

Linguistics and Speech Science, including Phonetics and Rhetoric

Communications Science, Gender Linguistics, Sociolinguistics

Course: Linguistics, Linguistics and Speech Science
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Course objectives:

Gender is an essential, stable category in the context of speech and communication. This is because gender is perpetually (re)produced via language and communication. As far as the subject-specific gender studies content and related skills taught in the degree are concerned, the object is to recognise, reflect on and on the basis of theoretical principles to analyse the way in which gender relations (re)present cultural and symbolic systems through the medium of language and linguistic structures. Gender-aware linguistics and communication aims to render conscious the processes by which gender-specific attributes are created in language and a related phenomenon the production of hegemonic, gender-hierarchic discourses and political, cultural and social gender positionings.

Teaching content/subject-specific gender studies content:

At the heart of feminist and gender-aware linguistics and communication studies lies the interdependency of language, identity, subject positions and socio-political structures and hierarchies.

Language is ascribed considerable importance both as engineer and as instrument reflecting societal, political and social contexts and power relations.

Feminist language critique

Feminist language critique recognises (and criticises) the fact that both individual words (the morphological-lexical level) and syntactic structures, as action-bearing linguistic elements, have a gender-specific meaning.

Language contains perspectives, value-judgements, placements and appellative statements and, as the medium for experiences, constantly initiates a pre-interpretation of reality. Thus language essentially regulates human behaviour. From a feminist linguistic perspective, social structures become transparent when as a result of selective perception at the content and formal level only men are considered to be valid actors or subjects. Language shapes our self-perception and our behaviour towards ourselves, determining whether we are perceived of as a subject and whether we act as such.

From a feminist, gender-aware standpoint, identity-building, understanding and self-conception by women would not appear to be possible using a language that functions exclusively or primarily in male speech-forms and thus constructs male realities in a one-sided way.

Doing gender through language

Language-related gender stereotypes form the cognitive basis for the interactive construction of gender ("doing gender").

Linguistic-constructivist theory assumes that, during the process of identity building, key elements of the gender concept are learnt via day-to-day interactions. Women define themselves on the sociolinguistic level within social relations determined by men, in which they do not appear as independent subjects.

Via interactive, linguistic processes, sex becomes gender and is immediately naturalised. Via language, cultural acquisitions take on the appearance of something natural which ultimately also applies to language itself.

Gender and gender hierarchies are reproduced in speech acts. Acting in language the process of being identified and gaining attributes in language is therefore of fundamental importance for all social, gender-specific identity-building processes.

Language sensitivity and reflection

The reflective use of language involves maintaining a certain distance towards one's own social role, speech intention and the speech situation. Reflection on language looks at the "what" and the "how" of our linguistic actions. It is thus a prerequisite for emancipation and autonomy in our linguistic acts of communication. This reflective knowledge comprises both speech-analytical and critical elements. This means that the reflective use of language is always a speech-analytical and critical process. Reflection on language is necessary in order to find an identity a process that is acted out in the area of conflict between individual and (speech) community.

Language as a political issue

Gender-appropriate politics, research and practice requires gender-appropriate language. The essential criterion is whether the language and the content match, and whether both genders are mentioned (if both are meant) or the relevant gender mentioned (where one is meant).

Language, discourse and materiality

Discourse theory analyses the understanding of reality, as reflected in language, of different periods of history. The rules of discourse define, for a particular context or area of knowledge, what can be said, what should be said, what may not be said, and who can say what.

Discourse is simply the linguistic part of a "discourse practice" that also comprises non-linguistic aspects. In certain theories, the execution of specific (physical) representations ("performativity") is also considered part of the discourse practice. Feminist theories consider gender identity itself as discourse practice.

Gender differences between men and women can thus be understood as discourse constructions.

