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Tobias-Alexander Herrmann

Nonbinary Gender Identities: Linguistic Practices in Russian and Czech

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Herausgegeben von Tanja Anstatt, Tilman Berger, Christina Clasmeier,
Björn Hansen und Volkmar Lehmann

Tobias-Alexander Herrmann

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in Russian and Czech**

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Contents

List of Tables	xi
List of Figures	xii
List of Abbreviations	xiii
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Structure of the book and chapter outlines	1
1.2 Theoretical framework	2
1.2.1 Terminology	2
1.2.2 Background	5
1.2.2.1 Modern approaches	6
1.2.2.2 Postmodernist approaches	8
1.2.3 Poststructuralism	11
1.2.3.1 Performativity	13
1.2.3.2 Indexicality	15
1.2.3.3 Identities	16
1.2.4 Grammar as discourse	18
1.2.4.1 Gender and gender agreement in Russian and Czech	19
1.2.4.2 Nonbinary linguistic practices	21
1.2.5 Literature review	25
1.2.5.1 English	25
1.2.5.2 Various languages	26
1.2.5.3 Slavic languages	28
1.3 Materials and Methods	31
1.3.1 Data collection I: A corpus with nonbinary linguistic practices	31
1.3.1.1 Linking theory and practice	31
1.3.1.2 Scraping and storing data	33
1.3.2 Procedure and data analysis I	37
1.3.2.1 Singling out thematic clusters	37
1.3.2.2 Identifying patterns and themes	41
1.3.3 Data collection II: Polling nonbinary individuals	45
1.3.3.1 Survey design	45
1.3.3.2 Sociodemographic information	47
1.3.3.3 Nonbinary language use	48
1.3.4 Procedure and data analysis II	49
1.3.4.1 Survey procedure	49
1.3.4.2 Processing survey data	50
1.3.5 Interim conclusion	51
2 Linguistic agency in discourse	53
2.1 Materials and Methods	55
2.1.1 Survey & data collection	55
2.1.2 Methods for analysis	59

2.2	Results	61
2.2.1	Q ₁ & Q ₂	61
2.2.2	Q ₃	62
2.2.3	Q ₄	63
2.2.4	Q ₅	65
2.2.5	Comparison of Q ₄ and Q ₅	67
2.2.6	Q ₆ & Q ₇	70
2.2.7	Q ₈	71
2.2.8	Q ₉	74
2.2.9	Q ₁₀ & Q ₁₁	79
	2.2.9.1 Russian	80
	2.2.9.2 Czech	87
	2.2.9.3 Comparison and interim discussion	92
2.3	Interim conclusion	94
3	Gender reinterpretation	97
3.1	Identity labels	98
3.1.1	Materials and Methods	101
3.1.2	Results	102
	3.1.2.1 Nonbinary identity labels in Russian	102
	3.1.2.2 Nonbinary identity labels in Czech	107
3.1.3	Interim conclusion	108
3.2	Pronoun practice	109
3.2.1	The case of Russian	111
	3.2.1.1 The emergence of the pronoun practice	111
	3.2.1.2 Form and function of the pronoun practice	114
	3.2.1.3 Distributional patterns	118
3.2.2	The case of Czech	121
	3.2.2.1 Form and function of the pronoun practice	121
	3.2.2.2 Distributional patterns	124
3.2.3	Interim conclusion	126
3.3	Gender alternation	126
3.3.1	Overview	127
	3.3.1.1 Number of genders	128
	3.3.1.2 Types of alternation	129
	3.3.1.3 Meanings of gender alternation	135
3.3.2	Distribution	139
3.3.3	Attitudes	141
3.3.4	Interim conclusion	144
3.4	The neuter gender	146
3.4.1	Overview	147
3.4.2	Distribution in Russian	148
3.4.3	Distribution in Czech	150
3.4.4	Attitudes	151
	3.4.4.1 Russian	152
	3.4.4.2 Czech	159
3.4.5	The neuter gender for nonbinary identity construction?	161
3.4.6	Interim conclusion	166
3.5	Summary	167

4	Gender neutralization	169
4.1	Alternative ungendered constructions	169
4.1.1	Overview: Types of alternative constructions	171
4.1.1.1	Russian	173
4.1.1.2	Czech	177
4.1.2	Distribution	180
4.1.2.1	Russian	182
4.1.2.2	Czech	186
4.1.3	Attitudes	188
4.1.4	A generalization of ungendered constructions	191
4.1.5	Interim conclusion	195
4.2	Plural agreement	196
4.2.1	The case of English singular <i>they</i>	198
4.2.2	The case of Russian	199
4.2.2.1	Full plural pattern: Using <i>my</i>	200
4.2.2.2	Full plural pattern: Using <i>vy</i>	203
4.2.2.3	Singular <i>oni</i> & singular-plural pattern	207
4.2.3	The case of Czech	226
4.2.3.1	Using first person plural: <i>Mykáni</i>	227
4.2.3.2	Using second person plural: <i>Vykáni</i>	229
4.2.3.3	Using third person plural: <i>Onikáni</i> & singular-plural pattern	232
4.2.4	A generalization of plural agreement with singular meaning	240
4.2.5	Interim conclusion	246
4.3	Summary	247
5	Gender specification	249
5.1	Graphemic Approaches	250
5.1.1	Materials and Methods	254
5.1.2	Gender graphemes in Russian	254
5.1.2.1	Types of gender graphemes and general distribution	254
5.1.2.2	Distribution of first person instances	259
5.1.2.3	Meaning of gender graphemes	261
5.1.3	Gender graphemes in Czech	262
5.1.3.1	Types of gender graphemes and general distribution	262
5.1.3.2	Distribution of first person instances	265
5.1.3.3	Meaning of gender graphemes	267
5.1.4	Explaining the data	267
5.1.5	Interim conclusion	273
5.2	Neopronouns, neoforms, neogrammar	274
5.2.1	Classification of neoforms	275
5.2.1.1	Formal aspects	275
5.2.1.2	Semantic aspects	278
5.2.1.3	Ideological aspects	279
5.2.1.4	Cross-linguistic evidence	280
5.2.1.5	Modeling the emergence of novel coinages	284
5.2.2	Gender-related neoforms in Russian	286
5.2.2.1	Morphology and semantics of neoforms	286
5.2.2.2	Usage and distribution	300
5.2.2.3	Attitudes	301

