

Gender fair language strategies in English, Dutch and German (with a focus on Dutch and German)

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To speak in a gender fair way requires different strategies in English, Dutch and German. Due to the lack of a nominal gender system in English, personal nouns such as *president* or *neighbour* can be used in a 'neutral' way, i.e. they can refer to both male and female representatives of the designated category (cf. *The president is pregnant*). On the other side of the gender spectrum, we find German with its threefold nominal gender system (masculine-feminine-neutral), whereby a direct gender-sex connection is said to hold – with personal nouns – between grammatically feminine nouns and female reference (*die Frau* 'the woman') and between grammatically masculine nouns and male reference (*der Mann* 'the man') (Kotthoff & Nübling 2018: 74). This intimate connection between gender and sex is the main reason why a singular masculine noun like *Nachbar* 'neighbour' is avoided in German when one wants to 'generically' refer to both male or female neighbours, especially in contexts of direct address (*Dear neighbour!* vs. *Lieber Nachbar!*; better alternatives in German are *Liebe Nachbarin*, *lieber Nachbar* ("splitting") or a plural use of the noun: *Liebe Nachbarn*). In Dutch, the nominal gender system does not formally distinguish between masculine and feminine gender anymore (*de lieve man/vrouw* vs. *het lief kind*); it has evolved from an older threefold into a twofold gender classification (common vs. neutral) (Audring 2010). Regarding the possible 'neutral' use of personal nouns, Dutch occupies a middle position, as it features both 'neutral' nouns like *de buur* 'the neighbour' or *de leerkracht* ('the teacher'), like in English, and paired "gendered" nouns (*buurman/buurvrouw* 'male neighbour/female neighbour'; *leraar/lerares* 'teacher-female teacher'), like in German, whereby it should be remarked that the generic potential of the 'male' pole of the pair (*leraar* 'teacher', *lezer* 'reader', *roker* 'smoker') is more outspoken in Dutch than in German (De Backer & De Cuypere 2012), that is, some 'male' nouns ('roker' in (1)) can also be used in contexts in which the referent is clearly female:

- (1) DUT *Zij is **kettingrookster/kettingroker**.*
GER *Sie ist **Kettenraucherin** / ? **Kettenraucher***
 ',She is a chain smoker'

In contexts of direct address, gender is highly salient, which is the main reason why speakers of German (and to a lesser extent Dutch) prefer gendered forms in this context, especially if they want to explicitly address female hearers or readers (as in *Liebe Leserin/Beste lezeres* 'dear female reader', to address the reader of a women's magazine). In my talk, I want to concentrate on (German and Dutch) personal nouns in **predicative** contexts, as in example (1), in which the nouns have a reduced referentiality so that gender is a less relevant category (Kotthoff & Nübling 2018: 93). More in particular, I will look at personal nouns after *als* 'as' (as in *een rol als / eine Rolle als* 'a role as'; *een job als/ein Job als* 'a job as' / *een toekomst als/eine Zukunft als* 'a future as'), whereby especially in Dutch, variation can be expected regarding the use of neutral vs. gendered nouns.

The analysis will be corpus-based; for German, I will use the DeReKo-corpus, for Dutch the corpus 'Hedendaags Nederlands'. Main aim of the talk is to arrive at a better understanding of the actual use of personal nouns in predicative contexts and of the factors which influence possible variation (e.g. the personal noun itself, prestige of the described role, self reference or other reference, regional variation, progressive or more conservative text source). On a final note, I will consider how these observations may be used as a basis to formulate 'realistic' gender fair strategies in Dutch and German.

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- De Backer, Maarten & Ludovic De Cuypere (2012): The interpretation of masculine personal nouns in German and Dutch: a comparative experimental study. *Language Sciences* 34, 253-268.
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