

**Deictic and phoric procedures, sex and gender –
a functional approach to the German reference system**

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Abstract

Because of their close developmental ties it could be expected that the pronominal systems of German and English are quite closely related with regard to form and function. After exploring the similarities, the chapter proceeds to demonstrate that in German, however, the linguistic means of gender has structural consequences that cast some doubt on the applicability of the pronoun category in a way that calls for a different theoretical approach. Drawing on German-based Functional Pragmatics that views ‘pronouns’ as deictic and anaphoric devices their functions are explored regarding a) reference to speaker and hearer and b) the topical organisation of spoken and written language. The last section attempts to show the structural consequences for the German reference system introduced by recent linguistic demands of identity policy.

Key words: Functional Pragmatics, phoric procedures, deictic procedures, sex, gender, thematic organisation of oral discourse and written text, equal representation of the sexes in German, equal representation of identities in language

1. Preliminary remarks

Frequently personal pronouns are seen as a set of linguistic devices with a predominantly social function in that they refer to speaker or hearer or to people

spoken about by speaker and hearer. Because of the close developmental ties of English and German, it could be expected that there are substantial similarities both regarding the set of personal pronouns and their functions. In Section 2, I shall argue that this is, however, hardly the case as English, during its development, shed a property that to this day is still intrinsic to the very make-up of the German language: gender. Allowing for ways of reference that differ significantly from the English situation, gender has structural consequences that cast some doubt on the applicability of the category of personal pronouns to the German language.

In Section 3, I attempt to demonstrate that an analysis of pronouns within the framework of German-based Functional Pragmatics does more justice to the properties of these expressions than traditional approaches. As explored in Section 4, this applies especially to their pragmatics in the areas of a) reference to speaker and hearer and b) the topical organisation of spoken and written language.

In Section 5, I discuss, with regard to the reference system, the impact of the linguistic demands made by equal representation of the sexes as well as by recent identity policy.

2. 'Personal Pronouns'

In this section I argue that the category of *personal pronouns* leads to inconsistencies when applied to English, and even more so when applied to German.

At a first glance, there does not appear to be any difference between the English and the German set of personal pronouns as each English expression has a German counterpart:

(1)	I	ich
	you	du
	he, she, it	er, sie, es
	we	wir
	you	ihr
	they	sie

This allows me to illustrate briefly a terminological inconsistency by just referring to the English situation: *I* and *you* are certainly personal. But are these expressions pronouns? The meaning of the term *pronoun*, as an analytical sediment inherited from antiquity (Ehlich 2007f), is ‘something that stands for a noun’ – from Latin *pro-nomen*.¹ Which noun could be represented by *I*? My name? If I always used my name instead of *I*, some people would believe that I required some psychological treatment. The same would apply if I always used the hearer’s name instead of *you*.² This is why I, in accordance with Functional Pragmatics (comp. Section 3), do not think that it is very meaningful to classify *I* and *you* – as well as *ich* and *du* – as pronouns.

And what about *he, she, it* and *er, sie, es*? The category of *personal pronoun*, admittedly, works very well in the following situation:

(2) **Peter** said **he** couldn’t come to the party.

Peter hat gesagt, dass **er** nicht zu der Party kommen kann.

¹ That this is, to this day, still the core meaning of the term is demonstrated, for instance, by the notion of coreference.

² I am well aware that so-called third person reference to self is quite common in languages other than English and German. However, since the personal name cannot even remotely be considered as a functional equivalent of *I* or *you* (German: *ich* und *du*), these expressions cannot be pronouns as there are no nouns they could possibly refer to.

The expressions *he* and *er* both refer to the personal name *Peter* that denotes a person. We also observe that the reason the expressions *she* or *sie* cannot be employed to refer to *Peter* is a property of the person the name *Peter* denotes, i.e. *sex*. Almost every English noun that does not denote something endowed with sex is *ne-utrum* (Lat.: ‘none of each’), *neutral*, and referred to by *it*.³ As for personal names, the German situation is a little different as names with diminutive suffixes (e.g. *Kläuschen* as the diminutive form of *Klaus* or *Annchen* as the diminutive form of *Anne*) can be, on principle, either referred to by *er/sie* or by *es*. However, it is, I believe, quite safe to say that the category of personal pronouns works reasonably well with English and German in such instances, which also includes animals (*the tomcat* – *he*; *der Kater* – *er*).

However, if we look at example (3) and its analysis (3’), we encounter a substantial difference between English and German that may cast some doubt on the category of *personal pronoun* when applied to German:

- (3) Um die Energiebilanz des Systems einfach zu gestalten, soll der aufgeladene Kondensator von der Spannungsquelle abgetrennt werden, so dass für ihn $Q = \text{konst.}$ gilt. (Zastrow, 2004, p. 138)

To simplify the system’s energy balance, the charged capacity should be disconnected from the power supply so that $Q = \text{const.}$ applies to it.

- (3’) Um die Energiebilanz des Systems einfach zu gestalten, soll **[der aufgeladene Kondensator]**_{NP,masculine.} von **[der Spannungsquelle]**_{NP,feminine.} abgetrennt werden, so dass **[für ihn]**_{PP} (*ihn* = accusative of *er*) $Q = \text{konst.}$ gilt.

To simplify the system’s energy balance, **[the charged capacity]**_{NP} should be disconnected from **[the power supply]**_{NP} so that $Q = \text{const.}$ applies **[to it]**_{PP}.

³ With few exceptions such as in *she is a fine ship*. For this reason it is, I believe, not very meaningful to consider *it* as a *personal* pronoun.

In the German example, the accusative of *er*, i.e. *ihn*, is used to refer to a *noun phrase*, namely *der aufgeladene Kondensator* ('the charged capacity'). Thus, an expression that seems to be the equivalent of *he* is in fact used to refer to an electronic object. There is nothing personal about this. And there is nothing pronominal about this either, as *ihn* does not just refer to the noun *Kondensator* ('capacity'), but to the noun phrase *der aufgeladene Kondensator* ('the charged capacity') – otherwise the technical meaning of this sentence would become incorrect. Hence the category of personal pronoun does not work for German at all in instances of this kind.