5.2.3	Gender-related neoforms in Czech	306
5.2.3.1	Morphology and semantics of neoforms	307
5.2.3.2	Usage and distribution	317
5.2.3.3	Attitudes	318
5.2.4	A generalization of neoforms	320
5.2.4.1	Classification of neoforms: Mapping identity	320
5.2.4.2	Popularity of neoforms: The many disadvantages	323
5.2.4.3	Function of neoforms: Making space for nonbinary identities	326
5.2.5	Interim conclusion	329
5.3	Nonbinary naming practices	330
5.3.1	Gender marking on names	333
5.3.2	Materials and Methods	337
5.3.3	Results	340
5.3.3.1	Types and usage of names	340
5.3.3.2	Classification of names	345
5.3.3.3	Levels of onymic genderization	350
5.3.4	Interim conclusion	356
5.4	Summary	357
6	Conclusion and outlook	359
6.1	General summary	359
6.2	Directions for future research	362
	Primary Sources	365
	References	379
A	Survey of nonbinary respondents	397

List of Tables

1.1	Emerged thematic clusters in RUNB	39
1.2	Emerged thematic clusters in CZNB	40
2.1	Results of survey item Q3	63
2.2	Overview: Results of Q10 & Q11 in Russian sample	86
2.3	Overview: Results of Q10 & Q11 in Czech sample	92
3.1	Most frequent Russian nonbinary identity labels	105
3.2	Most frequent Czech nonbinary identity labels	108
4.1	Most frequently used Russian verbs for ungendered constructions	182
4.2	Most frequently used Czech verbs for ungendered constructions	187
4.3	Frequency share of occurrences of singular-plural pattern (3P)	217
4.4	Frequency share of occurrences of singular-plural pattern (1P)	217
5.1	Gender graphemes in RUNB corpus	257
5.2	1SG gender graphemes instances across RUNB corpus	260
5.3	Gender graphemes in CZNB corpus	263
5.4	1SG gender graphemes instances across CZNB corpus	266
5.5	English traditional and neopronouns	276
5.6	Proposed declension paradigms of Russian nonbinary third person neopronouns	292
5.7	Proposed Russian nonbinary neo <i>l</i> -forms	293
5.8	Proposed declension paradigms of Russian nonbinary adjective desinences	295
5.9	Proposed declension paradigms of Russian personal nouns	299
5.10	Proposed declension paradigms of Czech nonbinary third person neopronouns	310
5.11	Proposed Czech nonbinary neo <i>l</i> -forms	310
5.12	Proposed declension paradigms of Czech nonbinary adjective desinences	312
5.13	Proposed declension paradigms of Czech neopronouns	316
5.14	Sonority Scale for Russian allophones and phoneme inventory	339
5.15	Sonority Scale for Czech phoneme inventory	340
5.16	Distribution of name use among Russian nonbinary speakers	341
5.17	Distribution of name use among Czech nonbinary speakers	341
5.18	Accuracy of GLM indicating genderization on phonological level in Russian names	351
5.19	Accuracy of GLM indicating genderization on phonological level in Czech names	351
5.20	Onymic genderization across levels for Russian names	352
5.21	Onymic genderization across levels for Czech names	352
5.22	Overview of Russian nonbinary names	354
5.23	Overview of Czech nonbinary names	355

List of Figures

1.1	Data structure in nonbinary corpora	37
2.1	Results of survey items Q1 & Q2	62
2.2	Results of survey item Q4	64
2.3	Results of survey item Q5	66
2.4	Interlocutor network	68
2.5	Results of survey items Q6 & Q7	71
2.6	Results of survey item Q8	72
2.7	Results of survey item Q9	76
2.8	Comparison of Q4 and Q9 ratings	77
2.9	Illustration of linguistic agency in discourse	94
3.1	Russian nonbinary identity labels	103
3.2	Pronoun use among Russian nonbinary respondents	119
3.3	Pronoun use among Czech nonbinary respondents	125
3.4	Gender alternation across text	131
3.5	Gender alternation across time	132
3.6	Results of survey item Q12.5 for Russian sample	140
3.7	Results of survey item Q12.5 for Czech sample	140
3.8	Results of survey item Q12.1 for Russian sample	149
3.9	Results of survey item Q12.1 for Czech sample	151
4.1	Results of survey item Q12.6 for Russian sample	184
4.2	Results of survey item Q12.7 for Russian sample	184
4.3	Results of survey item Q12.6 for Czech sample	187
4.4	Distribution of instances using singular-plural pattern across RUNB corpus	218
4.5	Results of survey item Q12.2 for Russian sample	221
4.6	Results of survey item Q12.2 for Czech sample	236
5.1	Results of survey item Q12.4 for Russian sample	259
5.2	Results of survey item Q12.4 for Czech sample	265
5.3	Probability hierarchy of novel coinages	285
5.4	Overview of origin and classification of presented neoforms in Russian	300
5.5	Results of survey item Q12.3 for Russian sample	301
5.6	Overview of origin and classification of presented neoforms in Czech	316
5.7	Results of survey item Q12.3 for Czech sample	317
5.8	Boxplot of given names' genderization on three levels	353

