Gender Asymmetry in German Phraseology: Linguistic, Cultural and Psycholinguistic Perspectives

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Abstract. The article is focused on identifying the specifics of gender asymmetry in German phraseology based on psycholinguistic analysis. The aim is to determine the essence of using the internal code of the speaker's intentions while verbalising gender in the target language culture. The study used the method of a controlled word association test. Google Forms were used to analyse the perception peculiarities of the German idioms components that directly or indirectly denote male and/or female gender. The typicality and individuality of responses to the 26 proposed phraseological units with masculine (*Mann, Mensch, Drache, Luder*) and feminine (*Mädchen, Frau, Dame, Weib*) components confirmed the asymmetry and unevenness of gender representation in German. The test involved 81 native speakers (56 women and 25 men) aged 14 to 71 residing in Germany and 82 non-native speakers (70 women and 12 men). None of the participants associated themselves with the third gender. Gender asymmetries characterise German phraseology due to the androcentricity of the German language. The associative representation of the male gender in phraseology due to the processes of metonymisation predicts its leading role in the target linguistic culture. Exclamatory and comparative phraseology registers traces of gender asymmetry neutralisation. However, researchers have discovered that phraseological units with a feminine component exclusively serve to denote feminine traits and homosexuality. The feminine component for a man mainly implicates negative connotations, while expressing neutral and positive ones indirectly. Pejorative idioms with a pronounced negative connotation, treating women as sexual objects or as an appendage of a man, deserve attention in the responses. The respondents' responses to phraseological units with neuter or masculine components predominantly denote the female gender through manifested negative connotations. The responses to the component *Mädchen*, the suffix -*chen* of which in German actualises the seme of the neuter category, were mainly negative due to the influence of the denotative and signifying meaning of the phraseological unit. The analysis of the zero associations of some phraseological units with women showed the dominant role of men in the target linguistic culture.

Keywords: phraseological unit, gender asymmetry, psycholinguistics, word association test, German language, connotation.

Лозицька Марія, Зубач Оксана. Гендерна асиметрія в німецькій фразеології: лінгвокультурологічний та психолінгвістичний аспекти.

Анотація. Стаття спрямована на виявлення специфіки гендерної асиметрії в німецькій фразеології на засадах психолінгвістичного аналізу. Мета – визначення сутності розгортання внутрішнього коду мовленнєвих інтенцій в процесі вербалізації гендеру в цільовій

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лінгвокультурі. У дослідженні застосовано метод спрямованого асоціативного експерименту, в якому, за допомогою Google Forms, проаналізовано особливості сприйняття компонентів фразеологічних одиниць німецької мови, які прямо чи опосередковано позначають чоловічу та/або жіночу стать. Типовість та індивідуальність реакцій на запропоновані 26 фразеологічних одиниць з маскулінними (*Mann, Mensch, Drachen, Luder*) та фемінінними (*Mädchen, Frau, Dame, Weib*) компонентами підтвердили асиметричність та нерівномірність представлення статей в німецькій мові. В експерименті взяло участь 81 носіїв мови (56 жінок та 25 чоловіків) віком від 14 до 71 року, які проживають на території Німеччини, та 82 особи (70 жінок та 12 чоловіків), які не є носіями німецької мови. Зазначимо, що жоден з учасників дослідження не асоціював себе з третьою статтю. Німецькі фразеологізми характеризуються гендерними асиметріями через андроцентризм німецької мови. Асоціативна репрезентація чоловічої статі у фразеології внаслідок процесів метонімізації прогнозує його провідну роль у цільовій лінгвокультурі. Ознаки ж нейтралізації гендерної асиметрії зафіксовано у вигукових та компаративних фразеологізмах. Водночас встановлено, що фразеологічні одиниці з компонентом-фемінітивом використовуються виключно для маркування жіночих рис та гомосексуальності. Фемінінний компонент на позначення чоловіка імплікує переважно негативну конотацію, а нейтральна та позитивна – виражені опосередковано. На увагу заслуговують реакції на пейоративні фразеологічні одиниці з яскраво вираженою негативною конотацію, де жінки трактуються як сексуальний об'єкт чи додаток до чоловіка. Прояв переважно негативної конотації прослідковувався в реакціях респондентів на фразеологізми з компонентами середнього або чоловічого роду на позначення жіночої статі. Реакції на компонент *Mädchen,* суфікс *-chen* якого у німецькій мові актуалізує сему категорії середнього роду, були переважно негативні через вплив денотативно-сигніфікативного значення фразеологізму в цілому. Аналіз нульових асоціацій деяких фразеологізмів з жінкою засвідчив панівну роль чоловіка в цільовій лінгвокультурі.