But there is something else to consider: It has certainly been observed that my English translation of this example reads a little cumbersome as the pronominal phrase *to it* could not only be left out, but it is also not quite clear what *it* is supposed to refer to: *the charged capacity* or *the power supply*. In German, however, the situation is unequivocal: The masculine *ihn* is the accusative of *er* and can only refer to *der aufgeladene Kondensator* because this noun phrase is masculine while the noun phrase competing for reference, the dative *der Spannungsquelle* ('the power supply'), is feminine.

What can we conclude from these observations? *I* and *you*, as well as their German counterparts, do not qualify as pronouns because there are no nouns they could possibly refer to. In English, *he* and *she*, however, do qualify as personal pronouns while their German counterparts only do so when referring to personal names. When referring to personal names, *he* and *she* as well as their German counterparts show agreement with regard to a property possessed by the persons (or animals) the names refer to: *sex*. In all other instances, the German

expressions *er*, *sie* and *es* refer to noun phrases with which they agree with respect to a property the English language does not possess: *gender*⁴. Thus, *er* in German may refer to a personal name such as *Peter* and the agreement occurs with respect to *sex* (male); or the expression may refer to a noun *phrase* such as *der aufgeladene Kondensator* ('the charged capacity'), in which case the agreement occurs with respect to *gender* (masculine).

Since the category of personal pronouns has proven to be not very useful in describing the German situation⁵, I am now attempting to introduce a different approach to this word class.

3. Deictic and phoric procedures

The treatment of the 'personal pronouns' of German requires, as I shall argue, a functional approach by which these linguistic devices are not categorized just by formal properties, but by their actual function in linguistic interaction. In this section, I shall briefly develop the framework of German-based Functional Pragmatics and then enter into a functional description of the German 'pronominal' system, attempting to demonstrate that *ich* ('I') and *du* ('you') are deictic, whilst *er/sie/es* ('he/she/it') are (ana-)phoric devices with a meta-communicative function relying on gender as a means of language.

⁴ In this and the following sections that deal with the structural properties of German, I use the term *gender* in a strictly grammatical sense.

⁵ I am well aware that the alternative to this – admittedly somewhat rigid – treatment of the category of personal pronouns would be to just advocate a somewhat 'loose' meaning of *pronoun*. The problem with this is that categories carry analytical sediments (Ehlich 2007f) – tacit meanings that have an influence on how we perceive things. This is why textbooks for the teaching of German as a foreign or as a second language frequently offer exercises on the expressions *er/sie/es* in reference to people even though the texts offered for reading activities happily employ *er/sie/es* also in reference to noun phrases.

3.1 Functional Pragmatics

Functional Pragmatics (FP) was developed by Konrad Ehlich and Jochen Rehbein during the 1970s and has since then been expanded to a holistic approach to language and linguistic interaction (Redder 2008, Thielmann 2013a). Drawing on Bühler's concepts of linguistic fields and the actional quality of language as well as Austin's and Searle's speech act theory, Ehlich and Rehbein conceive of language as a complex of form-function-nexus anchored in reality as societal practice. Language, as a societally elaborated form, allows human beings to act on each other's minds. In their paper *Sprachliche Handlungsmuster* ['Linguistic Action Patterns', 1979], Ehlich and Rehbein demonstrate that the repetitive nature of societal reality leads to the societal elaboration of linguistic routines, *linguistic action patterns*, through which interactants routinely pursue purposes (e.g. *question and answer, request, promise, apology* etc.).

In its attempt to reconstruct the nexus between linguistic and societal purposes as well as the nexus between linguistic actions and their constitutive devices, FP's approach to language is overall 'pragmatic' (Ehlich 2007a); there are no autonomous morphological, syntactic or lexical modules to which a pragmatic module can be 'added'. As a consequence, language's intrinsic makeup is conceived of as being purposeful as well.

In *Sprachmittel und Sprachzwecke* ['Means of Language and Linguistic Purposes', 2007b] Ehlich demonstrates that the intrinsic makeup of languages is the result of material choices made by language communities. If intonation is used to differentiate between lexical units as in tonal languages, intonation is no longer free to indicate, for instance, different basic illocutions. This is why tonal

languages tend to have illocutionary particles. In English and German, intonation is a linguistic device, as speakers are free to choose intonation contours in order to differentiate illocutions or to lend a deictic function to parts of their utterance (e.g. *Look at him!*). In Chinese, however, intonation is a *means of language*, as it is part of the intrinsic makeup of the language itself in that if one wants to utter a word with a certain meaning one is bound to using a specific intonation contour.

Speakers can combine and integrate linguistic devices so that they ultimately form complete speech actions. This is possible because linguistic devices themselves possess partial actional quality. In FP, such linguistic units of actional quality are called *linguistic procedures* (Ehlich 2007a). Linguistic procedures can be part of five functional nexus – *linguistic fields*, which are quite possibly constitutive of every language (ibid.).

With a *symbolic procedure* from the *symbolic field*, the speaker makes the hearer call upon a knowledge element. Employing a *deictic procedure* from the *deictic field*, the speaker makes the hearer establish a new focus of attention on something that may be within the shared space of perception, but may also be part of other spaces within which deictics can be functional, such as discourse space, text space or imaginary space (Ehlich 1979). Bühler believed that there are no linguistic fields beyond the deictic and the symbolic field. These two fields are not sufficient, however, as the speaker needs to communicate to the hearer how symbolic and deictic procedures are to be processed. These meta-communicative devices constitute the *operative field*. Through *operative procedures* from the *operative field* (typically anaphora, plural and case suffixes,

affixes of word formation, articles, word order, stress, etc.), speakers communicate the makeup of their utterances – for instance the differentiation between subject and object or the topic and the comment of an utterance. *Incitive procedures* such as interjections allow for direct interference with the hearer's actions (Ehlich 1986). Through *expressive procedures* such as *wonderful!* speakers align themselves emotionally with hearers.

