The social deixis of gender boundaries: person naming practices in Croatian
Outline

- Gender and indexicality
- Social deixis
- Societal pragmatics and the pragmatic perspective
- Croatian naming practices for people
- Material analyzed:
  - Newspaper and grammars (*production study*)
  - Attitudes of gender activists and politicians about gender-fair language use (*expert interviews*)
  - Effects of naming practices with regard to gendered perceptions of people (*perception study*)
- General results and findings
- Conclusion: Naming practices and the indexing of gender boundaries
Gender and indexicality

Indexicality:
- Relations of utterances to different dimensions of the context
- Society, and, hence, socially accepted/expected/constructed ways of living in a gendered world, is a major contextual dimension (Goffman 1977: Gender, not religion, is the opiate of the masses)
- „...few features of language directly and exclusively index gender“ (Ochs 1992).

Indirect indexicality:
- Gendered (or, rather, supposedly gendered) ways of linguistic interaction

Direct indexicality:
- Explicit encoding of gender in language use
- „...utterances may pragmatically presuppose genders of speakers, addressees, overhearers, and referents“ (Ochs 1992).
Social deixis

The use of linguistic expressions to contextualize people in their social environment.

Three traditional categories of deixis:

- Person (I, you, her)
- Time (then, now, later)
- Place (there, where)
- Discourse deixis (text as context)
- Social deixis (marking of the social status of speaker, referents, addressee...)

Societal pragmatics and the pragmatic perspective

Macro-perspective needs to be analyzed in order to understand the micro-perspective

Societal structures in language use

Societal discourse rather than individual choices determining language use

Felicity conditions of speech acts determined by social believe systems

Mey, Jacob L. 2010: „Speech acting is a free choice: the user picks a suitable act he or she perceives as the relevant context. But the fact itself of speech acting, including the rights afforded and the limits set, is a matter of societal concern.“
Naming gender when naming people:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Croatian</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jedan mali učenik, koji je sanjao da bi bio velik.</td>
<td>Ein kleiner Schüler, der davon träumte, er wäre groß.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jedna mala učenica, koja je sanjala da bi bila velika.</td>
<td>Eine kleine Schülerin, die davon träumte, sie wäre groß.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svaki radnik ima pravo na odmor.</td>
<td>Jeder Arbeiter hat ein Recht auf Urlaub.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bili smo u gradu.</td>
<td>Wir waren in der Stadt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A(+mask) little(+mask) pupil(+mask) who(+mask) dreamt(+mask) of being(+mask) big(+mask).</td>
<td>Eine kleine Schülerin, die davon träumte(+fem), sie wäre (+fem) groß(+fem).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every(+mask) worker(+mask) is entitled to holidays.</td>
<td>Jeder Arbeiter hat ein Recht auf Urlaub.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Binary naming of gender in conventionalized naming practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Croatian</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ja sam feministkinja</td>
<td>I am a feminist (+FEM)</td>
<td>Ich bin Feministin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ja sam feminist</td>
<td>I am a feminist (+MASC)</td>
<td>Ich bin Feminist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti si gladan</td>
<td>You are hungry (+MASC)</td>
<td>Du bist hungrig (+MASK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti si gladna</td>
<td>You are hungry (+FEM)</td>
<td>Du bist hungrig (+FEM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oni su braća</td>
<td>They (+MASC) are brothers</td>
<td>Sie (+MASK) sind Brüder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One su sestre</td>
<td>They (+FEM) are sisters</td>
<td>Sie (+FEM) sind Schwestern</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Standardization of person naming practices
- eight grammars from the years 1970-2012
- analysis of the representation of grammatical gender, derivation, congruence, gender etc.
- aim of the study: tracing discourse formations and influential processes of standardization

Conventionalization of person naming practices
- nation-wide daily newspaper *Vjesnik*
- years 1998 and 2010, six issues per year:
  - 12 issues
  - 1,334 articles
  - 12,252 substantival pers. app.
- aim of the study: tracing conventional person naming practices in public language use
Some results:

**Grammars:**

Strong tendency to mingle explanations of the use of grammatical gender with conceptualizations of social gender.

Rare explanations of the linguistic norm of using masculine word forms generically when talking about people.

**Vjesnik:**

Little usage of possible gender-neutral appellation forms.

Clear dominance of appellation forms and actual depictions of men.

Strong tendency for naming women by explicity referring to gender (žena, supruga, trudnica, rodljva, majka...).

Little change in the diachronic perspective.
Alternative strategies of naming people:
Webpages and publications from feminist and queer organizations
Jedna mala učenica, koja je sanjala da bi bila velika.