List of Abbreviations

1SG/1PL	first person singular/plural	Cz	Czech
2SG/2PL	second person singular/plural	En	English
3SG/3PL	third person singular/plural	Es	Spanish
Ø	zero morpheme	Fi	Finnish
ACC	accusative case	Ge	German
AUX	auxiliary	He	Hebrew
C	common gender	OCS	Old Church Slavic
COND	conditional	Ru	Russian
DAT	dative case	Sv	Swedish
DET	determiner		
DOM	direct-object marker	CZNB	Czech Nonbinary Corpus
F	feminine	RUNB	Russian Nonbinary Corpus
FUT	future		
GEN	genitive case		
INS	instrumental case		
LOC	locative case		
M	masculine		
N	neuter		
NB	nonbinary (gender)		
NOM	nominative case		
OK	otherkin (identity)		
PL	plural		
PREP	prepositional case		
PRN	pronoun		
PRS	present		
PST	past		
PTCP	participle		
REFL	reflexive		
X	ungendered		

1 Introduction

In this book I investigate the assumption that Russian and Czech nonbinary individuals use language for identity construction. Drawing on the standard variety, which produces the gender binary by means of direct and indirect indexes, constructing female and male identities, the variation in nonbinary speakers' speech is explored that aims to buck the linguistic gender binary. Regular variation on the local level may solidify and eventually emerge as a linguistic practice for nonbinary identity construction. Therefore, I hypothesize that whenever a linguistic feature indexes a speaker's gender identity in the standard variety, a nonbinary individual banks on alternatives, that is to say a linguistic practice, to linguistically construct nonbinary identity. Hence, the aim of this book is to explore and describe these practices, providing an in-depth investigation of how Russian and Czech nonbinary individuals linguistically construct gender identity. Before I begin the exploration, description and analyses of nonbinary linguistic practices, I briefly outline how the present book is organized.

1.1 Structure of the book and chapter outlines

The present chapter lays the groundwork for the book. Section 1.2 is devoted to theoretical considerations, setting the stage for the subsequent analyses. The key aspect is the relation between language and identity, or more specifically how language contributes to constructing identity and how the Russian and Czech linguistic features produce and reify the gender binary. In section 1.3 the materials and methods used in this book are presented, demonstrating how data were collected, processed, and analyzed.

In chapter 2 I investigate the subjectivity of nonbinary individuals in discourse, exploring the relevance and degree of their agency to linguistically construct identity in interaction with various interlocutors. This endeavor is motivated by the theoretical underpinnings that speakers' identity construction is subject to competing discourses. Hence, the chapter analyzes under which circumstances nonbinary speakers are actually able to draw on linguistic practices to perform and thus construct nonbinary identity in general. I develop and present a model, depicting the factors that influence in which contextual and communicative settings linguistic identity construction is (im)possible for nonbinary speakers.

Chapter 3 is devoted to linguistic practices that rely on the approach of gender reinterpretation. First, I show that the use of collective and highly specific identity labels are a first step in identity construction by calling nonbinary identity into being through the use of lexemes. Second, I demonstrate how the practice of sharing and asking for a person's pronouns has become a pragmatic means to index nonbinary identity. Third, I describe how the alternation of agreement patterns, as has been described in previous works for other languages, has become a popular practice to go beyond the binary. Fourth, the use of the neuter agreement for animate referents is discussed.

In chapter 4, I present linguistic practices that are backed by the approach of gender neutralization. They all have in common that they use elements and features of the standard variety, which do not have a binary gender index and have acquired a different meaning on the local level among nonbinary speakers. I will describe two major linguistic practices, namely using alternative ungendered constructions as well as banking on plural agreement with singular semantics.

Chapter 5 dives into the approach of gender specification, containing three linguistic practices. First, I explore the use of graphemic methods and how they are applied to include a formal third option among the feminine and masculine gender. Second, I will analyze proposals that aim to establish a specific option on the morphological level beyond the binary, ranging from individual lexemes to an entire novel agreement class. Third, I analyze the naming practices of nonbinary speakers and the means that are used to specify nonbinary meaning.

In chapter 6, I conclude the analyses and summarize the main findings. I also suggest directions for future research on language and nonbinary identities.

1.2 Theoretical framework

The first part of the introductory chapter presents theoretical aspects relevant for the analyses in this book. Starting off, the key terminology and definitions will be provided, before laying out the theoretical framework the research is based on.