Ehlich treats word forms such as *ask-s* as *procedural combinations* (here: symbolic + operative). Speech actions arise from *procedural integration* (Ehlich 2007c) – typically by operational procedures working upon an elementary propositional basis consisting of symbolic procedures. The utterance *The doctor comes on Mondays* consists of an elementary propositional basis (*doctor – come – Monday*) that achieves the status of an assertion by operational procedures working upon this basis: word order (positioning the subject before the predicate); anaphoric subject-predicate-agreement; plural suffix; determination (*the*), and an assertive intonation contour. Syntax, if seen from this perspective, is not a set of rules operating on lexical devices, but a set of principles according to which linguistic procedures purposefully combine and integrate (Hoffmann 2003).

In order to enrich the possibilities of their languages, language communities frequently employ linguistic devices belonging to one linguistic field for the purposes of another: In *look at that!* the expression *that* is used to point at an object, it is deictic. In *I don't believe that he'll arrive in time* the expression *that* is operative as it communicates the relationship between two thoughts. In FP, such functional changes are described as *field transposition* (Ehlich 2007d).

3.2 The field-characteristics of ‘personal pronouns’

Ich (‘I’) and *du* (‘you’, singular) are deictic procedures. The deictic object of *ich* is the speaker role; the deictic object of *du* is the hearer role. In face-to-face-interaction, this is very basic. In textual communication things can get a little more complicated: The novel *Stiller* by the Swiss author Max Frisch (1973) starts with the sentence *Ich bin nicht Stiller* (‘I am not Stiller’). In this case, the deictic object of *ich* is the speaker role of a protagonist in imaginary space. The basic deictic object of the plural *wir* (‘we’) is a group including the speaker and the hearer or hearers as in *gehen wir?* (‘shall we go?’). If, however, a politician says *wir müssen den Gürtel enger schnallen* (‘we need to tighten the belt’), the deictic object of *wir* requires some reconstruction on the hearer’s part: Does *wir* include the politician? Does *wir* include me too?

As is the case in English, *ich* and *du* have adnominal forms: *mein* (‘my’) and *dein* (‘your’). These forms are frequently analysed as possessives, which is not very convincing: I may defend *meine Brieftasche* (‘my wallet’) against a thief, but would I do this with *meine Zahnschmerzen* (‘my toothache’) even if someone intended to take the latter away unlawfully? These adnominal forms as well as their plurals (*unser* – ‘our’; *euer* – ‘your’) are deictic, they allow for the *deictic modification* of the speaker, and respectively, the hearer role.⁶

The expressions *er* (‘he’), *sie* (‘she’) and *es* (‘it’) belong to the operative field as they are meta-communicative even in cases where they are traditionally described as ‘personal pronouns’ (Ehlich 2007c). To justify this observation, let

⁶ Grammars of German as well as text books for the teaching of German as a foreign or as a second language tend to treat these expressions, because of their inflectional behavior, as *possessive articles* – a categorial misnomer that does not do any justice to their deictic function and obscures the functions of German definite and indefinite articles.

us once more consider example (2) where the English and the German situation are very similar:

(2) **Peter** said **he** couldn't come to the party.

Peter hat gesagt, dass **er** nicht zu der Party kommen kann.

If someone said *Peter said Peter couldn't come to the Party* ('Peter hat gesagt, dass Peter nicht zu der Party kommen kann'), the hearer is led to believe that there are two Peters involved. In example (2), *Peter* is the topic, the theme. *He* advises the hearer, that the topic is continued so that new, rhematic information can be added to it (Ehlich 2007e, Thielmann 2021, pp. 124-130). This operation, i.e. communicating to the hearer something about the thematic structure of one's utterance, is, I believe, clearly meta-communicative.

He, she and *it* – as well as their German counterparts – are operative, they are *phoric procedures* (from ancient Greek *phérein* 'to carry'), *anaphora*.⁷ As in English, German anaphora have adnominal forms: *sein* ('his'), *ihr* ('her'), and *sein* ('its'). These expressions – as their deictic counterparts described above – are also frequently analysed as possessives – a perspective that does not do justice to their actual function. Consider the following example:

(4) [**The house**]_{th} was dilapidated, [**its roof**]_{th} caved in in many places.

[**Das Haus**]_{th} war baufällig, [**sein Dach**]_{th} an vielen Stellen eingestürzt.

In this example, for the description of which I have drawn on Hoffmann (1992), *the house* is the topic, the theme. The adnominal form of the phoric procedure *its* ('sein') allows for a modification of the theme, i.e. for *thematic modification*.

⁷ If these expressions are emphasized (e.g. *ich meine ihn* 'I mean him'), they assume a deictic quality. In this case, a field transposition, from the operative to the deictic field, is achieved by emphasis.

The German reflexive *sich* ('him-/her-/itself') is also part of the system of phoric procedures. Consider the following example:

(5) [Peter]_{th} wusch [sich]_{th}.

[Peter]_{th} washed [himself]_{th}.

The theme in this example is an agent doing an action of which he is the object.

The reflexive allows for the *syntactic modification* of the theme.

As I pointed out in Section 1, German phoric procedures agree with the sex (in the 'personal' case) or, if not more frequently, with the gender of their referent, which makes it necessary to say something about the latter phenomenon.

3.3 Gender

The most important function of gender in German is that it constitutes nouns as a class of symbolic procedures with a conceptual naming quality. What do I mean by this? Consider the status of *run* in the following English examples:

(6) (a) They *run* around the block every day.

(b) We've had a good *run* so far.

(c) This was a badly *run* race, wasn't it?

In (6a), *run* is the predicate which is indicated by a phoric procedure in the preceding subject slot. In (6b), *run* is the head of a noun phrase indicated by the article *a*. In (6c), *run* is an attribute to *race*, as it occurs after the article and is modified by the adverb *badly*. Beyond being a symbolic procedure, *run* does not belong to any word class as its actual meaning is determined by its syntactic

environment. Typical for the analytical makeup of English, *run* is a *pure symbolic procedure* (Vogel 2000, Redder 2005, Thielmann 2009).⁸

In German, however, gender constitutes a word class: nouns (Eisenberg, 2004, vol. 2, p. 150). Any German word that comes with gender attached to it has a conceptual naming quality by itself, it does not require an article to do so. German nouns do not display gender (this is the task of adnominal expressions), gender is a “hidden” category (Weinrich, 1993, p. 325). Gender is something one needs to know about a noun to employ it correctly in a sentence.⁹ Apart from being constitutive of the word class of nouns, gender plays an important role in the interior makeup of phrases (Thielmann 2007a, 2013b,c), and, important for the current argument, in making references unequivocal (comp. discussion of example (3) in Section 1) . Hence, gender is not a linguistic device – one cannot freely assign gender to convey meaning –, gender is a *means of language* as described in Ehlich (2007b): Being part of the intrinsic makeup of German, gender allows, among other things, for the unequivocal ‘docking’ of linguistic devices such as phoric expressions.

