INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN GERMAN

The German language, like many other Indo-European languages, has a gender system marking masculine, feminine and neuter, and traditionally adheres to a binary male/female gender construct. Traditionally, it has also adhered to a "generic masculine". Beyond official German usage, there are now several more gender-inclusive ways to use the language. Nowadays, Germans commonly use the verb "*gendern*" (literally: *to gender*) derived from the English noun *gender* for referring to the process of actively making spoken and written language more inclusive.[1]

However, we must stress that gendering is a major topic and still a heated debate in Germany, that is to say that there is as yet no rule that is applied throughout.

1. One way to replace the generic masculine for professions with a gender-inclusive form introduced quite a few years ago is using the so-called *Binnen-I* (medial capital I), as in *LehrerIn* (teacher, both male and female). Similarly, the *Schrägstrich* ("slash") (e.g., *Bauarbeiter/-in*, construction worker, both male and female) was also used several years ago to make the male-female distinction. But even these spellings conform to gender binarism and are now considered rather old-fashioned.

2. Two more inclusive alternatives are the underscored so-called *Gender-Gap* (e.g., *Student_in*, student, both male and female and everything in between), *Gendersternchen* ("gender star") (e.g., Student*in, student), and the *Gender-Colon* (e.g., *Mitarbeiter:in,* colleague). These measures stand for the whole spectrum of gender identities, and therefore not only make a male-female distinction but allow for non-binary inclusion. It allows speakers of German to visually convey inclusion by using either form, not only in class-issued essays, but also in emails to tutors or fellow students written in the German language.

   In pronunciation, we introduce a glottal stop (smallest of breaks) where the star or the colon are.

   The "gender star" and "gender gap" make it easy to create gender-inclusive variants of nouns, such as turning *Freund* (male friend) and *Freundin* (female friend) into *Freund*in* (friend, including male, female and everything in

between). However, this can cause some confusion linguistically for learners of German, because some of the grammatical information can get lost in the process. If you write "*Ich sehe eine*n Köch*in*" ("I see a cook"), it isn't clear to German learners that the masculine singular form is *Koch* not *Köch*.

3. This problem can be avoided by using gender-neutral forms instead, such as *Studierende* (student) or *Lernende* (learner). If there isn't a gender-neutral alternative with a word that you come across, it is important to find ways to use German creatively to avoid binary constructions. For example, you could use "Lehrkräfte" instead of Lehrer*innen.

4. Gender-inclusive language also includes pronouns. With the neologism *xier*, a whole set of non-binary third-person pronouns are being coined by the German trans community and are beginning to catch on in some learning environments.

5. Many of these linguistic structures have yet to be officially included in the *Duden*, the standard German dictionary, so it is important that we as students make efforts to raise awareness surrounding gender inclusivity to make it a standard practice within classroom discourse. You can address the issue of pronoun choice by simply asking, for example "What is *your* pronoun?" when your classmates are introducing themselves.

Further resources:

Gendergerechte und inklusive Sprache. Fair sprechen - fair schreiben: gendergerecht, diskriminierungsfrei und inklusiv

Gender-inclusive language in German teaching

Version 3.3 : xier Pronomen ohne Geschlecht – Illi Anna Heger – Grafische Dokumentation, Comics, Theorie und xier Pronomen