1.2.1 Terminology

As the language use of nonbinary individuals is investigated in this book, defining nonbinary identity is key. Cordoba (2020a: 49) pointed out that *nonbinary* has been reported to first be used as an identity category in the collection *Unseen Genders: Beyond*

the Binaries by Haynes and McKenna (2001) and accordingly the term has been around for quite some time. Very broadly speaking, the term denotes people who do not fall into the distinct categories of female or male (Fiani 2018: 222). However, the label can be ambiguous as it defines several gender identity groups. For instance, it may describe “an individual whose gender identity falls between or outside male and female identities”, or “an individual who can experience being a man or woman at separate times” as well as “an individual who does not experience having a gender identity or rejects having a gender identity” (Matsuno and Budge 2017: 116f). Crucially, gender identity indicates a person’s internal sense of their own gender, their self-awareness and self-identification (Stryker 2008: 13, Matsuno and Budge 2017: 117, Zimman 2021: 73, Ackerman 2019: 3). Notably, this internal, personal sense of gender is neither related to a person’s *sexual orientation*, which is “defined as an individual’s erotic response tendency or sexual attractions” (Drescher 2010: 430), nor is it related to any of the person’s physical conditions, which are described using the term *sex assignment*. The latter represents a binary categorization of an individual made at birth (Zimman 2021: 73) based on physical characteristics such as chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitals (Fiani 2018: 222). All mentioned aspects are bundled in the definition of nonbinary identity below:

[G]enderqueer or non-binary people are simply people who are not male or female; [...]. In general, non-binary or genderqueer refers to people’s identity, rather than physicality at birth; but it does not exclude people who are intersex or have a diversity/disorder of sexual development who also identify in this way. Whatever their birth physicality, there are non-binary people who identify as a single fixed gender position other than male or female. There are those who have a fluid gender. There are those who have no gender. And there are those who disagree with the very idea of gender (Richards, Bouman, and Barker 2017: 5).

Having distinguished gender identity, sexual orientation and sex, there are additional terms describing how these in a person may interact. The term *cis-identified* individual captures that a person’s internal sense of gender identity and their birth-assigned sex match (Fiani 2018: 222). The assumption that a person is cisgender by default is described as *cisnormativity*, and “the assumption that most people are attracted to those of ‘the opposite’ gender, that is, a cisgender man is attracted to cisgender women” is captured by the term *heteronormativity* (Cordoba 2020b: 878). However, in terms of a person’s sexual orientation, a person may not identify as heterosexual, and in terms of gender identity, the term *trans-identified* individual describes that gender identity and sex assigned at birth do not match (Fiani 2018: 222). Transgender may therefore

be used as an umbrella term for nonbinary individuals, described as binary and nonbinary transgender identifications (Vincent 2016: 5), however, some nonbinary people would reject this label for themselves. Notably, nonbinary people “do not describe their genders as a single ‘third gender’ or as necessarily defined by or in relationship with a fixed gender system”, but instead are more likely to experience gender as fluid (Corwin 2017: 256).

Regardless of gender identity and sex assigned at birth, there are myriad ways how a person may express or present their gender. *Gender expression* is a type of conveying gender and is rooted in *gender roles*, the latter being “gender categories within a given culture” (Zimman 2021: 73). This means is that a variety of behaviors are associated with an outward expression that is, depending on a given culture, perceived as typically feminine or masculine, including semiotic resources such as clothing, hairstyle, makeup choices, body characteristics as well as voice and language (Fiani 2018: 222, Matsuno and Budge 2017: 117, Zimman 2021: 72). With these culturally defined ways of communicating gender through appearance and behavior being available, a person can actively pursue the expression and presentation of a certain gender and/or their gender identity. If a person displays their gender drawing on culturally gender-variant semiotic resources, their gender expression is based on cultural gender norms, with the person being *gender conforming*. However, a person may also deploy resources that do not correspond to such norms (see Stryker 2008: 12, Ackerman 2019: 3), with this “gender non-conformity” also representing “a pattern of gender expression that differs from cultural norms” (Fiani 2018: 59). This person may be called *gender nonconforming*. Crucially, nonbinary people cannot be anticipated to express their gender identity in a certain fashion, that is to say present in a nonbinary way (Zimman 2021: 72), and their gender identity does not necessarily have to match their gender expression and embodiment (Cordoba 2020a: 159). Particularly this fact is important because it points to a relevant aspect of this book: Nonbinary people can use certain features of language to construct identity, but their language use does not depend on their identity.

Meanwhile, how others perceive a person’s gender – based on the way a person expresses their gender and how these others interpret it based on cultural norms – is described using the term *conceptual gender* (Ackerman 2019: 3, Hekanaho 2020: 56). Here, again cisnormativity and heteronormativity play a role because interlocutors are likely to address, for instance a nonbinary speaker, in a fashion that includes gendered ele-

ments in language such as pronouns and agreement patterns, which may be not appropriate to use in relation to this given individual. This – be it intentional or unconscious – incorrect use of language is described with the term *misgendering*, that is to say when gendered language is used that does not match a person’s gender identity (Ansara and Hegarty 2014: 260, Zimman 2017b: 89, Conrod 2018: 4). The concept of being “misgendered” is the opposite of being “appropriately gendered” (Serano 2007: 179), with the latter representing to be the default case in a cisnormative understanding.

Disentangling these various aspects in nonbinary people is key for the present book and the analyses. The reason is that against the background of the gender binary, gender identity, sex assigned at birth and gender expression are often perceived to coincide – a cisnormative and heteronormative perspective –, however, this may not be the case for nonbinary individuals. In the following subsection, I take a detailed look at how the gender binary and gender identity are located in language and vice versa, and how this plays out on the level of linguistic identity construction.