Constructivist theory-building and language

The naturalising and materialising affects of linguistic cultural norms are critically examined. The supposedly natural body is the naturalised effect of discourse. However, language (discourse) and materiality are not opposites, since language is also material and refers to such. Anything that is "material" can never completely escape the linguistic process of signification. The materiality of biological gender (i.e. sex) is also constructed via the ritualised linguistic repetition of norms. Gender, it is argued, is more than just cultural gender identity it is also a mechanism for constructing biological gender (sex) as a prediscursive entity. At the same time it camouflages this process, so that sex does not appear as an effect of gender, but rather as biological fact.

Integration of gender studies content into the curriculum:

Gender is essentially an interdisciplinary category. Accordingly, the significance of the category gender as a determining factor should always be investigated at all levels of the subject linguistics/sociolinguistics/communication and at all process steps.

Study of the relationship between language, gender and power should therefore revolve around a number of elements: critically evaluating the use of the category gender, promoting gender-awareness and reflection on language (non-sexist and gender-aware speech acts), and learning about feminist linguistic and current post-structuralist theoretical approaches, and the approaches of discourse analysis. Ideally, these aspects should be integrated into all the relevant subjects as core components as a part of gender mainstreaming. However, it would also be possible to include them as modules (or module components) in existing subjects as follows:

1. "Gender and language": In this module we examine the close relationship between language and gender. We see how gender and gender hierarchies are (re)produced through speech acts, and how acting in language the process of being identified and gaining attributes through language is of fundamental importance for all social, gender-specific identity-building processes as well as for social and political power relationships.
2. "Doing Gender": In this module we examine the constructive and/or constitutive function of language. Language is not simply a reflection of social realities rather, these realities are constructed by means of language. We see how a perpetual construction of gender via language takes place in everyday interactions, leading to the (re)production of social (power) relationships. We also look at various questions of how gender stereotypes are formed, socialisation and social codings, and performativity. A great deal of empirical research has been carried out in this area and can be drawn on in this module. Students could also carry out smaller empirical studies themselves in this area.
3. "Language, discourse and power": As part of our examination of the relationship between language and gender, we reflect on actual discourse from the point of view of gender linguistics and sociolinguistics and drawing on various theories, since social and societal gender relations are based on dominance mechanisms produced via language and discourse. Led by theory and using the approaches of discourse analysis, we investigate the "symbolic order" so as to reveal the mechanisms behind language with regard to the formation of hierarchies and the inclusion or exclusion of certain individuals or groups. At the same time we also analyse the functioning of what appear to be "natural" and gender-neutral speech patterns, as gender-specific attributions of dominant discourses are reproduced and deeply embedded in everyday interactions.

Degree Stage:

These modules could be integrated into both the BA (from the second semester onwards) and the MA.

The first two modules are suitable for inclusion in the BA; the third should be included in the MA.

Basic Literature/Recommended Reading:

- Butler, Judith: Körper von Gewicht. Frankfurt am Main 1991
- Cheshire, Jenny/Trudgill, Peter (ed.): The Sociolinguistics Reader: Gender and Discourse, New York 1998
- Foucault, Michel: Die Ordnung des Diskurses.
- Gansel, Christina: Sprachwandel und Feminismus. Anspruch und "Wirklichkeit", in: Deutschunterricht 48 (1995), 322- 328

- Klann-Delius: Sprache und Geschlecht. Stuttgart 2005
- Kotthoff, Helga: "Kommunikative Stile, Asymmetrie und 'Doing Gender'", in: Feministische Studien 2, 1993, 81-95
- Reiss, Kristina: Sprache spricht das Subjekt. Weibliche Identität durch Sprache. In: Frauen antizipieren Zukunft II. VUB Fachbuchverlag Köln 2002
- Samel, Ingrid: Feministische Sprachwissenschaft. Berlin 1995
- Spender, Dale: Man Made Language. London 1980
- Trömel-Plötz, Senta: Gewalt durch Sprache. Frankfurt 1984
- Weedon, Chris: Wissen und Erfahrung. Feministische Praxis und poststrukturalistische Theorie. Dortmund 1991

Journals:

- Zeitschrift für interdisziplinäre Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung
- Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik (einzelne Ausgaben)
- Zeitschrift für Sprache und Kognition (einzelne Ausgaben)