

My main objective is to conduct a semantic and pragmatic analysis of gender-specific terms and grammatically gendered parts of speech (such as pronouns, adjectives, verbs) that indicate the gender of the referent, the hypothesis being that gender-specific terms entail the gender of the referent while grammatically gendered terms presuppose it. The smaller objective is to focus on the more innovative practices of speakers in terms of gendered language — both in terms of local innovations and efforts to effect change in linguistic practices globally.

In contemporary philosophy of language gendered language occurs usually in one of two contexts: how to define gender terms such as „man” and „woman” and if and how we should use gendered language. I take those questions to be of great philosophical importance, however, I believe that there's also work to be done in less practical and more foundational area - how gendered language actually works? What are the semantics of gendered terms: how is the information about the referent's gender conveyed? Are there differences in how gender is encoded in gender-specific terms and in grammatically gendered terms? While many of similar questions have been posed within linguistics, the category of grammatical gender is still considered to be rather puzzling, and the categories of conceptual gender (including natural and definitional gender) aren't well defined.

Languages exhibit different gender systems: there are grammatically gendered languages (e.g., Polish, French), natural gender languages (e.g., English, Danish), and genderless languages (e.g., Finnish, Turkish). Regardless of the system, all languages have gender-specific terms such as natural kind terms (woman, boy) and kinship terms (mother, brother). In some languages, gender-specific nouns are morphologically marked, like with the word "actress" where the suffix encodes gender. The project focuses on three types of gendered terms: gender-specific nouns (e.g., brother, girl, actress, landlord), gender-specific personal pronouns (e.g., he, she), and grammatically gendered parts of speech (e.g., adjectives, verbs). These categories will be analysed to understand how gender is linguistically encoded and interpreted. I will focus on gendered terms in English and Polish, however, the analysis will be informed by examples from other languages with different gender systems.

My hypotheses are the following:

1. Gender-specific nouns entail the gender of the referent
2. Gender-specific pronouns and other grammatically gendered parts of speech are presupposition triggers that trigger presuppositions about the referent's gender

After analysing the semantics of gendered terms, I will focus on their unconventional and innovative uses such as gendered terms used in slang, gendered slurs, feminist attempts at linguistic change, and linguistic practices of non-binary speakers. I take these uses to be examples of local linguistic innovation, some aimed at global linguistic change, some simply expressive. The goal is to identify the pragmatic mechanisms that are employed in such uses.