The Generic Masculine in the Czech and German Languages: a Cognitive Study
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Introduction and research in the German language
This article is a summary of my Master's thesis written in German (Kolek 2016), the objective of which was to verify the generic function of the masculine in the German and Czech languages by means of association experiments. The below described contrastive experiment contributes to the existing German research and also to the so far relatively narrow empirical base testing the generic masculine in the Czech language. Apart from testing the generic function of the masculine, my objective was also to monitor the ways of self-appellation of the tested women.

Already in 2005 (i.e. at a time when there were no studies in the Czech language testing the generic masculine), the researchers Lisa Irmen and Ute Linner analysed a large number of existing German studies that they divided in two categories: studies with relevant characteristics (e.g., Irmen/ Köhncke 1996, Stahlberg/Sczesny 2001) and studies without relevant characteristics (e.g. Braun et al. 1998, Rothmund/Scheele 2004). More recent experiments (e.g. Kusterle 2011, Hansen/Littwitz/Sczesny 2016, etc.) continue in this tradition and with the help of other research methods confirm the existing findings that the generic masculine is associated predominantly with the image of a man and consequently makes women less visible and disadvantages them, or they analyse the legibility and comprehensibility of the texts formulated in various alternatives of the generic masculine (e.g. Braun et al. 2007), or, amongst other things, they examine the influence of the generic masculine and gender-inclusive forms on the choices of occupation with children (e.g. Vervecken/Hannover 2015), etc. These perception studies thereby prove the strong influence of language forms (the generic masculine and various forms of gender-fair expressions) on the cognitive inclusion of women.

Existing research on the generic masculine in the Czech language

Czech research on the generic masculine does not reach by far such a methodological variety and such a scale as research in the German language. The Czech empirical base for the testing of the generic masculine so far consists of research by Valdrová (2008), two bachelor's theses (Vyroubal 2011 copying the method used by Valdrová and Ryšková 2013), the research by Čmejrková (2008) and the master's thesis supervised by her and written by Smithová. Smetáčková (2016) deals with the relationship between the generic masculine and occupational prestige.

Valdrová conducted the first association experiment of the generically intended masculine in the Czech language in 2006 and published its results in 2008 in the article *"A Woman and a Scientist? That Does Not Fit." Tests of the Generic Masculine in the Czech Language.* The method the author selected was a test of witty surnames when the tested people (aged 10-18 divided into three age groups) were asked to think up funny surnames for 10 stimuli in total, which were supposed to be characters in a new film. These were occupations with either a prevalence of men, or a prevalence of women in them, or those that can be considered gender neutral. The experiment had two variants – one with generic masculine (filled in by 425 people) and the other one containing concepts in both masculine and feminine forms. The latter one was filled in by 147 people.

In the first variant of her experiment, the average value of the image of a male was 88.5%, while 83.1% with girls and 92.6% with boys. The author of the experiment also stated that the older the tested people were, the higher the percentage proportion of the image of a male they stated – in girls the values increased in the ranges of 79.2% - 80.9% - 92.4%, in boys 89.6% - 91.3% - 95.3%. Completely different results were shown by the other, gender-faire variant of the test: in girls the image of a male appeared on average 44.6% and in boys 57.4%. In conclusion, the researcher states that "the generic masculine mostly evokes the image of a male" (Valdrová 2008, p. 35) and that "only the options of selection from gender counterparts activates the image of a female as a member of the given group in one's mind more distinctly" (Valdrová 2008, p. 36).

A similar method was selected for the research of the generic masculine in the plural by Pavel Vyroubal in his bachelor's thesis (2011). He selected five concepts (*teachers, programmers, doctors, shop assistants, scientists*) which are, in part, identical with the research by Valdrová. Male and female respondents – students of secondary school – associated names with these concepts that could be used for the given occupations in a new Czech film.

