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Linguistic Purism and Resistance to Gender-Inclusive Language: Discourse Strategies of the German *Verein für Sprachpflege* (VfS).

Abstract

In recent years, debates around gender-inclusive language (“Gendern”) have intensified in German-speaking societies. While advocates emphasise inclusivity and linguistic equity, a vocal counter-movement has emerged, framing such changes as ideological and as threats to the integrity of the German language. This presentation examines the role of the Verein für Sprachpflege (VfS), one of the most prominent private language protection associations in Germany, in mobilising public discourse against gender-inclusive linguistic reforms.

Focusing on the VfS’s publication *Deutsche Sprachwelt*, I analyse how the association’s editorials, articles, and campaigns construct a narrative of linguistic purity, cultural heritage, and resistance to “political correctness”. Through discourse analysis, I show how the VfS positions itself as a defender of “common sense” and “linguistic clarity” while deploying populist rhetoric to oppose inclusive language initiatives by universities, media outlets, and governmental institutions.

The paper situates this linguistic activism within broader sociopolitical currents of cultural conservatism and resistance to gender equality policies. By unpacking the VfS’s strategies (including petitions, awards, and selective expert endorsements), the presentation highlights how “language care” becomes a vehicle for gender-political backlash under the guise of apolitical language preservation.

Ultimately, the case of the VfS illustrates how non-state actors shape linguistic norms and public attitudes, turning language reform into a symbolic battlefield in contemporary Germany’s “culture wars”.

Literature

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Biography

Dr. Falco Pfalzgraf is a Reader / Associate Professor of German Linguistics at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL). His research interests include gender across languages, language policy, and the application of discourse analysis. Pfalzgraf is the founder of the international [network](#) “Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation.” In both his research and teaching, Pfalzgraf combines linguistic theory with social relevance.

At QMUL, Dr. Pfalzgraf is Director of the MA in TESOL programme, Chair of the Master’s Examination Board in the School of Arts, and Convenor of the section “Language and Linguistics” at the Centre for Anglo-German Cultural Relations (CAGCR). In addition, he chairs the London/UK branch of the Association for the German Language (Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache, GfdS).