



# Teaching Gendergerechte Sprache and Non-Binary Pronouns

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# Overview

- Why is gender important in a foreign language classroom?
- Diversity and intersectionality
- Engaging critically with the standard curriculum
- Critical pedagogy
- Why is gender important in GFL classrooms?
- How to appropriately engage in discourse about gender and sexuality with students
- Gender and non-binary structures in the German language



# Gender in the Foreign Language Classroom

*“Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt”*

- What the terms “gender” and “queer” encompass
- Discourse and identity
- Safety and inclusivity
- Beyond linguistic competence
- Transformative learning



# Diversity and Intersectionality

- Inclusivity and identity-affirming praxis extends beyond gender and sexuality
- Students are multifaceted individuals with varying backgrounds and relationships to one another
- Roles of race, class, nationality, age, disability and so on in the lives of our students
- Outdated curricula as a source of critical investigation



# Engaging Critically with the Curriculum

- Opens doors for productive discourse between students and instructors
- Issues that are ignored or misconstrued within the curriculum can be reassessed
- Way to introduce new vocabulary and create an activity out of critical discussion
- Encourages students to engage in critical thinking and form new understandings of the world as they view it through the lens of a foreign language



# Gender in the GFL Classroom

- Germany's relationship to queer people and institutions
- Excessive gendering within the German language
- Large movement for developing gendergerechte Sprache since the 1980s
- American/English-speaking context



# Engaging in Gender and Sexuality Discourses with Students: Initiating Open Environment

- Preemptively create an open and safe environment for students in which they feel they can express themselves and learn without judgement
  - Students' participation
  - Trust between instructors and queer students will develop
  - Other non-LGBTQIA students will be encouraged to think critically about these themes and build more meaningful relationships with queer students and each other.
- Acknowledge at the very beginning of the course that your classroom will be open, inclusive, and judgement free
- Acknowledge the diversity of your students and let them know you see and hear them as multifaceted human beings



# Engaging in Gender and Sexuality Discourses with Students: Initiating Open Environment

- Explain that gender plays a role in the German language grammatically and it plays a role in the process of learning German.
- Express that one of your goals is to examine biases in the curriculum to make it more diverse and inclusive.
- Hand out a questionnaire or survey to students. This is a useful place to privately ask them:
  - Their preferred pronouns
  - Preferred name if different from the name on the university's register
  - If they would like to meet one-on-one



## Engaging in Gender and Sexuality Discourses with Students: No-Gos

- These themes should be treated as if they are nothing unusual. Rather than making gender and sexuality a spectacle, we need to integrate it as a new norm into our praxis
- Do not assume everyone is cisgender and/or heterosexual
- Do not assume gender or sexuality based on looks or behavior
- Do not *out* anyone. *Outing* someone is when the gender/sexual identity of a queer person is revealed without their consent before they have openly disclosed that information themselves
- Do not misgender students and always use their preferred pronouns. If you misgender them, quickly correct yourself and move on
- Do not universalize the gender neutral pronoun

# Engaging Critically with the German Curriculum



- In many assignments students must re-confront various identities and relationships that they already know in their native tongue
- Create situations/activities/assignments involving various identities for the students to interpret.
  - For example, in an activity in which students describe family dynamics, allow space to include non-traditional identities such as homosexual relationships or a family member who does not identify within the gender binary.
- Consider each lesson critically
- Promote positive aspects of queer Germany like sexological sciences and Weimar queer culture etc. while acknowledging the injustices brought on these people and institutions by § 175 and the Nazis that are often left out of the discussion

# Gendergerechte Sprache

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- This is the phenomenon of reconstructing the German language to make it more female-friendly and gender inclusive has been developing since the 1980s
- Examples of these linguistic developments include the **Binnen-I**, **Splitting**, **das Sternchen**, **Die Paarform**, **Partizipien**, **geschlechtsneutrale Begriffe**, and so on
- With exceptions, the above-mentioned techniques largely conform to the male-female binary

# Gendergerechte Sprache

**Binnen-I**: Using the Binnen-I addresses men and women in the plural feminine form. This method is mainly used in written form as it is a visual marker, but can be expressed verbally by putting emphasis on the Binnen-I.

zB: “LehrerInnen”, statt (maskulin) “Lehrer”

**Splitting**: Both feminine and masculine forms are shown by adding a “/” or “\_” between the gendered forms.

zB: der/die Schüler/in, die Student\_in

**Das Sternchen**: Similar to splitting, placing an asterisk (\*) at the end of the word acts as a placeholder for a gendered ending. This method is only adequate in written form.

zB: Freund\* statt Freund/Freundin.

# Gendergerechte Sprache



**Die Paarform:** This method addresses both masculine and feminine forms outright, simply adding “und” or “oder” between them.

zB: Professorin **oder** Professor, Studentinnen **und** Studenten

**Partizipien:** When participles are used in plural, gender is no longer explicitly attached to the noun. To do this, replace the ending of the noun with “-ende”, “-ierende”, or “-ierte”.

zB: Studierende, Lehrende, Interessierte

**Geschlechtsneutrale Begriffe:** We can also replace gender-specific terms with gender neutral formulations.

zB: die Feuerwehr statt die Feuerwehrmänner, die Lehrkraft statt die Lehrer

# Non-Binary Language in German

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- Non-binary, genderfluid, or gender nonconforming people: these gender identities apply to those who do not adhere to stereotypical gender norms and/or don't identify themselves within the strict male-female binary
- In English those who do not conform to the gender binary or wish to challenge it often use “they/them/theirs” as a gender neutral pronoun set. This is not as simple in German
- Although no methods to reference non-binary individuals have been made official in Germany we can utilize what they have come up with and integrate it into our curricula as a new gender formulation

# Non-Binary Pronouns

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- Integrating a new pronoun into an established grammar system will be new for everyone... It may take time to get used to but it is necessary to make it an available option
- Even if none of your students identify as non-binary, they need to integrate this into their vocabularies for when they encounter non-binary people outside of the classroom

# Xier/Xieser/Dier



The most commonly used non-binary pronoun set in Germany seems to be **Xier/Xieser/Dier**. This information on non-binary pronouns was largely gathered from Anna Heger's work on non-binary pronouns and Gendergerechte Sprache, and more detailed explanations and background information can be found on her [website](#).