The number of male names was on average 74.42% in boys and 58.56% in girls, which might sound positive at first sight. When taking a closer look, however, at Vyroubal's results, we discovered that with two out of five concepts girls stated a male name in more than 70%; boys even with four out of five (with two of the concepts it was even more than 80%). This is why I do not think that it is possible to speak about the unmarkedness of the masculine in either the singular or the plural. The following table shows Vyroubal's results (Vyroubal 2011, p. 27):

Occupation	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Male names in %	Female names in %	Male names in %	Female names in %	Male names in %	Female names in %
Teachers	80.23	19.77	49.17	50.83	55.13	44.87
Programmers	86.05	13.95	76.52	23.48	78.35	21.65
Doctors	72.09	27.91	58.56	41.44	61.16	38.84
Shop assistants	54.65	45.35	36.19	63.81	39.73	60.27
Scientists	79.07	20.93	72.38	27.62	73.66	26.34
Total	74.42	25.58	58.56	41.44	61.61	38.39

Kristyna Ryšková in her bachelor's thesis (2013) uses names as well. Ryšková created a questionnaire in two variants: one with generic masculine, the other one with both masculine and feminine gender forms. Her questionnaires consisted of 10 questions (e.g., *Which monarch in the Czech lands is most frequently associated with reforms and the Enlightenment?* or *Which Czech TV presenter is, in your opinion, the most famous?*) which the respondents answered. I assume, however, that this method cannot be considered as either an association experiment, or a perception study as the answers are not associations but facts, or assumptions, or guesses of correct answers (see the principle of association experiment below).

The results of Ryšková, even using the above described testing method, revealed that the generic masculine was associated predominantly with the image of a male (in 70.52%) and that a gender-

fair variant of the questions brought more balanced results (53.89% images of a male and 38.59% images of a female; the remaining percentage is represented by no answer or stating two names).

Světla Čmejrková (2008) presented the tested people with the statement *"A teacher's job is paid less than a policeman's job."* and asked them how they understood the sentence presenting them with the following options: 1) the authors mean both men and women, 2) the author means men only, 3) there should be explicitly stated that both men and women are meant (male teachers and female teachers, policemen and policewomen)?, 4) other, please explain. 56% of the tested people selected option 1), 21% selected 2) and 22% selected 3).

The research conducted by Čmejrková cannot be considered an association experiment, but is instead intentional and conscious, the cognitive interpretation of the given statement based on the options of possible interpretations. This interpretation is certainly affected by Czech language practice where unreflective use of the masculine also for the designation of women (see our own research below) prevails, and by the author's subjective distancing from the feminine where her use of the masculine is habitual (Čmejrková in Valdrová 2018, p. 387). My opinion is that the author's strategy of asking (with a presumed time allowed for thinking) does not reveal unconscious cognitive interpretations such as, e.g. when reading or listening to the news or in other circumstances. Moreover, this method fixes in the subconsciousness of male and female recipients a presupposed fact that the generic masculine includes both males and females. Similar faults can be found in the master's thesis by Simona Smithová (2011) supervised by Čmejrková.

The research conducted by Irena Smetáčková (2016) does not test the perception of the generic masculine, but instead explores its relationship and the relationship between doubled forms and the occupational prestige. The researcher determined that in the fields dominated by men, the gender-specific feminine form of the occupation has lower prestige than the masculine form, and the other way round, in fields dominated by women, a lower prestige is shown with the masculine form of the occupation. This, in the researcher's opinion, demonstrates the strong influence of gender stereotypes.

The use of the generic masculine is ambiguous in its consequences, which means that it is, paradoxically, not economical since it often places higher demands on the cognitive processing of the text, or even requires explicit commentaries (numerous Czech examples are stated, for example, by Valdrová 2018).

The research method, the course of the experiment and the people tested

The objective of my research was to test the generic function of the masculine using a different method than Valdrová (2008). The association experiment represents one of the psycholinguistic methods (Maršálová 1982, p. 12). The associations are defined as a "process and state of an unintentional, mechanical and automatic connection of two or more psych. contents" (Glück 1993, p. 62). The course of the association experiment can be described as follows: tested people are presented with a word and the instruction to say/write down a word (one or more) that first comes in their mind with the given one, while we can specify certain limitations (e.g. the tested people are asked to associate antonyms, verbs, etc.) To create so-called association standards there is a need that the experiment contains at least 100 words and that at least 100 people (better when even more) take part in the experiment.

My experiment is, in part, similar to the experiment conducted by Dagmar Stahlberg and Sabine Sczesny (2001), in which the tested people were asked to associate names. My experiment took place in November and December 2015 and the questionnaire was distributed electronically. After the details relevant from the socio-linguistic point of view (sex, age, highest achieved education level and occupation), there were 16 concepts (see below) in the generic masculine form presented in the Czech version of the questionnaire. The German version of the questionnaire contained the same concepts, with one extra stimulus – "*Federal Chancellor*". The tested people were asked to put one to three names (first name and surname) that come to their mind first. There are no assumptions and it is not a research on the understanding or the interpretation of the statements (see above). Considering the fact that the tested people were required to provide associations in the form of names, there was a need to select such stimuli, i.e. occupations, where women are also present (ideally, in the same proportion as men). The other significant limitation were the names themselves that the tested people had to be familiar with. This is the reason why it was impossible to select, for example, the concept of a *shop assistant* as not many people know one to three names of male or female shop assistants.

