequently found in gender systems is *male* vs. *female*, that is, the real-world distinction of binary gender identity (cf. Corbett 1991). While the assignment of gender classes may overwhelmingly depend on such notional information in some languages, e.g., notional gender languages like English, there are gender systems that overwhelmingly make use of morphological and phonological information, e.g., grammatical gender languages like German and Spanish, and other gender systems that either make use of a mixture of notional and formal information or are without a grammatical gender system, e.g., Georgian (Corbett 2007). Analogously, the resolution of gender, that is the agreement of another element with a pertinent noun, may rely on either semantic or syntactic criteria. Semantic gender resolution involves reference to the meaning of the pertinent noun, potentially ignoring its grammatical gender in favor of social gender. Syntactic gender resolution, on the other hand, draws on the grammatical gender of the pertinent noun, potentially ignoring its semantics and, with that, social gender (Corbett 2007).

It is this interplay of grammatical gender and social gender that sparks linguists' interest, leading to an ever-growing body of related research. The findings of such research are cause for language users to reflect and change their language use, and even to invent novel linguistic forms. Such change and invention, then, is the trigger for opinionated utterances as the one quoted at the beginning of this call. We aim to provide a collection of cutting-edge linguistic research on gender bias and gender fairness from a variety of linguistic areas which presents novel findings in languages with notional gender, grammatical gender, and no gender system.

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