After these preliminaries, I shall now discuss the pragmatics of deictic and phoric procedures in German.

⁸ The traditional treatment of *run* as polysemic does, in my view, obscure the fact that – as it is typical for isolating languages such as English or Chinese – hearers have to infer the concrete meaning from the syntactic environment.

⁹ I was in Australia when I started using e-mail. When I got back to Germany, I had to find out the gender of *Mail* since Germans had borrowed the word from English. My guess was neutral, but I was wrong. The gender of *Mail* in German is feminine (possibly from the feminine *Nachricht* ‘message’).

4. The pragmatics of deictic and phoric procedures in German

In this section, I intend to focus on two things. Firstly, I shall briefly enter into the consequences of addressing the hearer with a deictic procedure, i.e. the emergence and use of the polite form *Sie*. Secondly, and this is going to take up a little more space, I attempt to demonstrate the true nature of the German reference system, which not only consists of phoric, but also of deictic procedures, and which plays a crucial role in the topical organization of spoken and written German.

4.1 The polite form *Sie*

As previously discussed, the expression *du* ('you'), by which the hearer is addressed, is a deictic (quite similar to *thou* in late Middle and Early Modern English). The effect of *du* – as well as of *thou* – thus can be compared to pointing at someone, which is linguistically effective, but a very direct form of address. Hence it is no wonder that both languages, English and German, tried to enrich their possibilities with regard to differentiating degrees of social proximity. Until early modern times, English entertained the *thou-you*-system, which afterwards was abandoned for using the plural in both cases, i.e. also when addressing a single person. German initially chose an analogous path (a *du-ihr*-system) and, during the 18th century, briefly flirted with a *du-er/sie*-system. Employing operational phoric procedures in order to address someone lends them a deictic or, as Ehlich (2007d) puts it, a *paradeictic* quality – this is a case of field transposition. For about the last 200 years, the plural *sie* ('they') has been used

in cases of social distance.¹⁰ In writing, the form itself as well as its adnominal version is spelled with a capital letter: *Sie/Ihr*. The effect of addressing someone, by virtue of field transposition, with the plural of a phoric procedure – a little like vaguely waving a bunch of flowers in his or her direction – certainly does justice to the requirement of indicating social distance. One cannot go wrong with using the *Sie* with any stranger above sixteen, while employing *du* with German police can be a somewhat costly exercise. If people prefer the *du*, they will say so.

In contrast to the deictic *du*, the paradeictic *Sie* gives the hearer space. Indeed, enough space. As a consequence, everything surrounding the *Sie* can be quite frank in comparison to British or Australian standards.¹¹

Consider the following authentic exchange between judge (R) and accused (A) during a trial (Hoffmann, 1980, p. 44):

(7) R: Sie ham s doch gemacht!

‘You did it, didn’t you!’

A: Ja, weil ich total besoffen war.

‘Yes, because I was totally pissed.’

Even though Germany has an investigative legal system where judges do, on a regular basis, test witnesses, it may be surprising from an Anglophone perspective that there are no “face-saving” routine formulae such as *I believe* or *I put it to you*. If the explanatory value of the notion of “positive/negative face”

¹⁰ These linguistic developments are beautifully described in Weinrich’s *Lügt man im Deutschen, wenn man höflich ist?* (‘Do Germans lie when they’re polite?’) (1986).

¹¹ House & Kaspar (1981) suggest that, from a British perspective, Germans tend to be more direct. See Thielmann (2003, p. 151-153) for a more comprehensive description of the pragmatics of *Sie*.

(Brown & Levinson 1987) should indeed go beyond intuitive appeal, one has to acknowledge, however, that the linguistic devices actually employed to pursue such purposes need to be seen in interaction with the tacit presuppositions of a specific language community as well as with regard to the specifics of institutional communication.¹²

4.2 The German reference system

In the previous sections I argued that, while it may be somewhat safe to consider *he* and *she* as personal pronouns for the English language,¹³ German *er*, *sie*, and *es* should be on principle considered as phoric procedures, since in many cases they do not refer to personal names indicating agreement with respect to sex, but to noun phrases indicating agreement with respect to gender.¹⁴ In this section I attempt to demonstrate that phoric procedures, which, as shown above, continue the focus on topical noun phrases, are in competition with deictic procedures the purpose of which is shifting the hearer's focus from thematic to rhematic elements of previous utterances.

To demonstrate how this system works, I shall discuss some examples with respect to their thematic progression.

In example (8) from a German national newspaper, the reader's focus on the topical noun phrase *Stiftunginitiative der deutschen Wirtschaft*, a feminine

¹² This is why I argue that societies on the whole may in the long term profit from the institutional consequences drawn from intercultural communication failures in interacting with (ethnic) minorities (Thielmann 2007b, p. 402).

¹³ *They*, if referring to noun phrases, and *it* are certainly not adequately described when categorised as *personal* pronouns.