In total 268 people (212 women and 56 men) took part in the Czech version of the research, 255 questionnaires were completed correctly (202 by women and 53 by men). A total of 242 people (170 women and 72 men) filled in the German version of the questionnaire, after excluding the

incorrect ones, 236 questionnaires were analysed (165 completed by women and 71 by men). Although participation in the experiment was not limited in any way, most of the participants were aged 20-30. People over 30 were rather an exception. Considering the fact that the majority of the participants were university students, the groups can be considered homogeneous (both related to age and highest achieved education level) and the results will be presented as a summary.

Results

"Occupation"

As mentioned above, the tested people stated their occupation. This information served for closer specification of male and female respondents and also had a research character. With the female respondents, a quantitative analysis was carried out on as to they stated their occupation in a gender specific form (e.g. *studentka* [female student]), or generic masculine (e.g. *student*). 70.8% of Czech women, which means 143 female respondents, stated their occupation in the form of the generic masculine, while only 21.8% of women (44) stated their occupation in a gender specific form. The remaining 15 women (7.4%) come under the category "other", e.g. maternity leave. In the German version of the test, the results were different: 41.2% of German women stated their occupation in the generic masculine and 53.9% in a gender specific form, the remaining 4.8% were again in the category "other". The results can be summarized in a comprehensive graph:
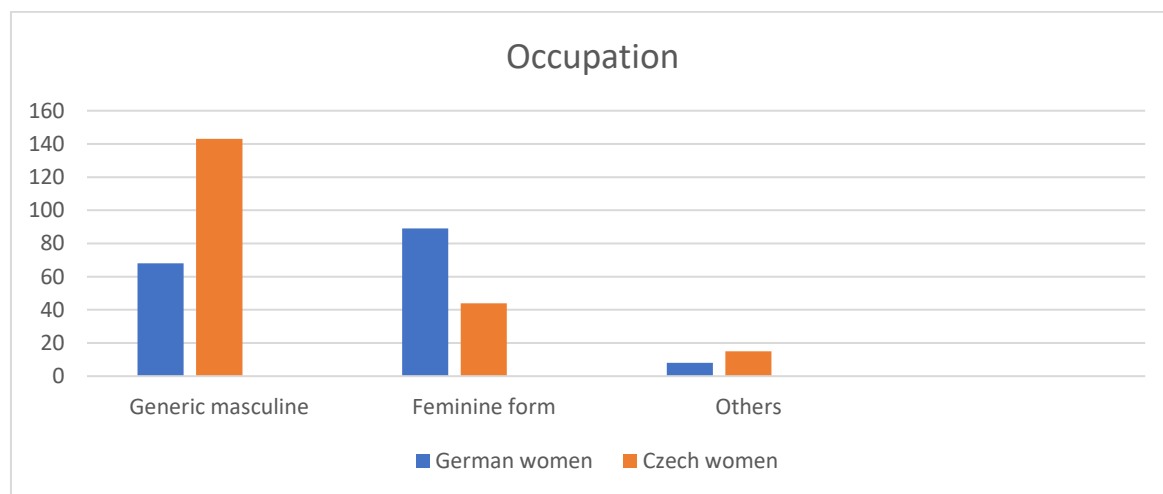
I consider it important to mention the fact that to create and use a gender specific form for an occupation is not a problem for the Czech language. There is consequently no objective reason why women should name their occupation in a masculine form. Valdrová states that if "a woman denotes herself with a generic masculine, she marginalizes herself in the group she wants to belong to" (Valdrová, 2008, p. 35-36). Former publications within Czech studies favoured the use of gender specific forms and even expressed surprise over the fact that women are still (!) labelled by masculine (e.g. člen [member / masculine], členka [member - feminine] 1932).

Associations

The results of my association experiment can be comprehensively presented in the following table. The numbers represent the numbers of women in % stated by individual tested people with regard to their nationality and gender.