Ключові слова: *фразеологічна одиниця, гендерна асиметрія, психолінгвістика, асоціативний експеримент, німецька мова, конотація.*

Introduction

Psycholinguistic studies of readers' and speakers' perceptions of gender show the existence of certain biases, primarily related to the linguistic implementation of gender in the language (Gygax et al., 2019) and the cognitive mechanisms of its perception in the target linguistic culture. At the heart of understanding social categories and language, speaker characteristics such as emotional status, age, gender and race are often considered separate in scholarly work. However, perceptual systems for social categories, including gender, clearly rely on interdependent cognitive processes (Tripp & Munson, 2002).

Understanding the essence and nature of gender perception helps to overcome discriminatory aspects in language, to find ways to form gender-neutral and gender-sensitive language (Greco, 2019; Hugues, 2020; Lindqvist et al., 2019), to distinguish different speech styles (Balachandra et al., 2021; Getchell & Skinner Beitelspacher, 2020), speech behaviour of the sexes in the target segment, targeting a specific demographic group (Bui, 2021), which are to some extent determined by brain characteristics and embodied in pitch, word choice (Wallentin, 2020).

Language accumulates and transmits the speaker's mental representations of men and women. Understanding these ideas directly depends on how the target language represents the sexes. Gender asymmetry is inherent in languages with grammatical gender, which includes German. In such languages, the masculine gender acquires the status of being non-marked and refers to a person in general. Coady (2018) explains the nature of such linguistic sexism through the thought processes of iconisation, fractal recursiveness, and erasure. Iconisation consists of dichotomising and attributing common characteristics to each of the two groups of people, embodying itself in the gender binary. In fact, grammatical gender reflects linguistically the binary social gender. In this case, it minimizes differences within the group, while emphasizing intergroup differences (p. 275–276). Variation or erasure takes the form of ignoring facts that contradict 'naturalness'. These processes have, in fact, led to the non-markedness (generativity) of masculine grammatical gender, viewed as one of the signs of the apparent asymmetry of the language. However, discrimination can also be implicit: quite often, insults directed at men contain discriminatory features against women (Sunderland, 2020).

Critical reflections on androcentrism and gender asymmetry in language from a feminist perspective in the German-speaking world developed into a literary and linguistic movement in the 1970s (Pober, 2007) and currently exacerbate due to the denial of the generativity of the masculine grammatical gender in German proposed by the editors of the Duden, one of the most influential spelling dictionaries in the German language (Rütten, 2021). Of course, such a move seems logical, as experiments with French (Gygax et al., 2012) have shown that people find it challenging to think of a person as a woman when referring to her in the masculine form.

A cross-linguistic study of 391 people conducted by Horvath et al. (2016) based on Italian and German confirmed the results: the use of only the masculine form creates more masculine images in the respondents' imagination, while the use of paired forms also makes women visible. The discovery of such facts proves once again the asymmetry of the language system, which usually favours the male gender and is not limited to masculine generativity.

Femininity and masculinity are sharply demarcated and opposed. Masculinity dominates and is a symbol of the universal, while femininity is a sign of the specifically female, which leads to gender asymmetries. The fundamental works of well-known feminists Pusch "German Is the Language of Men" (1984), Tremmel-Plotz "Women's Language Is the Language of Change" (1982), Lakoff "Language and the Place of Women" (1975) reveal the main aspects of discrimination against women in the linguistic picture of the world, asymmetries in the language system directed against women (Hellinger, 1990; Pober, 2007; Richardson & Robinson, 2008). In particular, Samel (2000) identifies nine sexist gender asymmetries in favour of men in the German vocabulary, among which idioms and set expressions occupy a prominent place. This is the reason why the cognitive interpretation of the concept of

"gender inequality" has shown that it has a more negative emotional colouring for women than for men, as it includes experiences related to sexism, discrimination, and violence (Kostina et al., 2022).

Method

A person characterizes themselves by their ability to associate, which is a sign of their creative thinking. Associations, in turn, illustrate linguistic awareness, perception of the world and its major categories. For example, an associative test involves recording verbal responses to a stimulus and mathematical processing of the results (Lyubymova, 2020). Scientists have various explanations for the formation of associations: the objective and social experience of an individual, mental factors, and cultural and historical affiliation of a person (Surmach, 2012, p. 22).