1.2.2 Background

In order to understand both how and why gender is conceptualized the way it is in state-of-the-art academic theories, including the question of how language and gender are linked, it is necessary to briefly review the development of research on gender. This is particularly relevant against the background that early approaches to gender did not allow to theorize nonbinary identity. In this section I sketch early approaches, including their shortcomings, and describe which changes took place in research paradigms that now allow to localize nonbinary identity in language. The section is structured according to the following division of approaches to gender:

Some commentators refer to what I am calling the ‘postmodern’ approach as ‘social constructionism’, opposing this to the ‘essentialism’ of earlier approaches. [...] Other commentators discuss the shift using a terminology of ‘waves’, in which what I am calling ‘modern’ feminism represents the ‘second wave’, and what I am calling ‘postmodern’ the ‘third wave’. [...] One problem that arises with virtually all terminologies—not only ‘modern/postmodern’ or ‘second/third wave’ but also ‘traditional’, ‘older’, ‘newer’, etc.—is that they tend to imply a linear process whereby one paradigm succeeds another in chronological time (Cameron 2005: 483).

Modern and postmodern approaches to gender can again be subdivided according to the different schools and theories that subscribe to the corresponding notions. Therefore, these overarching perspectives will be presented in line with the major strands of

research that have been relevant for linguistics in the past decades when it comes to approaches to gender, namely variationist, interactional, and feminist sociolinguistics.

1.2.2.1 Modern approaches

Early approaches to gender can be characterized by relying on a biologically based binary, using the term ‘sex’ rather than gender. Rooted in physical traits of human beings, claiming there is a natural opposition, the biological binary is mapped on the cultural binary, with the female/male division becoming the feminine/masculine division.

The variationist perspective As regards the variationist perspective, gender is considered “as an independent variable that language variation and change depend on”, meaning it is “assumed to predict or otherwise account for some degree of linguistic variation” (Queen 2013: 374). Two approaches can be distinguished, labelled first-wave and second-wave variationist sociolinguists. In the first wave, speaker sex is a macro-sociological variable, and identities are assumed to be “stable, unified and essential, as they would be based on membership of individuals in specific social categories” (Drummond and Schlee 2016: 51). Hence, this correlation put forward considers language (use) as the result of gender identity. The paradigm shift of the second wave is driven by the observation that language is understood “as a tool with which to ‘do’ identity” (Levon 2021: 39). While this change is of constructionist nature, identity continues to be seen as fixed and stable. Therefore, “this approach focuses on how people use language in different contexts to construct different identities by investigating shared repertoires, values and practices” (Drummond and Schlee 2016: 52).

The interactional perspective The concept of ‘doing’ various kinds of identity originated in sociological and ethnomethodological research (see Garfinkel 1967, Goffman 1977, Goffman 1979, Fenstermaker and West 2002, West and Zimmerman 1987) and is of particular relevance for approaches that assume an interactional perspective, including conversational analysis. Under this notion, gender is viewed as an interactionally relevant accomplishment that is constructed in and through talk. However, while speakers manage their activities locally, their social behavior is determined by overarching structures (Cameron 2005: 486). This is why West and Zimmerman (1987) proposed that gender is not something we have, but rather something we do, with the powerful structures of accountability forcing individuals to do gender in interaction. Hence, “[g]ender is understood as a social construct rather than a ‘given’ social cate-

gory, and speakers are seen as ‘doing’ gender – doing femininity or doing masculinity – in everyday interaction” (Coates and Pichler 2023: 193). The theoretical problem of the *Doing Gender* approach is that gender is theorized as an overall pervading concept. Because of this omnirelevance of gender, which is localized in social practices, it is no longer possible to determine to which extent other social identities such as age, ethnicity, race, religion, status, etc. influence social interaction. This includes the question of how language use and gender are actually connected. Gender is conceived as a dominant category that is more impactful than anything else in society. At the same time, the omnirelevance of gender rules out the question of its origins. If individuals are always bound to follow socially constructed understandings of femininity and masculinity, then they may deviate from these patterns and behavior, but they are not able to change these. Individuals’ only option is to act in accordance with ready-made scripts of feminine and masculine behavior. This analytical problem arises by mixing micro-sociological and macro-sociological processes (see the overview by Hirschauer 2016: 116–118).

The feminist perspective A third approach to gender emerged as part of the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s which put to the fore “the ways in which language use helped to keep women in their (subordinate) place” (Coates and Pichler 2023: 188), and can therefore be called the feminist perspective. In her work, Robin Lakoff (1973, 1975) puts forward the idea of a “women’s language” which is a marked register comprising, for instance, the use of tag questions and intensifiers. These “were thought to be culturally deficient because they indicated, among other qualities, hesitancy and uncertainty” (Jones 2016: 212). Research taking such stance is known as the deficit approach. Closely related to this perspective is the dominance approach “which focuses on how women are expected to use language and how their linguistic usages perpetuate their subordinate position in society” (Kiesling 2007: 653). This gender-specific linguistic usage allowed men to dominate female speakers through talk, perpetuating the subordinate position of women to the dominant position of men in society (Coates and Pichler 2023: 188). A central difference between these approaches is the shift that women’s linguistic usage is no longer considered deficient, but men’s styles are problematized (Jones 2016: 213). This view was backed by studies of Zimmerman and West (1975, 1977) who demonstrated that two persons of the same gender barely ever interrupted each other, whereas in mixed-gender dyads men usually interrupted women.

