
An experimental investigation of the denotation of German masculine nouns

Cornelia Ebert*¹, Anna Pia Jordan-Bertinelli^{†2}, Stefan Hinterwimmer*², and Robin Hörnig³

¹Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main – Germany

²Bergische Universität Wuppertal – Germany

³Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen = Eberhard Karls University of Tuebingen – Germany

Abstract

In German, nouns are obligatorily marked for grammatical gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter). For nouns denoting (sets of) humans, it is debated whether nouns in the masculine form (which is, in most cases, morphologically unmarked) denote (sets of) male as well as female or non-binary individuals having the relevant property or whether they denote (sets of) male individuals exclusively. In two acceptability rating studies, we investigated whether the interpretation of the masculine form exclusively referring to male humans is triggered by a conversational implicature, and, hence, can be canceled or enforced by a fitting context.

Keywords: generic masculine, acceptability rating study, conversational implicature

*Speaker

[†]Corresponding author: ap.jordan-bertinelli@posteo.de