¹⁴ As I have pointed out before, this fact has, regrettably, not yet entered the consciousness of many German as a foreign or second language text book authors who, misled by the category of "personal pronoun", to this day persist in offering exercises with phoric procedures referring to personal names only, even at higher levels (Thielmann 2019).

singular, is anaphorically continued with the expression *sie*, agreeing with the noun phrase in gender and number:

- (8) Wäre die bisherige Bilanz der [**“Stiftungsinitiative der deutschen Wirtschaft”**]_{th1, feminine} ein Indiz für den Zustand der deutschen Wirtschaft insgesamt, dann müsste man auf der Stelle verzweifeln: [**Sie**]_{th1, feminine} beherrscht das Lamentieren weit besser als das Organisieren.
[**Sie**]_{th1, feminine} ist auf überraschende Weise ineffizient.
[**Sie**]_{th1, feminine} verfügt über keine Autorität, über keine Persönlichkeit mit Vorbild stiftender Kraft.
[**Sie**]_{th1, feminine} ist nicht in der Lage, Zusagen einzuhalten.
[**Sie**]_{th1, feminine} versucht mit Tricks und Finessen, das Ergebnis [**ihrer bisherigen Bemühungen**]_{th1} zu schönen. (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18.10.00)

If the current balance of the [**“Foundation-Initiative of German Industry”**]_{th1} were an indication for the overall state of the German economy, one would have to despair immediately: [**The initiative**]_{th1} knows much better how to lament than how to organise. [**The initiative**]_{th1} is, in a surprising fashion, inefficient. [**The initiative**]_{th1} possesses no authority, no personality with the power to set an example. [**The initiative**]_{th1} is unable to keep agreements. [**The initiative**]_{th1} tries, with cunning and trickery, to palliate the results of [**its hitherto efforts**]_{th1}.

As my English rendition, which is intended to mirror the textual structure of the German original, shows quite clearly: There is no phoric procedure in English that would possibly allow for the continuation of the reader’s focus over such textual distance while, at the same time, rendering the passage in the way I have done does not really lead to a coherent text in English. In German, such a structure is possible because – as I hope I have been able to clarify – German does not possess personal pronouns, but phoric procedures the reference of which is made unequivocal by agreement with sex, gender, and number of the topical linguistic unit they refer to.

Example (9) is taken from an internet review of Bulgakow’s *Hundeherz* (‘The heart of a dog’). Here we can study the interplay of deictic and phoric procedures:

(9) Und er hat soeben [**Wurst**]_{th1, feminine} gekauft,

 [**sie**]_{th1, feminine} ist in der Manteltasche,
 ganz genau riecht der Hund [**das**]_{neutral}.¹⁵

He's just bought [**some sausage**]_{th1},

 [**it**]_{th1} is in his coat pocket,
 the dog can smell **this** very accurately.

The referential structures of English and German appear to be very similar here. The point I intend to make is, however, that the devices achieving these references are not. In the English translation, the focus on the noun phrase *some sausage* is continued with the phoric procedure *it* – the neutral is used because *sausage* is devoid of sex. The expression *this* in *the dog can smell this very accurately*, points back at the proposition of the previous sentence, it is *anadeictic*.¹⁶ In the German version, the noun *Wurst* ('sausage') is feminine; the phoric procedure *sie* that continues this topic agrees with it in gender and number. *Wurst* ('sausage') is an uncountable and thus does not take an article. Nevertheless, the noun is equipped with gender, as revealed by the phoric reference *sie*. Examples like this one make it quite plain that, in contrast to some beliefs, gender, as something speakers know about nouns, is not assigned, but revealed by the article or other adnominal expressions.

¹⁵http://rezensionen.literaturwelt.de/content/buch/b/t_bulgakow_michail_hundeherz_daec_13725.html [04.07.24]

¹⁶ Since deictics refocus the hearer's attention, the phrase "anaphoric use of deictics" is self-contradictory as Ehlich (1982) points out.

The anadeictic expression *das*, employed to make the hearer/reader refocus the previous proposition, belongs to the class of deictic devices allowing for pointing at objects: *der*, *die* and *das*. These are (as well as *dieser*, *diese*, and *dieses*) the deictic counterparts of the anaphora *er*, *sie* and *es*. They can – however discreetly – be used to point at people, agreeing with their sex (*guck mal der_{masculine} da!* ‘look at this male specimen’), and they can be used for the anadeictic refocusing of noun phrases. The neutral form *das* is used to refocus propositions or some of their elements in epistemic space (Redder 2009). If we change example (9) a little, we can observe the role of gender in anadeictic refocusing:

- (9′) [Die Wurst]_{th, feminine} ist in [der Manteltasche]_{rh, feminine, dative}.

 [Die]_{rh, feminine, nominative} ist offen.
 [The sausage]_{th} is in the [coat's pocket]_{rh}.

 [The pocket]_{rh} is open.

The feminine anadeictic *die* directs the hearer to shift the focus from the thematic element *die Wurst* (‘sausage’) to a feminine rhematic element of the previous utterance – the dative noun phrase *der Manteltasche* (‘the coat’s pocket’). In English, such anadeictic reference is not possible as there is no gender. Rhematic elements of previous utterances need to be restated (as in my translation of example (9′)) or refocused by the combination of a deictic and an abstract *shell noun* (Schmid 2000) (e.g. *The government [had banned the demonstration]_{rh}. [This act]_{rh} caused widely spread upheaval.*).

As a consequence of these structural differences, the thematic progression of German turns in oral discourse and paragraphs in written texts differ significantly. Example (8) above is part of a newspaper commentary. After the

topic is established in the first sentence, the text adds new information to this topic until a culmination point is reached in the last sentence – with which, I believe, an English paragraph would have to start. – Australian diplomats whom I taught ‘monitoring news’ would, when we got to reading newspaper commentaries, complain that they ‘could not find any opinion in those opinion pieces’ – they did not expect to find the opinion in the last sentence of a paragraph.¹⁷

To start my brief summary of this section, I would like to restate my claim that there are no personal pronouns in German: *Ich* and *du* are deictic procedures the deictic object of which is the speaker (*ich*) or the hearer role (*du*). As *du* is a rough equivalent to pointing at the hearer, the polite address *Sie* evolved by virtue of field transposition. Linguistic proximity issues being solved by a grammaticalised polite form, German interaction, from a British or Australian point of view, can afford to be a little more direct. *Er*, *sie* and *es* are operative, phoric procedures that unburden the hearer in that they achieve a continuation of thematic focus. Phoric procedures thus act in contrast to a system of deictic procedures (*der*, *die*, *das* and *dieser*, *diese*, *dieses*) which are, among other things, employed to anadeictically shift the hearer’s focus from thematic to rhematic elements. Sex and, especially, gender as a means of language play a crucial role in rendering anaphoric and anadeictic references unequivocal. The internal structures of German turns in oral discourse or paragraphs in written text strongly rely on the possibilities provided by this system of phoric and deictic procedures.