Because these speaking rights were comparable to those of children, the differences in language were explained to relate to male dominance and female subordination. Meanwhile, the difference approach attributes these differences to the diverging socialization of girls and boys, claiming they inhabit different (gender) subcultures – which is why it is also called the subcultural or two-cultures approach (Kiesling 2007: 654, Coates and Pichler 2023: 188). This view was put forward by Maltz and Borker (1982) and further developed by Tannen (1990). A central idea is that women simply have different goals than men. However, with this notion ignoring male dominance, the difference approach was rejected (Coates and Pichler 2023: 193). These perspectives, backed by feminist efforts, have left their traces in activism regarding the equal representation of women and men in language. For instance, *feminization*, which is the use of feminine nouns to refer to women, is pursued to combat the linguistic male bias of the dominance approach and *gender specification*, meaning the mention of split forms, corresponds to the difference approach (Motschenbacher 2015: 29).

All told, modern approaches to gender have witnessed several paradigm shifts. The term ‘sex’ is replaced by ‘gender’, and the understanding emerges that the latter is socio-culturally constructed. Despite said developments, however, a central point of criticism has been the approaches’ presupposition of “an essence at the core of the individual, which is unique, fixed and coherent, and which makes a person recognisably possess a character or personality” (Baxter 2016: 37). This essentialist view of gender was considered problematic because it reduced “the complexities of gender to a homogeneous duality” (Coates and Pichler 2023: 196). This notion propagated the existence of a feminine and a masculine prototype, in turn bringing about the cultural assumption “that men and women are binary opposites” (Jones 2016: 210) which make up the natural gender order (R. Connell 1987). This criticism fueled the emergence of the postmodern turn, which called the homogeneous duality of the gender binary into question.

1.2.2.2 Postmodernist approaches

The social constructionist perspectives bridges modernist and postmodernist approaches, with language use being constitutive of social reality and gender being accomplished through talk (Coates and Pichler 2023: 188). However, more recent social constructionist works treated as postmodernist approaches view gender in a less essentialist fashion, focusing more strongly on the locally performed aspects.

The variationist perspective Under the research paradigm of the variationist perspective, attention is being paid to linguistic features that index social meanings. The latter are understood as stances, personal characteristics, personae and social types (Moore and Podesva 2009: 448-450). Crucially, this puts the focus on a person's "language use in combination with other social practices" (Drummond and Schlee 2016: 54), which constructs identities, whereas previously a single linguistic feature indexed and reflected an entire social category. This approach is known as third-wave variationist sociolinguistics and allows for an investigation that takes the intersectional nature of identity into account. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) put forward five principles that require attention from the interactional perspective: 'emergence', 'positionality', 'indexicality', 'relationality' and 'partialness', which allows them to demonstrate how speakers construct identity in discourse:

The interactional view that we take here has the added benefit of undoing the false dichotomy between structure and agency [...]. On the one hand, it is only through discursive interaction that large-scale social structures come into being; on the other hand, even the most mundane of everyday conversations are impinged upon by ideological and material constructs that produce relations of power. Thus both structure and agency are intertwined as components of micro as well as macro articulations of identity (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 607).

In terms of gender, this means that a single variable feature may still convey meaning, but the latter is mediated and depends on the context the former is used in, and it can only be uncovered by "relating performances of gender to the particularities of the context, rather than treating them all as expressions of some overarching global opposition" (Cameron 2005: 488). As a consequence, these assumptions allow for nonbinary identity construction.

The interactional perspective Moving on to interactional perspectives, the omnirelevance of an essential binary gender and the problem of stable overarching structures proposed in the Doing Gender approach is met with the concepts of *undoing gender* (Hirschauer 2001) and *redoing gender* (West and Zimmerman 2009). The heuristics of undoing gender seek to understand how gender differences function as a powerful – yet limited – tool of providing meaning which, however, operate together with a range of other social differences, each of which also being able to produce inequalities, and how these gender differences in such a multicategorical society are brought into effect or, vice versa, are rendered meaningless (Hirschauer 2016: 123). For instance, Deutsch (2007) argues that gender is undone when social interactions are less gendered or when

gender is irrelevant in interaction. Similarly, gender is undone if “essentialism of binary distinctions between people based on sex category is challenged” (Risman 2009: 83). West and Zimmerman (2009), however, highlight that gender in these interactions still exists, while being less restrictive. Therefore, they label such behavior as redoing gender. Nonetheless, even if gender is undone or redone, making femininity or masculinity less relevant or even irrelevant in interaction, this behavior never renders the allegedly natural gender order itself meaningless because of “accountability to the gender binary itself” (Darwin 2017: 319). This perspective in principle allows to theorize nonbinary identities, although navigating gender beyond the binary is only possible in relation to the very binary options, meaning the latter are either strategically employed or subverted (see the Doing Transgender framework put forward by C. Connell (2010) and Darwin’s (2017) study on Doing Nonbinary Gender). Despite valuable insights, the gender binary remains a key element in this notion. This is problematic because it construes identities beyond the binary as the third gender, contradicting psychological accounts of nonbinary gender (see section 1.2.1).

The feminist perspective The feminist perspective witnessed a central paradigm shift, which is key for the present book. Following the deficit, dominance and difference approaches, the postmodern turn, criticizing the essentialist nature of gender identity while taking intersectional aspects into account, questioned the homogeneity of women and men in general. This novel view shed light on the issue how femininity and masculinity are actually constructed in the first place. This observation, then, is relevant for the question of how nonbinary gender identities are constructed because the focus moves away from “thinking in terms of binary gender difference to thinking in terms of gender diversity” (Cameron 2005: 487).