Word association tests are widely used in psychology and sociolinguistics, especially to study the relationship between language and society, language and politics (Masenko, 2004). The word association test serves as a means of studying the social image of an individual (Denysevych, 2010) within the framework of gender linguistics as a special discipline of sociolinguistics (Stavytska, 2003), for studying gender specificity in language (Horoshko, 2001), for revealing the peculiarities of female and male linguistic worldviews (Kholod, 1997). This interest in the word association test stems from the desire to test linguistic hypotheses using methods and tools beyond "pure" linguistics (Zsarnoczaiova, 2020).

Among the interdisciplinary research methods, psycholinguistic methods, particularly the word association test, are the most proven.

Our study employed a controlled word association test to collect targeted material to confirm the linguistic hypothesis that German phraseology exhibits gender asymmetry, manifesting itself at both the linguistic and cognitive levels.) A controlled associative test was carried out in 2021–2022 using an online questionnaire created in Google Forms, where respondents identified, firstly, the gender orientation of idioms, secondly, the specifics of feminine components in idioms that nominate the male gender, and thirdly, the peculiarities of the connotation of individual phraseological units in the processes of verbalisation of speech. To obtain reliable results, two groups of respondents were involved in the test. The first group consisted of 81 native German speakers (56 women and 25 men) from different regions of Germany, representing different professions and aged between 14 and 71. The second group consisted of 82 respondents (70 women and 12 men) from different regions of Ukraine, aged 17 to 60, who were not native speakers but had studied German at educational institutions in Ukraine (see Figure 1). Regarding gender, we note the preference of female respondents – 77.3% of women and 22.7% of men (see Figure 2). It is noteworthy that not a single respondent identified or associated with the so-called third gender, which, by the way, has been officially recognised in Germany since January 2019.
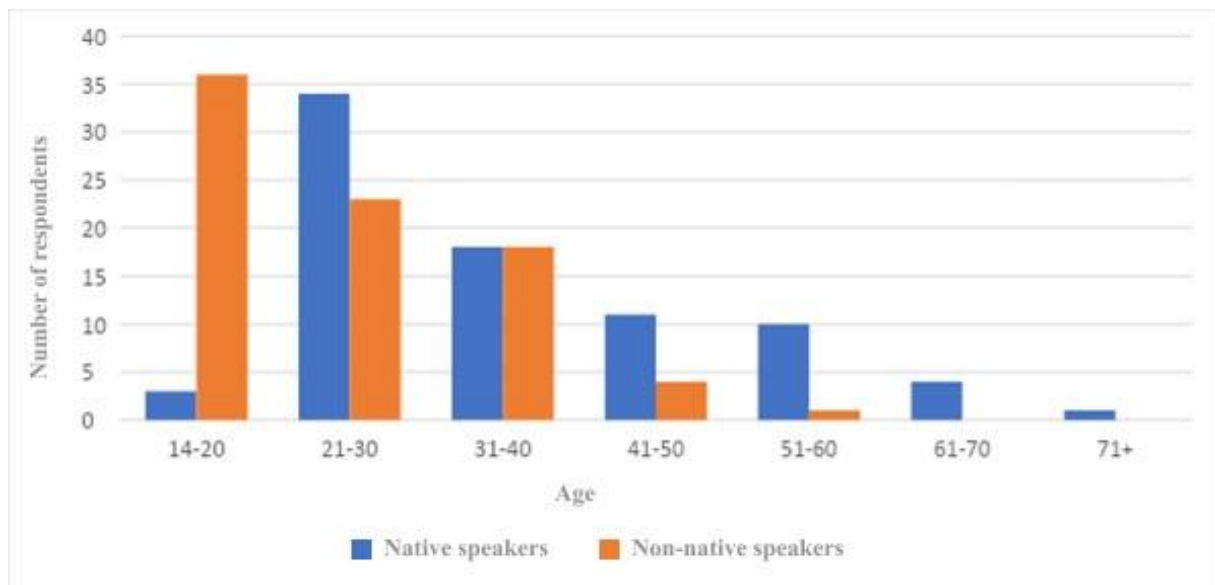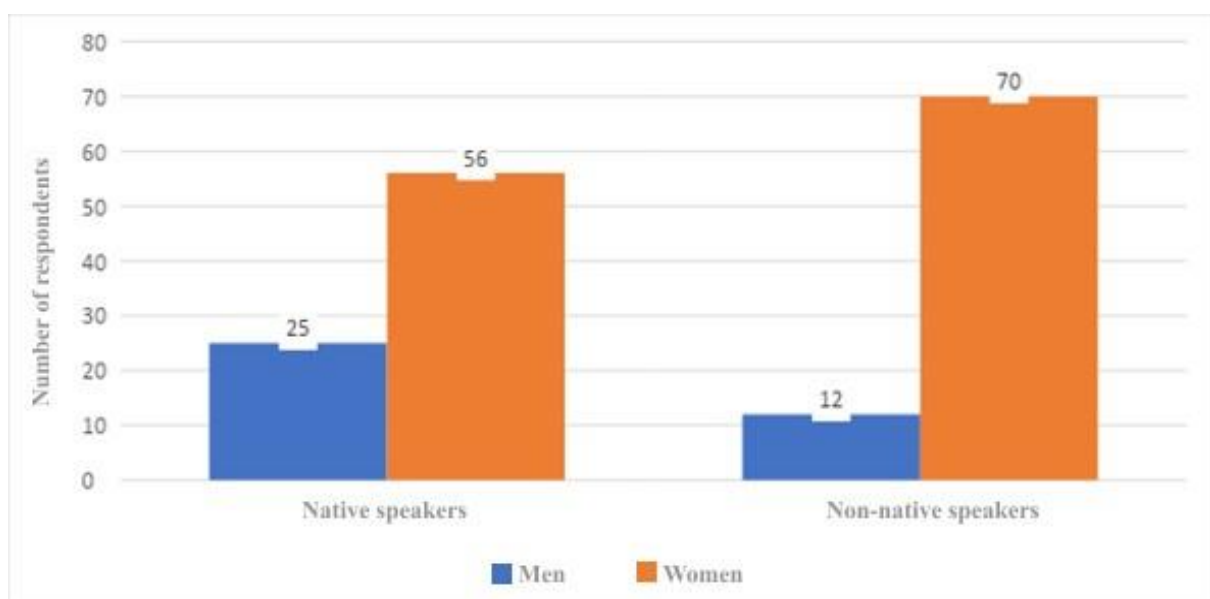
Figure 1
Age of Respondents