¹⁷ For a more systematic account see Thielmann (2011).

I shall now finally discuss how, in recent years, this system has come under pressure by a societal requirement to linguistically represent the equality of sexes as well as the equality of anyone who does not feel addressed by the term ‘equality of sexes’. Let us see what happens when sex meets a gender language.

5. Sex versus gender, or gender₁ versus gender₂

In this section I attempt to treat the linguistic consequences of political demands of equal linguistic representation of the sexes – or of those who do not ascribe to any sex – in German. As I am a linguist and not a sociologist, I apologise in advance for my rough sketch of the extralinguistic, political side, while, at the same time, I do have some confidence in the accuracy of my remarks on how these political demands affect the structure of German.

The main thing is that equal representation of the sexes in German is in conflict with a phenomenon deeply entrenched in an area of language I have not addressed so far: the *generic masculine*, which determines the agreement not only of phoric and deictic procedures, but also is the gender of operative procedures such as indefinites, interrogatives, and relatives.

Starting with the generic masculine as it is obligatory with certain usage of these procedures, I shall then proceed to discuss the linguistic consequences of equal representation of the sexes in German.

5.1 The generic masculine versus equal linguistic representation of the sexes

Please consider the following examples and their English translation:

- (10) (a) Gibt es hier **jemanden**_{masculine}, **der**_{masculine} noch keine Eintrittskarte hat? ‘Is there **anyone** here **who** is still without a ticket?’
- (b) Gibt es hier wirklich **niemanden**_{masculine}, **der**_{masculine} die Antwort weiß? ‘Is there really **nobody** **who** knows the answer?’
- (c) **Wer**_{masculine} kommt? ‘**Who** is coming?’

We observe the following: The indefinites *jemand* (‘someone’, ‘anyone’) and *niemand* (‘nobody’) as well as the interrogative *wer* (‘who’) are masculine. If *jemand* or *niemand* are turned into extended phrases by a relative clause, the relative is masculine too.¹⁸ Indefinites – as well as interrogatives – are operative procedures. They abstractly categorize something the speaker does not know any more about to make it fit for syntactic functions such as subject, object or indirect object. As German is a gender language, the indefinites discussed here are not only equipped with gender, they can only be uttered with a specific gender: *generic masculine*.

It is important to notice that generic masculine is a phenomenon of *gender*, not of sex. The answer to *wer*_{generic masc.}? (‘who?’) can be *Peter* or *Maria*; the class of people referred to by the use of *jemand*_{generic masc.} (‘somebody’) or *niemand*_{generic masc.} (‘nobody’) on principle comprises men and women.

Generic masculine also carries over to certain parts of the lexicon. All nouns denoting professions or agents in the abstract are generic masculines: *Arzt* (‘doctor’), *Anwalt* (‘lawyer’), *Angler* (‘fisher’) *Bäcker* (‘baker’), *Student* (‘university student’), *Lehrer* (‘teacher’), *Flüchtling* (‘refugee’), *Sprecher*

¹⁸ Indefinites and interrogatives are frequently discussed as pronouns, which is not very meaningful as they are uttered for the want of a noun phrase; relatives are no pronouns either as they cannot be substituted by any noun or noun phrase.

(‘speaker’) etc. As can be observed from this list, such agent nouns frequently are the result of word formation. If they are derived from verbal stems, the suffix *-er* is added: *lehr-* (‘teach’) → *Lehrer*_{generic masc.}. The suffix *-er* imports generic masculine so that the resulting noun is equipped with gender – the same is the case with the suffix *-ling* as in *Flüchtling*_{generic masc.} (‘refugee’).

An agent noun such as *Bäcker* (‘baker’) denotes a) the profession of a baker in the abstract, b) a generic agent in this profession, and c) a male instantiation of this profession. Thus, it is perfectly meaningful to say the following:

(11) (a) *Peter*_{male} ist *Bäcker*_{generic masc.} ‘Peter is a baker’.

(b) *Petra*_{female} ist *Bäcker*_{generic masc.} ‘Petra is a baker’.

Example (11a) states that Peter, as a person, is a professional of the baker class and, at the same time, that Peter, by virtue of sex as indicated by the personal name, is a male member of this class. Example (11b) states that Petra, as a person, is a professional of the baker class and, at the same time, that Petra, by virtue of sex as indicated by the personal name, is a female member of this class.

There is, however, some asymmetry in this: *Bäcker* denotes the profession, a generic agent in this profession and a male representative of this profession while female representatives of the profession are ‘just included’. This is why societal developments in German-speaking countries led to a perception that there might be something wrong with this in terms of equal representation of the sexes.

German-speaking countries are no exception to the rule that after World War II Western countries, pretty much in general, constitutionally or otherwise stipulated equality of the sexes while they quite happily continued denying equality to women in many respects. In Germany, for instance, women were by

no means equal with regard to their position in inheritance law, and – due to restrictive marriage laws – until the late 1970s had no equal access to the labour market. Feminism played a crucial role in women’s fight for equality. During the late 1970s and the 1980s, when most legal discrimination was abolished, there was an increasing demand for equal representation of the sexes in language. During this period, the main linguistic consequences were increased usage of agent nouns indicating female sex by the suffix *-in*, such as *Ärztin* (‘female doctor’), *Bäckerin* (‘female baker’) or *Studentin* (‘female university student’). Since German is a gender language, the asymmetries illustrated by (11a,b) above were, however, not removed:

(12) (a) Peter_{male} ist Bäcker_{generic masc.} ‘Peter is a baker’.

(b) Petra_{female} ist Bäckerin_{female}. ‘Petra is a female baker’.

As we remember, example (12a) states that Peter, as a person, is a professional of the baker class and, at the same time, that Peter, by virtue of sex as indicated by the personal name, is a male member of this class. Example (12b) states that Petra is a female baker – *Bäckerin* does not denote the profession *baker*, but a female instantiation of the profession *baker*.