All told, the vital shift all postmodernist approaches capture is an anti-essentialist, intersectional notion of identity, and the latter is from this perspective “best viewed as the emergent product rather than the pre-existing source of linguistic and other semiotic practices” (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 588). Key concepts in this regard are performativity and indexicality, rooted in a poststructuralist view. These will be described in the upcoming section.

1.2.3 Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism is a postmodernist theory (but postmodernism not a poststructuralist theory) that primarily focuses on language, including its relation to identity, assuming “that language is the place where our sense of self and our identity or ‘subjectivity’ is constructed and performed” (Baxter 2016: 36). The central notion, then, is that language does not reflect an already given social reality, but instead constitutes social reality. In terms of gender, most social constructionist approaches acknowledge that there is a difference between sex and gender, but they rarely question how binary gender, or gender altogether, is brought into being. Poststructuralist works, however, in line with the theory’s central notion, assume that identities are a product of power and dominant structures, and meaning is produced within language, constructing gender, including the binary opposition. Hence, gender is rather considered as fluid and not as having clear-cut oppositions. Conceptualizing gender on theoretical accounts in this fashion “creates space for a focus on non-binary and transgender identities” (Mullany and Howard 2023: 232).

To understand the poststructuralist perspective of language, it is first necessary to review the key concept of structuralism and which perspectives divide these theoretical approaches. Structuralism according to Saussure (1916, 1974) considers language as a system. The latter “is composed of signs, which are divided into ‘signifiers’ (e.g., words, sounds, visual images) and ‘signifieds’ (concepts). Individual signs (whether in speech, writing or multimodal forms of text) do not have intrinsic meaning but acquire meanings through their relationship with and difference from other signs” (Baxter 2016: 36). In terms of the relation between the signifier and the signified, Saussure (1916) argues that the sign is arbitrary. Drawing on Saussure’s theory, a poststructuralist perspective of language challenges structuralist assumptions, particularly backed by the concepts of *différance* and *iterability* put forward by Derrida (1991, 1978 [1967b], 1976 [1967a]) who argued for the non-fixity of meaning:

According to Derrida, the meaning of signs emerges not only in their difference from other words, sounds or images, but also from the way signs are subject to an endless deferral. By this he means that any representation of meaning can only be fixed temporarily as it depends upon its discursive context. Signifiers are always located within a discursive context so that the temporary fixing of meaning, which comes from the reading of an image, word or text, will be dependent upon that particular context. Texts are constantly open to rereading and reinterpretation both within the particular context and, of course, when/if they are shifted to other contexts. Thus, the meaning of texts can never be fixed

finally as knowable and immutable but is always a 'site' for contestation and redefinition by different readings within varying contexts (Baxter 2016: 36).

Hence, from a structuralist perspective, the relation of form and meaning that is stable regardless of context is a central assumption. From a poststructuralist perspective, however, this view is superseded by the assumption that context is a crucial element when it comes to the question of how signs acquire meaning. The relevance of context in poststructuralism is operationalized using the Foucauldian view of discourses (Foucault 1972), which “encompass not only ideas, concepts, and values of a society, but also the institutions and practices that are intimately tied to and mutually reinforcing of those ideas” (Kiesling 2007: 657). Drawing on the concept of discourses has the advantage that it allows to trace how meaning emerges in its broadest sense, including the construction of social identities, while accounting for their unstableness and fluidity. This poststructuralist notion is relevant for the present book because it allows to investigate gender identity, including how it emerges and it is maintained. In addition, the approach also links identity to language.

Within poststructuralist linguistics, queer linguistics is a theoretical strand that is primarily concerned with the linguistic construction of heteronormativity and its stabilizer, the normative gender binary (Motschenbacher 2012: 94). Queer linguistics has adapted questions relevant to queer theory to the field of linguistics (see Barrett 2002, Davis, Zimman, and Raclaw 2014, Hall 2013, Motschenbacher 2010). Queer theory was motivated in the first place by “people whose gender identities patently are not determined by the sex of their bodies at birth or by their early socialization”, such as transgendered individuals (Cameron 2005: 490). Prior theories fell short of explaining the emergence of such identities. Therefore, with the aim of exploring how nonbinary people employ language to construct nonbinary identity, drawing on this research paradigm is useful for the present book because approaches informed by Queer Linguistics “question such dominant discourses as gender binarism [...] and aim to destabilise them by exposing the heterogeneity and cultural relativity of linguistic gender construction” (Motschenbacher 2016: 68).

In the upcoming sections, two key concepts will be presented in more detail to theorize how language and identity are interwoven, and why gender therefore emerges in interaction.

1.2.3.1 Performativity

The notion of performativity assumes that “identity does not represent a set of pre-existing, static truths but is rather an emergent, contextual, and intersubjective phenomenon that is constantly open to renegotiation” (Davis, Zimman, and Raclaw 2014: 3). This assumption is relevant for the present book as it allows to theorize both nonbinary identities as well as the crucial relation of language and gender. In this understanding, gender identity does not trigger a certain linguistic behavior, but instead, gender identity is the result of language use.