Figure 2
Gender of Respondents

The online questionnaire contained three blocks of questions on 26 phraseological units, selected based on indications of gender asymmetry in phraseology (Lozytska, 2021, p. 84–88). In the first block, respondents had to identify the association of specific idioms with the corresponding gender. All the selected phraseological units contained the masculine component *Mann*, postulating it to be generative and equally applicable to all genders. This was the purpose of this part of the test. The second set of questions contained idioms with feminine components (*Frau, Mädchen, Dame*), semantically addressing males. This block aims

to test the hypothesis that the feminine component in a stable expression nominating a man implies a reduction of his status.

The third set of questions concerned phraseological units with masculine and neuter grammatical gender components (*Drachen, Mädchen, Luder*), which traditionally refer to women. The respondents had to choose what colour (negative, positive, neutral) they thought these idioms had. The purpose of the third part of the test was to test the hypothesis that using masculine and neuter grammatical gender components in phraseological expressions implies a predominantly negative connotation of the expression as a whole.

In all three parts of the test, the word association test is defined as a controlled one, instructing respondents to choose from several stimuli their first association and to mark it in the questionnaire. The participants were informed about the purpose and structure of the study.

Procedure

The procedure of the association test included three stages (see Zsarnoczaiova, 2020, p. 81). First, the subject and purpose of the study were determined. The subject of the study was gender-marked idioms in German. The aim was to verify the hypothesis of gender asymmetry in German phraseology, manifested in the unequal representation of the genders through their nomination using phraseological units. We chose respondents following the principle of representativeness including participants of different ages and social status and equivalence ensuring the number of non-native speakers matched the number of native speakers, which is an essential prerequisite for conducting comparative studies. Based on the subject matter and the purpose of the study, we formulated the questions for a controlled word association test both clearly and unambiguously, and provided the necessary stimuli based on the subject matter and the purpose of the study.

The second stage, testing, involved giving instructions to the respondents and monitoring the process.

The third stage was to analyse the results of the test. The data obtained formed the basis for drawing conclusions regarding the research hypothesis. The objectivity of the results was ensured through an associative test that took into account factors influencing specific errors in the associative process, the thoughtfulness of the questions, and the proposed stimuli (Zsarnoczaiova, 2020, p. 81).