These semantic distinctions are subtle, but nevertheless important. A female colleague of mine said she objected to being addressed as or referred to as *Professorin* (‘female professor’). Her argument was that a *Professor* is, in accordance with Derrida (2001, pp. 34-36), someone who professes something (‘jemand_{generic masc.}, der_{generic masc.} bekennt’) while a *Professorin* is “just some female with a title”.

The same thing applies to communicative situations where professionals of both sexes are addressed: *Liebe Anwältinnen und Anwälte* ('dear male and female lawyers') addresses male and female instantiations of the lawyer profession; the wording does, however, not address representatives of this profession in the abstract. Forms of address such as *Liebe AnwaltInnen/StudentInnen* etc. were initially just intended as written abbreviations of *Liebe Anwältinnen und Anwälte* etc., but were increasingly pronounced as one word with a glottal stop at the *I* (*Anwält'innen*).

From these observations we can conclude the following: Generic masculine is deeply entrenched in the system of German indefinites and interrogatives as well as relatives referring to the latter. Generic masculine is also the gender of agent nouns denoting professions, generic agents, and functions. Hence the attempt to achieve equal representation of the sexes in German, for instance by using word formation to create female agent nouns, could not change the asymmetries inherent in a system relying on the generic masculine to communicate generality including either sex (e.g. *wer*_{generic masc.}? 'who?') or generality of agents regardless of sex (e.g. *Arzt* 'doctor', *Student* 'university student'). In German, sex blurs semantic distinctions when it encroaches upon gender's territory.

5.2 Gender₁ versus gender₂

The linguistic developments from the late 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s concerned with equal representation of the sexes did – in spite of sitting not quite well with the structure of German – certainly have some positive effect on the societal and political perception of women. During the 1990s, however, the discourse concerning equal representation changed in that it became increasingly

influenced by the concept of *gender role* as devised by the psychologist John Money (Money et al. 1955). Without going into any intricacies here I feel that I can safely state that sex is traditionally thought of as a ‘given’ property while John Money introduced the notion of ‘gender role’ in order to emphasise the malleability of sex in the process of identity formation.¹⁹ Thus, the social issue of equality of the sexes was replaced by the issue of identity.

This makes it necessary for me to introduce a terminological distinction: *Gender*₁ is to be taken in the sense of grammatical gender; *gender*₂ is to mean gender in the sense of ‘gender role’.

*Gender*₂ is a concept of identity policy the crucial domain of which is language. Drawing from advertisements for presidential positions at universities in German-speaking countries, I shall now attempt to illustrate the relationship between the linguistic demands of identity policy and the structural prerequisites of German.

If sex is viewed as *gender*₂, it follows that those who wish to be neither male nor female require linguistic inclusion. This is achieved by inserting graphemes such as the asterisk into split forms to represent non-binary identities:

¹⁹ The concept of ‘gender role’ transports an inherent hypothesis completely falsified by one of the most unethical human experiments after 1945, known as the David Reimer case (Colapinto 2001). It is almost impossible not to observe some isomorphism between the tenets of Nazism and those underlying John Money’s twin experiment that resulted in the suicide deaths of both of the twin brothers involved: the – perceived – malleability of human minds and bodies to be used as a resource by the ‘chosen’, and the undisputed right of the ‘chosen’ to put this resource to use for any type of societal engineering.

(13) die/der Rektor*in

die/der Rektor:in

die/der Rektor_in

‘the male/female/non-binary university president’

Such distinctions have major impact not only upon the semantics of the nouns denoting functions or professions, but also on the reference system. As we recall from the discussion of examples (11) and (12), *der Rektor*_{generic masc.} denotes a) a function (‘president of a university’) and b) a male instantiation of this function. Example (13) does not denote a function at all, but male, female or non-binary instantiations of a function. The following sections taken from job advertisements demonstrate quite clearly the problems created by a gender-approach to language:

(14) An der Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder) ist ab dem 01.10.2022 das **Amt der/des Präsidentin/-en (m/w/d)**²⁰ zu besetzen. [...]

Die Präsidentin/der Präsident nimmt **ihr/sein** Amt hauptberuflich wahr.

‘The European University Viadrina of Frankfurt (Oder) is seeking to fill the **position of the male/female/non-binary president**. [...] **The male/female president** is to regard **his/her** office as a full-time obligation.

As we can see, there is some confusion in the German text regarding position and institutional agent: The noun *Präsident* is generic masculine and denotes a

²⁰ The meaning of these abbreviations is the following: *m* – ‘male’, *f* – ‘female’, *d* – ‘non-binary’.

position as well as a generic agent acting in this position. The position itself, being an abstract entity, is completely devoid of sex and gender₂. Since *Präsidentin* does not denote a position, but its female occupant, the actual wording suggests that the function of president does not exist independently from its individual gender₂-instantiations. How can the university logically expect to fill the position under such circumstances?

We can also observe that the representation of non-binaries in the example's second sentence is quickly sacrificed for the ease of for anaphoric thematic modification ²¹ (**die Präsidentin/der Präsident – ihr/sein Amt; ‘the male/female president – his/her office**). As one can see – even with the explicit omission of non-binaries, linguistic representation of identity policy is not exactly reader-friendly.

But the main point is, I believe, that this way of writing leads to wordings that do not, at all, do justice to the actual state of affairs: An office, a function, a position must be able to exist independently from its holders, otherwise it could never be vacant. When a position is advertised, one needs to be able to talk about the position and, in the most general fashion possible, about potential occupants of this position. As the noun *Präsidentin* neither denotes a position nor its generic occupant, there is the question what the noun, and thus the adnominal anaphoric expression *ihr* actually refers to. Both do not refer to a generic potential candidate for the position, but to a possible state of affairs once the position has been filled.

²¹ For thematic modification compare section 2.2.; the only actual non-binary anaphoric expression in German is the neutral *es* ('it') with the adnominal form *sein* ('its'), which are both absolutely inappropriate for the purpose of reference to non-binary people in both languages.

The following example, taken from an advertisement for the position of a president of an Austrian university, is more consistent regarding the inclusion of non-binaries:

- (15) Die Universität Innsbruck sucht **eine/n Rektor*in (m/w/d)** [...] **Die/der Rektor*in** verfügt über ein hohes Maß an Kommunikations- und Integrationsfähigkeit nach außen und nach innen.