The concept of performativity has been put forward by Judith Butler (1990) which “is a way of inverting the causal relationship between gendered life experiences and gendered language/speech acts” (Conrod 2018: 5). While not a linguist, she draws on the speech act theory of J. L. Austin (1962) which posits that “performative verbs effect change in the world through language under appropriate social conditions” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a: 381). For instance, the utterance *I declare open the Games ...* at the Olympic Games ceremony is a linguistic social action, bringing about the effect that the athletic competition is kicked off. Notably, this illocution is only felicitous when uttered by a speaker with the institutional power and authority in a certain time and space. Then, such illocutions “do not describe pre-existing states but literally call them into being” (Baxter 2016: 39-40). Butler argues that gender is as performative as a speech act in the sense that it is invoked under felicitous conditions, stating “[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a ‘natural’ kind of being” (Butler 1990: 32). This view suggests that a person does not *have* a gender but accomplishes gender by *performing* acts that constitute femininity and masculinity. Crucially, said repeated stylization is not limited to physical traits and presentation, but includes “the resources of linguistic variation, from the pronunciation of particular vowels to the selection of whole codes” (Cameron 2005: 491) that contribute to performing gender. Such performative acts then constitute “the identity it is purported to be” (Butler 1990: 33). Central under this view is that the gender binary is no longer anchored in the biological distinction of bodies or sexual identity, and can therefore not be seen as an essential aspect of a person’s identity.

Butler replaces the essential biological perspective by a Foucauldian view of discourse through which gender is constructed. Discourses are “practices which system-

atically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972: 49 [1969]), meaning they constitute a “system of statements which cohere around common meanings and values” (Hollway 1983: 131). Butler therefore assumes that identities – or subjectivities, as she puts it – are contextually and historically induced. The historicity is relevant because discourses have created certain gender practices that have become the norm for a gender identity. Now being hegemonic practices in a given society, ‘citing’ and reiterating these norms is mandatory for an individual to perform a recognizable and legitimate identity. The reason is that a violation of such gender norms corresponds to a subversion of dominant gender ideologies. For instance, Davis, Zimman, and Raclaw (2014: 3) provide an overview of studies that have shown how linguistic practices of gender crossing demonstrate that “femininity and masculinity can be detached from the bodies to which they are ideologically linked, with language playing a crucial role in this process” (see Gaudio 1997, Gaudio 2009, Hall and O’Donovan 1996, Jackson 2003, Livia 2000, Manalansan 1995, and Murray 2003). This research highlights that the use of linguistic and other semiotic practices have to “meet socially imposed norms or regulations of gender-appropriateness” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004b: 491), demonstrating the relevance of performativity, with speakers being bound to adhere to normative cultural acts of performing gender which include language. Butler (1990) argues that the citation of discursively anchored and ideologically linked gender performances maintain and reify the *heterosexual matrix*, which is the notion that sex determines (binary) gender, and gender determines (hetero)sexuality. Crucially, this discourse or ideology “privileges heterosexuality and cisgenderness, making any person whose sex, gender, and/or sexuality deviates from these normativities” (Cordoba 2020b: 880) – in Butler’s terms – ‘unintelligible’. Butler (1990) puts forward that people’s engagement in these cultural acts is repeated on a daily basis and that therefore the awareness that gender is performed vanishes. Therefore, the repeated stylization becomes unconscious, and gender performativity is no longer perceived as a performance but instead considered natural (Jones 2016: 212). Therefore, gendered subjects are considered a product of power structures, while the naturalization of gender is an effect of discourses.

Performativity, then, puts to the fore the discursive nature of gender, with a woman being a woman because she constantly performs culturally negotiated social practices that construct a woman, rendering her identity as feminine, and the same is true for men. Note that criticism of the kind this view would neglect the existence of biological differences as well as language would alter physical traits is unjustified.

The notion does not reject a person's internal awareness of their gender identity either. However, the decisive point is how this internal awareness aligns with the socially dominant conceptualization of a gender identity, that is to say how a person with a given gender identity can become intelligible in discourse – and society. Hence, this perspective highlights that “the way we conceptualize sex/gender is molded socially and discursively” (Hekanaho 2020: 55). This means that everybody, including speakers but also linguists analyzing gender, look at gender through the ideological lens. The concept of performativity therefore provides a useful analytical notion to investigate “how people use linguistic resources to produce gender differentiation” because “it acknowledges the instability of identities and therefore of the behaviour in which those identities are performed” (Cameron 1997: 49). Particularly, it allows to investigate not only how women and men are constructed, but also how nonbinary people perform and construct identity. The latter view is motivated by the understanding that, while gender performances are usually unintentional acts, reifying dominant gender practices, Butler “acknowledges that an element of deliberate action is potentially present in those performances that challenge or subvert dominant ideologies” (Bucholtz and Hall 2004a: 381). Hence, individual speakers in principle can alter gender performance to achieve a gender identity that is nonbinary. In order to understand how gender performance is enacted, it is necessary to consider the system of indexes which operates within discourse. This mechanism is presented in the upcoming section.

1.2.3.2 Indexicality

Having described that gender is a discursive phenomenon that is performed through social practices, this section elaborates on the question of how language is connected to gender identity. The crucial link in this regard is the concept of indexicality or contextually bound meaning, refining the notion of performativity. Ochs (1992) proposes two kinds of relations between language and gender:

The first and less common is the direct indexical relation, as when a personal pronoun indexes gender of speaker or a kin term **indexes** gender of speaker and referent. [...] The second relates gender to language through some other social meaning indexed. In this second relation, certain social meanings are more central than others. These meanings however help to **constitute** other domains of social reality. That is, a domain such as stance helps to constitute the image of gender (Ochs 1992: 343, emphasis in original).

Direct indexes of gender are those that are meant to be applied for either women or men, which applies to a range of features in Russian and Czech (see typological overview in