# Xier/Xieser/Dier



These pronouns signify:

xier – ein Personalpronomen, anstelle sie und er. (“they”)

xieser – ein Possessivpronomen, anstelle ihr und sein. (“their”)

dier – ein Artikel und ein Relativpronomen, anstelle die und der

These pronouns function the same as the rest and have endings that mirror the established German grammar rules. Here is the declension of the personal pronoun xier:

Fälle:	1. Nom.	2. Gen.	3. Dat.	4. Akk.
Personalpronomen	<b>xier</b>	<b>xies</b>	<b>xiem</b>	<b>xien</b>

# Personal Pronouns

This is what it looks like in relation to the other personal pronouns:

		Personal pronoun				Possessive pronoun
		Nominative	Genitive	Dative	Accusative	
Singular	1st person	ich	meiner	mir	mich	mein
	2nd person	du	deiner	dir	dich	dein
	3rd person	er	seiner	ihm	ihn	sein
		sie	ihrer	ihr	sie	ihr
		es	seiner	ihm	es	sein
		xier	xies	xiem	xien	xies

# Personal Pronouns



Personal pronoun examples:

Nom. Wer schreibt? Xier schreibt.

Gen. Wessen gedenke ich? Ich gedenke xies.

Dat. Wem gehört das? Das gehört xiem.

Akk. Wen brauchst du? Du brauchst xien.

# Possessive Pronouns

The endings in possessive form essentially follow the others:

Fall:		1. Nom.	2. Gen.	3. Dat.	4. Akk.
herkömmlich:	<b>ihr_</b>	<b>_e</b>	<b>_er</b>	<b>_er</b>	<b>_e</b>
	<b>sein_</b>	<b>_</b>	<b>_es</b>	<b>_em</b>	<b>_en</b>
	<b>sein_</b>	<b>_</b>	<b>_es</b>	<b>_em</b>	<b>_</b>
alternativ:	<b>xies_</b>	<b>_er</b>	<b>_es</b>	<b>_em</b>	<b>_en</b>

# Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronoun examples:

**Nom.** Xieser Freund\*/ xiese Freundin/ xies Freund/ und xies Kind schreiben.

**Gen.** Xier erinnert sich xieses Freund\*/ xieser Freundin/ xieses Freundes/ und xieses Kindes.

**Dat.** Das gehört xiesem Freund\*/ xieser Freundin/ xiesem Freund/ und xiesem Kind.

**Akk.** Xier sucht xiesen Freund\*/ xiese Freundin/ xiesen Freund/ und xies Kind.

Fall:		1. Nom.	2. Gen.	3. Dat.	4. Akk.
herkömmlich:	<b>ihr_</b>	<b>_e</b>	<b>_er</b>	<b>_er</b>	<b>_e</b>
	<b>sein_</b>	<b>_</b>	<b>_es</b>	<b>_em</b>	<b>_en</b>
	<b>sein_</b>	<b>_</b>	<b>_es</b>	<b>_em</b>	<b>_</b>
alternativ:	<b>xies_</b>	<b>_er</b>	<b>_es</b>	<b>_em</b>	<b>_en</b>

# Relative Pronouns



Here are the variations of the relative pronoun **dier**:

Fälle:	1. Nom.	2. Gen.	3. Dat.	4. Akk.
Personalpronomen	<b>dier</b>	<b>dies</b>	<b>diem</b>	<b>dien</b>

Relative pronoun examples:

**Nom.** **Dier** Jona schreibt. Jona, **dier** schreibt, ...

**Gen.** Ich erinnere mich **dies** Peters. Peter, **dies** ich mich erinnere, ...

**Dat.** Das gehört **diem** Sarah. Sarah, **diem** das gehört, ...

**Akk.** Du brauchst **dien** Sascha. Sascha, **dien** ich brauche, ...

# Gender Terminology



Beyond pronouns and grammar there is queer-specific vocabulary that may be helpful to explore. Here are some sites that have information on these terms and translations and vocabulary alternatives:

- <https://geschicktgendern.de/>
  - Genderwörterbuch
  - Zeigt „übliche“ Benennung und dann gendergerechte Alternativen
- <https://nibi.space/start>
  - Glossary for terminology, concepts, and many other themes related to non-binary language and identity
- [https://nonbinary.miraheze.org/wiki/Glossary\\_of\\_German\\_gender\\_and\\_sex\\_terminology](https://nonbinary.miraheze.org/wiki/Glossary_of_German_gender_and_sex_terminology)
  - Glossary of gender and sex terminology
  - Similar to geschicktgendern
  - Has links to more resources/further reading
- <https://www.annaheger.de/pronomen32/>
  - Updated research on non-binary pronouns and gender-affirming language in Germany



## Further Resources

This site includes resources that may be useful in providing information on developing an inclusive classroom environment and the importance integrating “queerness” into the curriculum. The site has links to powerpoints, encyclopedias, pamphlets, scholarly articles, journals, etc. to assist with any further inquiries.

<https://queergerman.weebly.com/instructor-resources.html>

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