

The Influence of Grammatical Gender on Socially Constructed Gender in English, Dutch, and German

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Abstract : Grammatical gender can create a restrictive roadblock for the usage of gender-inclusive language. This research describes grammatical gender structures used in English, Dutch, and German and considers how these structures restrict the implementation of gender inclusivity in spoken and written discourse. This restriction is measured by the frequency with which gender-inclusive & generic masculine forms are used and by the morphosyntactic complexity of the gender-inclusive forms available in these languages. These languages form a continuum of grammatical gender structures, with English having the least articulated structures and German having the most. This leads to a comparative analysis intended to establish a correlation between the complexity of gender structure and the difficulty of using gender-inclusive forms. English, on one side of the continuum, maintains only remnants of a formal grammatical gender system and imposes the fewest restrictions on the creation of neo-pronouns and the use of gender-inclusive alternatives to gendered agentive nouns. Next, the Dutch have a functionally two-gender system with less freedom using gender-neutral forms. Lastly, German, on the other end, has a three-gender system requiring a plethora of morphosyntactic and orthographic alternatives to avoid using generic masculine. The paper argues that the complexity of grammatical gender structures correlates with hindered use of gender-inclusive forms. Going forward, efforts will focus on gathering further data on the usage of gender-inclusive and generic masculine forms within these languages. The end goal of this research is to establish a definitive objective correlation between grammatical gender complexity and impediments in expressing socially constructed gender.

Keywords : sociolinguistics, language and gender, gender, Germanic linguistics, grammatical gender, German, Dutch, English

Conference Title : ICLAS 2024 : International Conference on Language Acquisition and Sociolinguistics

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : May 23-24, 2024