Concept	Czech males	Czech females	German males	German females
Actor	4.42	10.71	20.97	30.97
Writer	5.5	11.92	8.84	32.87
Minister	2.13	4.65	25.2	37.01
Teacher	11.76	25.8	28.18	42.86
Presenter	6.74	10.85	15.44	17.7
Novel character	6.67	7.84	16.67	24.82
Singer	9	11.14	20.93	33.74
Doctor	14.71	21.43	19.7	33.66
Hairdresser	31.71	34.39	31.88	50.81
Scientist	3.53	7.84	12.4	19.39
Dubber	13.51	24.6	16.39	20.59
Film director	2.17	3.9	0.85	2.28
Sportsman	14.58	23.03	3.08	15.55
Film character	5.95	4.56	5.22	13.88
God	6.17	5.41	4.81	7.73

Colleague/fellow student	27.42	56.85	28.33	66.92
Average	**9.53**	**21.92**	**16.18**	**28.17**

As is immediately apparent, the number of associated females is much lower than 50% with all the concepts, except for the *colleague/fellow student* (in female respondents only). On average, Czech males associated the given concepts with the image of a woman in less than 10% only, females in approximately 22%. Men stated fewer female names than women in 14 out of 16 concepts. The values ranged between 2.13% (*minister*) and 31.71% (*hairdresser*) in males, and between 3.9% (*film director*) and 56.85% (*colleague/fellow student*) in females. In the German variant of the experiment, male respondents stated a female name on average 16% and German female respondents 28%. The values ranged between 0.85% (*film director*) and 31.88% (*hairdresser*) in males, and 2.28% (*film director*) and 66.92% (*colleague/fellow student*) in females. This means that the generic masculine is associated with the image of a man in the prevalent majority of both German and Czech male and female respondents.

The concept of *teacher* is also interesting, with which the number of associated females show higher values compared to others. I consider, however, these results quite low, especially when taking into account the feminization of teaching profession that is also demonstrated by the statistical survey by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport which states that approximately 80% of teachers in Czech schools are females. Despite the experience of each person from the times of school years, the influence of the language form was that strong that it was associated with images of a male and the tested people were looking for male representatives, very often the name of J. A. Comenius or the film character I. Hnízdo were given.

As stated above, the German version of the experiment included the extra concept of *Federal Chancellor*. As there had been one only female chancellor in German history at the time of the experiment, the methodology had to be modified for this one stimulus. With this concept it was monitored how many of the tested people stated the name Angela Merkel: in total 55.71% of German men and 82.32% of German women associated Angela Merkel. Considering the fact that data were collected at the time of the migrant crisis, when the German chancellor appeared in the media nearly every day, the number of men stating the name Merkel can be considered relatively low.

There was also a monitoring of how many of the tested people did not state any woman at all in their associations. 16.34% of Czech female respondents and 33.96% of Czech male respondents did not associate any female image. In the German questionnaire, 12.68% in total of men and 1.82% of women did not state any female name. We can therefore state that for these respondents (both female and male), the generic masculine does not serve its generic function. These tested people interpret the masculine in a gender specific way only, i.e. as the image of a male.

Conclusion

The above described German-Czech experiment follows in the footsteps of already conducted tests of the generic masculine in the German and Czech languages that cast doubts on the generic interpretation of the masculine. While in German there are countless numbers of experiments and studies testing the generic masculine, this research topic has not as yet received all that much attention in Czech linguistics.

The results of my experiment supported the existing conclusions about the generic masculine that in both Czech and German it is mainly associated with the image of a man, in more than 90%. The experiment also demonstrated that up to one third of the people always interpret the masculine as gender specific, which was also verified by the subsequent experiments conducted by the author. The use of the generic masculine then makes women and their contributions less visible. A possible solution to this are the alternatives of the generic masculine as suggested in the publications by Valdrová (e.g. 2001, 2005, 2010, 2013) or Kolek (in these proceedings).

When self-naming within this experiment when stating one's own occupation, different trends are apparent amongst Czech and German speakers. While Czech female respondents preferred the generic masculine, German female respondents chose gender specific forms. This demonstrates a higher degree of applying of assertion of gender-faire expressions in German speaking countries and also the higher level of emancipation of German women.

The German database of experiments and studies also includes publications testing not only the generic masculine but also, from a contrastive point of view, many alternatives of the generic masculine: double forms, the capital I, or participles. Czech linguistics will hopefully extend its knowledge in this area soon as well.

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