Results and Discussion

Gender asymmetry characterises the phraseology of the German language, resulting from the levelling of the use of paired forms. This levelling could make a woman visible not only in language and speech but also in the manifestation of reactions to her perception in the target linguistic culture. The controlled word association test helped to solve the problem of establishing the response profiles of two groups of respondents – native and non-native speakers – to phraseological

gender asymmetry, revealing linguistic sexism due to the peculiarities of androcentric processes.

The first block of the association test recorded the reactions of respondents, both native and non-native speakers, to phraseological units with the masculine component *Mann*, which not only explicated a gender-neutral semantic meaning but also implied intentions for both genders. It turned out that both native and non-native speakers associated the proposed units primarily with the masculine gender, probably due to the denotative meaning of the *Mann* component. It is noteworthy that when the meaning of an idiom did not refer to a person but to a trait or a phenomenon (e.g. *einen kleinen Mann im Ohr haben*), the respondents of both groups were more inclined to use such phrases concerning both genders, at a rate of 64.2% and 47.6% respectively. However, phraseological units explicating male identity through signifying elements and masculine components caused a clear association with the male gender (*Das ernährt seinen Mann!*) in both groups (30.9% and 32.9%) with an error of 2%. The idiom *Der große Mann braucht überall viel Boden* recorded zero associations with the female gender among native speaker respondents, a phenomenon we believe is linked to the emphasis on the importance of men in the target society. On the other hand, 3.7% of respondents in the second group correlated this phraseology with a woman, resulting from the desire for gender neutrality in language and speech that has emerged in Ukrainian society.

The associative responses of non-native speakers to phraseological units with the masculine component Mann show significant associations with the male gender, contrary to the neutral semantic meaning of the stable expression. The idioms (*alle Mann hoch / alle wie ein Mann / alle Mann / mit Mann und Maus*) with the *Mann* component to denote the target group with the denotative meaning "everyone" were more often associated with the male gender by non-native speakers (50%) than by native speakers (37%). These results document the priority of the non-native speaker's visual perception of the *Mann* component and the influence of its lexical meaning on the formation of language and linguistic competencies, which in their minds provokes a clear association of this component with the male gender, regardless of its holistic phraseological meaning. Thus, in two groups of respondents (67.9% and 45.1%), the typicality of associations with a man was observed for the idiom *der kleine Mann (von / auf der Straße)*, which describes an average person. At the same time, native speakers reduced the gender nomination of women through the prism of the above-mentioned stable expression to the level of 1.2%, while non-native speakers, on the contrary, actualised the proportion of the female gender during the test to 12.2%.

The test has shown the specificity of identifying the concepts *Mann* and *Mensch*, whose semantics not only label a man or implicate a woman but also reinforce feminine signifiers. The respondents of the two groups interpreted the component *Mann* in the phraseological units (*alle Mann hoch / alle wie ein Mann / alle Mann / mit Mann und Maus*) as a marker of a person in general (60.5% and 43.9%). The signs of unclear expression of perception or neutralisation of gender asymmetry in exclamatory (*Sie sind / Du bist mein Mann! Das ernährt seinen Mann!*) and

comparative (*voll sein wie tausend Mann*) phraseological units were found in two groups of respondents.

Both groups of participants were fine with the borrowed English phraseological units of *ein Allroundman / Allroundmann / Allround-Mann / Allrounder sein*. The content of these units elicited individual responses to male gender designation (48.1% and 37.8%), while their expression marked typical reactions to person perception in general (48.1% and 54.9%). At the same time, phraseological units containing the term *Mann*, which are burdened with adjectival components due to substitution mechanisms (e.g. *ein ganzer/ gelieferter Mann, ein Mann mit zugeknöpften Taschen/ aus (von) grobem Schrott*), and proverbs (e.g. *ein Mann ist kein Mann/ ein Mann allein kann das Feld nicht behaupten/ der große Mann braucht überall viel Boden/ der große Mann braucht überall viel Boden*) are commonly associated with the male gender by native speakers. Contrary to the beliefs of non-native speakers, these set expressions do not correlate with both genders. This misconception results from interlingual interference during the acquisition of the German language (see Table 1).

The respondents in both groups reacted differently to specific phraseological units. We are inclined to believe that this may be due to an incomplete understanding of the semantics of the set expression, resulting in the obscuring of its primary meaning and the activation of its secondary nomination. This leads to incorrect and inappropriate usage in communication. Responses to the phraseological unit *voll sein wie tausend Mann* colloquially translating as "very drunk" and encompassing two genders, have reinforced this assumption. However, more than 34% of non-native speakers and over 44% of native speakers associate this component directly with men, apparently guided by stereotypes that men eat too much and abuse alcohol. Slightly over 1% of the native speaker respondents (more than 1%) correlate the whole set expression with the female gender and the secondary nomination of the expression as "too drunk". We assume that using this set expression when referring to females exaggerates its meaning and is intended to highlight the person's high level of inebriation.