+ 

Jedan mali učenik, koji je sanjao da bi bio velik.

= 

Jedana malai učenikica, kojai je sanjaola da bi biola velika.
Croatian gender experts’ views on the role of language use:

- nine interviews (guided to open)
- March and April 2014, Zagreb
- 30 to 60 minutes each
- Qualitative content analysis, Maxqda

Getting back aim of the study:

Ground information and first-hand impressions regarding alternative language usage in Croatia
Expert interviews:  
The meaning of gender-fair language use

RKP  je li Vam jezik, jezični seksizam i sve to uopće, ehm, tema tu u Uredu? (ŠR)  
sad ste rekle da su mediji važni, mislite da je i jezik važan? (PB)

Answers

• mhm (SaSar)
• jeste (ŠR)
• jako je važan i mi jako puno inzistiramo na jeziku (PB)
• da, nama je to izuzetno važno da koristimo rodno osjetljiv jezik (NB)
• da, da, je! (DM)
• ja mislim da je to jako bitno (AB)
Expert interviews:
*Critical stance towards norms*

i to je, kao, od nekih su argumenti kao tehnički je to jako zahtjevno imati takve tekstove. a drugo, to je kao isto gramatički, ja kad mi neko to kaže, mislim, *meni je to smiješno, eh, stvarno, da bi gramatički muški rod bio univerzalan, a ženski ne bi mogao biti univerzalan* (PZ)

i onda, ne znam, od jedne osobe sam baš čula taj neki argument, kao, da je, eh, muški rod, kao, i kod osoba koje su zapravo dosta ono (.) feministkinje su, kao, muški rod je gramatički ispravan. ali, mislim, *ne postoji to... nije da nešto u osnovi ima gramatičku ispravnost, nego mi tvorimo, mi nečemu prepisujemo ispravnost* (MM)
Analysis of the effect of different forms of naming people practices in Croatian:

- online study, limesurvey
- three questionnaires containing 16 questions that varied regarding the naming practice
- used to name fictive groups of people respondents were asked to designate with first names
- resulting in a sum of 5,984 gender specific names
- 142 completed questionnaires
- aim of the study: testing the possibility of different naming practices to be perceived in a balanced way with regard to gender
Analyzed forms in the perception study

I: masculine naming practice
   dva pisca (two writers+MASC)
   četiri biciklista (four bicyclists+MASC)

II: neutral naming practice
   osobe, koje pišu romane (persons who write novels)
   grupa od četiri osobe biciklom ide
   (a group of four persons goes by bicycle)

III: slash-variant
   dva spisatelja/dvije spisateljice (two writers+MASC/+FEM)
   četiri biciklista/kinje (four bicyclists+MASC/+FEM)
Gender specification of designated first names according to the naming practice used in the questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire / naming practice</th>
<th>Male first names</th>
<th>Female first names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I: Androg. Masc.</strong> (n=3.323)</td>
<td>2391 (=72%)</td>
<td>932 (=28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II: Neutral</strong> (n=1.246)</td>
<td>760 (=61%)</td>
<td>486 (=39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III: Slash</strong> (n=1.415)</td>
<td>728 (=51%)</td>
<td>687 (=49%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Central aspects and results:

• Person naming practices in languages with strong grammatical gender features most often conceptualize gender in a dichotomous way as either female or male and, accordingly, provide a steady ground for the ruling binary gender conceptualizations and gender hierarchies.

• Grammatical rules and linguistic norms cannot be seen as neutral or as free of ideology. This is true not only for puristic and nationalist tendencies, but also, and even to some greater extent, regarding socially accepted gender norms.

• Linguistic contexts with rigid and clearly dichotomizing norm patterns in personal naming practices can provoke specifically creative ways of alternative naming practices.

• Doing research on a Slavic language makes it very clear why linguistic analysis is so important for Gender studies altogether.

• Strives for gender-fair language use can function as a very general way of social criticism, as they can explicitly show a non-conforming attitude.
Conclusion

Different naming practices in Croatian have different effects on readers’ perceptions of the referents’ gender, showing that gendered naming practices are a matter of presupposition of (assumed) gender realities/identies of people.

Such presuppositions seem to be what Ochs and others have in mind when considering the indexing of gender, yet, the feature of grammatical gender being very closely delimited in its arbitrariness is mainly seen as a mere grammatical feature of a given language, making its social implications inconceivable.

The fact that people are obliged to choose between one of two possible realizations of an deictic item when naming people in languages like Croatian, makes person naming practices a special field of social deixis, where speakers, addressees, referents and readers/hearers are expected to already have clear cognitive concepts of the social gender of people.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!