‘The University of Innsbruck is seeking **a male/female/non binary president. The male/female/non binary president** possesses highly developed communication and integration skills inside and outside the university.

Apart from the fact that the University of Innsbruck does not appear to have any position to fill, we can observe that the noun phrase *eine/n Rektor*in (m(w/d)*, while including non-binaries, does exclude the possibility of anaphoric continuation. Gender₂-inclusive noun phrases are devoid of unequivocal sex or gender₁. The German system of anaphora, however, does rely on sex or gender₁ in order to render references unequivocal. This is why the noun phrase *die/der Rektor*in* needs to be restated in the text.

As we have seen with regard to examples (3) and (8) above, restatement of topical noun phrases renders texts incoherent in that restatement draws the readers’ attention to the topic. Thus, gender₂-inclusive language is quite hostile to a clear thematic progression of German texts.

I believe I have been able to demonstrate that the changes to language demanded by identity policy are not only very substantial, but also hostile to the very structure of German as a language that relies on gender₁ or sex for proper

thematic progression. These changes are so massive that they appear to be only justifiable on moral grounds.²² Currently, they are rejected by two thirds of the German population in total and the majority of the supporters of each political party (infratest 2021).

However, the linguistic point I have attempted to make here is that the most inclusive way of dealing even with issues of identity is a structure German readily provides: the generic masculine.²³

6. Discussion

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate the following things:

1. It is quite safe to consider *er/sie/es* as well as *he/she* as personal pronouns when these expressions refer to names denoting beings equipped with sex. However, in most cases the German expressions *er/sie/es* refer to noun *phrases* equipped with gender (e.g. *der aufgeladene Kondensator*_{masculine}; ‘the charged capacity’) so that the category of ‘personal pronoun’ cannot be meaningfully applied. The expressions *ich* and *du*, as well as their English counterparts *I* and *you*, are deictics that refocus the roles of speaker and hearer and thus cannot be pronouns as there are no nouns they could possibly refer to. Their adnominal

²² As German leftist Sahra Wagenknecht recently observed in her controversial book *Die Selbstgerechten* (‘The Unco Guid’, 2021), there is some evidence for the notion that the purpose of the moral discourse concerned with identity is to distract from the political failure to address social inequality.

²³ Some readers may find this way of reasoning about language a little ‘normative’. As a linguist my first obligation is, of course, to describe und understand language and its use, which also entails a descriptive attitude towards language change. If, however, there are political attempts at linguistic engineering, I consider it my scholarly responsibility to point out – similar to the way highly respected German linguists such as Peter Eisenberg and Helmut Glück have done – the structural consequences of such measures, and then to leave it to the language community to decide on how they wish to proceed.

forms *mein/dein* (*my/your*) allow for the deictic modification of the speaker or the hearer role.

2. As *du* is a rough equivalent to pointing at the hearer, the polite address *Sie* evolved by virtue of field transposition. Linguistic proximity issues being solved by a grammaticalised polite form, German interaction, from a British or Australian point of view, can afford to be a little more direct.

3. *Er, sie* and *es* are operative, phoric procedures that unburden the hearer in that they achieve a continuation of thematic focus. Phoric procedures thus act in contrast to a system of deictic procedures (*der, die, das* and *dieser, diese, dieses*) which are, among other things, employed to anadeictically shift the hearer's focus from thematic to rhematic elements. The adnominal forms of anaphora (*sein/ihr/sein*; 'his/her/its') serve the purpose of thematic; the adnominal forms of deictics such *dieser/diese/dieses* ('this') serve the purpose of rhematic modification. Sex and, especially, gender as a means of language play a crucial role in rendering anaphoric and anadeictic references unequivocal. The internal structures of German turns in oral discourse or paragraphs in written text strongly rely on the possibilities provided by this system of phoric and deictic procedures.

4. German indefinites such as *jemand* ('somebody') and *niemand* ('nobody') as well as the interrogative *wer* ('who') are generic masculines. The same applies to German agent nouns such as *Bäcker* ('baker'). An agent noun such as *Bäcker* denotes the profession in the abstract, a generic agent in this profession as well as a male instantiation of this profession. Thus, generic masculine is deeply entrenched in operative resources such as indefinites and interrogatives as well

as in the semantics of agent nouns in that it allows for the generic naming of professions and agents – *der Hörer*_{generic masculine} (‘the hearer’), for instance, is a systematic position in a linguistic action pattern.

5. Extralinguistic demands of equal representation of the sexes as well as identity policy put this system under massive strain as it becomes increasingly difficult to name professions, agent groups or types in the abstract, and splitting the references according to sex or gender² is impossible in spoken discourse and renders written texts quite illegible.

7. Conclusion

A closer look at what is generally considered as the set of German personal pronouns reveals – apart from the deictics *ich* and *du* and their plurals – a system of phoric (*er/sie/es*) and deictic (*der/die/das* and *dieser/diese/dieses*) procedures pertinent to the thematic organisation of oral discourse and written text: Phoric procedures serve the continuation of thematic focus; deictic procedures serve the refocusing of rhematic elements. Gender and sex serve as a means of language to render references unequivocal.

Regrettably, these observations the core of which has been around for quite some time (e.g. Bühler 1934, Ehlich 1979) have not yet entered German as a Foreign or Second Language textbooks (Thielmann 2019) where deictics have not yet been discovered and anaphora are still taught as personal pronouns, regardless of their actual function.

It is, however, even more unfortunate that those in charge of linguistically implementing equal representation of the sexes or identity policy appear to be

oblivious of the semantic distinctions blurred by abolishing the generic masculine and the consequences this entails for the reference system. If these changes prevail regardless of the opposition of the vast majority of the German population, German may become a language devoid of the possibility of generally naming professions or agents and referring to these entities in a way that allows for clear thematic organisation. However: Even though the unco guid are willing to sacrifice the proper workings of an entire language for the sake of rigidly righteous policy, there is still some hope that the majority of the German language community may eventually do away with the policy because they actually wish to make themselves understood.

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