Table 1

Productive Responses to Mann Component Semantics, in Per Cent

Phraseological unit with the component *Mann*	Gender profiles of responses					
	native speakers			non-native speakers		
	men	women	both genders	men	women	both genders
alle Mann hoch / alle wie ein Mann / alle Mann / mit Mann und Maus	37	2.5	60.5	50	6.1	43.9

Er ist unser Mann! / Sie sind / Du bist mein Mann!	75.3	3.7	21	61	11	28
Das ernährt seinen Mann!	66.7	2.5	30.9	47.6	19.5	32.9
voll sein wie tausend Mann	44.4	1.2	54.3	34.1	6.1	59.8
der kleine Mann (von / auf der Straße)	67.9	1.2	30.9	45.1	12.2	42.7
Ein Allroundman / Allroundmann / Allround-Mann / Allrounder sein	48.1	3.7	48.1	37.8	7.3	54.9
auf den alten Mann sparen	54.3	3.7	42	52.4	11	36.6
einen kleinen Mann im Ohr haben	33.3	2.5	64.2	36.6	15.9	47.6
der rechte (richtige) Mann (an der rechten Stelle)	66.7	1.2	32.1	41.5	6.1	52.4
der große Mann braucht überall viel Boden	77.8	0	22.2	45.1	3.7	51.2
ein ganzer Mann	88.9	6.2	4.9	54.9	4.9	40.2
ein gelieferter Mann	77.8	3.7	18.5	54.9	11	34.1
ein Mann aus (von) grobem Schrott	86.4	2.5	11.1	52.4	6.1	41.5
ein Mann ist kein Mann (ein Mann allein kann das Feld nicht behaupten)	79	2.5	18.5	35.4	11	53.7
ein Mann mit zugeknöpften Taschen	81.5	4.9	13.6	47.6	13.4	39

The conceptual level actualization of *Mann* occurs through the significative meaning of the entire phraseological unit. Simultaneously, the non-native speaker

group participants associated such phraseological units binary with both masculine and feminine genders (see Table 2). Clearly, the neutral semantic content of the above-mentioned phraseological units in Ukrainian influenced the production of associative responses of non-native speakers through a conditional or unconscious projection onto their mother tongue. The limited number of associations with the component denoting women in the two groups of respondents is based on the typical notion of women as representatives of fair sex, which can be signified through lexical units. Yet, the specificity of secondary nomination mechanisms and the effects of rethinking processes in phraseological units can entirely obscure this idea. These factors can alter the meaning of these units or contribute to their obscurity.

Table 2

Associative Responses to the Semantics of the Mann Component in Phraseological Units, In Per Cent

Associations of the *Mann* component	Profiles of associative responses	
	native speakers	non-native speakers
with a man	63	46
with a woman	6	10
with both genders	32	44

Based on the analysis of results obtained from the initial block of the test, we are able to refute the notion that phraseological units containing the generative component *Mann* hold equal meaning for both genders. It is worth mentioning that native speakers are more inclined to associate such expressions with men when compared to non-native speakers. Native speakers typically interpret their language in a more androcentric manner, while non-native speakers tend to rely on the dictionary definition of a given expression, where the gender component is neutralised.

The consistent perception and representation of men, who are prominent in the target linguistic culture worldview, is somewhat altered by the mechanisms of phraseologisation. In particular, gender-specific elements acquire additional meanings beyond male or female sex, through metonymic transfer, encompassing all associated attributes. According to this interpretation, women, children and even animals were considered the property of men. This predicted the leading role of men in the formation of associative reactions and thinking activities. Moreover, phraseological units that include the term *Frau* are exclusively employed to emphasise female traits and behaviours, especially in the context of homosexuality.

Negative reactions to the component corpus of the phraseological units *Frau mit Stiel* and *synthetische Dame* were predominantly recorded among both native and non-native speakers during the test. Meanwhile, the phraseological unit *die große alte*

Dame des… elicited less adverse responses from native speakers, likely because of the connotative aspect that clarifies the meaning of "respectable age" meaning. Additionally, the dictionary definition of the expression has a clear positive connotation. In this case, the *Dame* component serves to express the experience of the person referred to by the phraseological unit. The second group's associative responses to this phraseology produced noteworthy results. We observed a significantly higher percentage of negative connotations than native speakers (28.4% and 41.5%, respectively). We attribute this to the literal interpretation of the set expression by those who have not fully mastered German. Consequently, the association was similar to previous expressions with feminine components, where negative connotations prevailed.

The ironic responses to the phraseological unit *Mädchen für alles* from the participants in the two groups stemmed from their background knowledge and similarity associations. This is because in German, the word *Mädchen* denotes a neuter category and is not gendered. The culturally determined attitude of native speaker respondents (59.3%) contributes to their negative reaction towards the primary nomination of the term *Mädchen* in reference to "girl" or "minor," as well as the components that are perceived to induce a female minor to perform a specific action. The non-native respondents exhibited a negative response of 69.5% to the phraseological unit, as it carries a connotation of insult or humiliation in Ukrainian. The term "errand boy" is intended for use in relation to both sexes but with greater emphasis on the masculine gender.

Notably, the feminine component of the term for a man provokes mainly unfavourable associations for respondents of both genders, while neutral and positive connotations are expressed implicitly (see Table 3).

Table 3

Productive Responses to Masculine Connotations in Phraseological Units, in Per Cent

Phraseological units	Responses to masculine connotations					
	Native speaker respondents			Non-native respondents		
	positive	negative	neutral	positive	negative	neutral
Frau mit Stiel (homosexueller Mann)	19.8	67.9	12.3	9.8	62.2	28
Mädchen für alles	13.6	59.3	27.2	9.8	69.5	20.7
synthetische Dame	4.9	66.7	28.4	13.4	59.8	26.8
die große alte Dame des…	39.5	28.4	32.1	12.2	41.5	46.3

The analysis of answers from the word association test from both groups of respondents indicates that nominating a man in terms of feminine attributes degrades his status. Native speakers notably favored the idiomatic expression for a homosexual man more than non-native speakers, a trend that may be attributed to the greater acceptance of same-sex relationships in German linguistic culture. Phraseological units regarding women often include components that fall under the masculine or neuter gender categories. Examples of such units are *ein leichtes Mädchen / ein spätes Mädchen / ein gefallenes Mädchen,* with *Mädchen* being a neuter noun in German, and its suffix *-chen* actualising the neuter seme. The respondents from both groups mainly demonstrated negative responses to the proposed phraseological units because of their denotative and signifying meaning, as illustrated in the projection of girl → woman of easy virtue → woman of unacceptable behaviour (demeanour/conduct) / woman of loose morals within the two linguistic cultures. Moreover, non-native speakers reacted considerably positively to the component in the phraseology *ein gefallenes Mädchen*, achieving a 24.4% mark. We presume that this outcome arises from the favorable connotation of the associated element in Ukrainian, where the female person is classified as belonging to the feminine grammatical gender. This leveling out mitigates the fact that the neuter gender expresses a woman.

The negative response of the two groups (90.1% and 65.9%) to the pejorative phraseological unit with a pronounced negative connotation *sei nicht solch altes Weib!*, which is based on the interpretation of a woman as a sexual object or as an appendage of a man, is remarkable. The percentages of favourable (1.2% and 11%) and neutral (8.6% and 23.2%) responses to this language suggest clues of linguistic culture association in the provision of language use, specifically stereotypical beliefs and viewpoints on women.

The responses of native speakers towards the partial or complete gender-based opposition expressed in the phrase *ein Mann, ein Wort, – eine Frau, ein Wörterbuch,* were shaped by the acceptance of the former as "correct" or neutral, and the latter as "negative". (Lembik, 2013). Consequently, the majority of native speakers (75.3%) reported a negative assessment of this phraseological unit, with fewer than 10% reacting favourably. We find that non-native speakers' responses are proportionally restrained (positive: 40.2%, negative: 30.5%, neutral: 29.3%) because of the functional opacity of the *Wörterbuch* component in denoting a woman. This is because the components *Wort and Wörterbuch* are interpreted as positive by non-native speakers' linguistic culture, depicting a man as "strong, reliable, responsible, a man of his word," and a woman as "intelligent, erudite, educated," or a symbol of verbosity.

No positive associations were found among native speakers regarding the phraseological unit *ein alter Drachen*. This is due to the direct meaning of the leading component which carries an explicit negative connotation, used to denote an imaginary object of large size. The recorded negative reactions in both groups (95.1%

and 59.8%) stem from a shared archetypal understanding of dragons as symbols of adversity, danger and negative phenomena.

Native speakers' lack of neutral responses to the expression *ein falsches Luder* can be explained by the pragmatic reinterpretation of the component *Luder* which traditionally refers to a piece of meat used to lure animals, to describe women who entice men with their physical appearance. This lack of reaction reflects a reluctance to contemplate or analyse its connotations and a rejection of the idea, manifesting as intentional aversion and maximum negativity. The similarity in positive reactions (1.2% and 1.2%) in both groups towards this phraseology provides evidence of a phenomenon in linguistic cultures.

Despite the negative connotation prevailing among non-native speakers, the number of positive and neutral reactions from them slightly exceeds that of native speakers. The responses indicated a mainly negative connotation due to linking with particular phrases and their constituent elements. Table 4 illustrates the demonstration of using neuter or masculine gender to refer to the female gender.

Table 4

Productive Responses to Masculine Connotations in Phraseological Units, in Per Cent

Phraseological units	Responses to the connotations of the female gender					
	Native speaker respondents			Non-native respondents		
	positive	negative	neutral	positive	negative	neutral
ein alter Drachen	0	95.1	4.9	11	59.8	29.3
ein falsches Luder	1.2	98.8	0	1.2	89	9.8
ein leichtes Mädchen	2.5	90.1	7.4	15.9	58.5	25.6
ein spätes Mädchen	2.5	59.3	38.3	4.9	51.2	43.9
ein gefallenes Mädchen	1.2	74.1	24.7	24.4	52.4	23.2
sei nicht solch altes Weib!	1.2	90.1	8.6	11 %	65.9	23.2
ein Mann, ein Wort, – eine Frau, ein Wörterbuch	8.6	75.3	16	40.2	30.5	29.3

Hence, analysing the data obtained during the test's third phase substantiates that employing masculine and neuter grammatical gender components to

phraseological units refer to women conveys predominantly negative connotations. The increased percentage of favourable reactions from non-native speakers supports this conclusion, as the positive connotation in this instance is primarily due to the feminine grammatical gender of the corresponding elements in Ukrainian. Therefore, utilising the masculine or neuter gender to refer to a female individual diminishes her status, is derogatory and is typically used in a negative context.

The study confirms that the German language's androcentricity generates asymmetries via the masculine referent that represents a person in general. Despite usually being considered "correct" and "neutral," the priority of masculine gender in phraseological units with masculine components is now in question. Additionally, referring to a male with a feminine pronoun signifies a dismissive attitude towards him. Using feminine components in phraseological units that denote attitudes towards men leads to a decreased perception of their social status amongst native speakers. Moreover, nominating the female gender through the prism of a neuter or masculine grammatical gender in phraseological units can impart a negative or abusive connotation.

Conclusions

The gender representation asymmetry in phraseology arises from the cognitive dissonance in the composition of German phraseological units and the distinctive formation of phraseological semantics. The psycholinguistic analysis and word association test have uncovered typical and individual reactions to gender perception in German linguistic culture among native speakers and Ukrainian German language learners.

In the German language, phraseological units with the masculine component. People primarily associate *Mann* with the male gender. However, gender-neutralisation signs are present in the reactions to exclamatory and comparative phraseological units containing this component. The significance of men in the target linguistic culture is evident in the phraseological units denoting age-related human changes through the adjectival components *klein* and *alt*. In response to idiomatic expressions containing feminine components *Frau, Mädchen, Dame*, the status of a male is diminished. Expressions containing the *Frau* component solely indicate what pertains to women's domain and homosexuality. Traditionalism in the perception of women is evident in typical reactions to idioms comprising masculine and neuter grammatical gender components *Drachen, Mädchen, Luder*. The irony arises from the phrase *Mädchen für alles* due to its denotative and connotative meanings, compounded by the fact that the initial component belongs to the neuter grammatical category.

As indicated by the respondents, the absence of any feminine connotations in the phraseological unit *der große Mann braucht überall viel Boden* illustrates the dominant role that men hold within German linguistic culture. The predictability of the respondents' lack of reaction to the neutral connotations in the phraseology *ein*

falsches Luder and the positive ones in *ein alter Drachen* can be attributed to the negative meaning assigned to an imaginary object. The deployment of the internal code of speech intentions of a linguistic personality in a target linguistic culture and the verbalisation of gender in phraseology depend on the associative perception of the phraseology's component meanings, their grammatical categorisation responses and the level of interlingual interference. This pragmatises the linguistic culture specificity of the target linguistic environment and predicts the specificity of perception and production of linguistic units by both native and non-native speakers.

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