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Gender and language in online job advertisements – a cross-cultural study.

Lea Hodel, Magdalena Formanowicz, Sabine Sczesny, Jana Valdova & Lisa von Stockhausen
University of Duisburg-Essen, University of Bern, University of South Bohemia, Budweis

The aim of this project is to investigate the use of gender-fair language from a cross-linguistic perspective. Specifically, we are interested in whether the use of gender-fair language correlates with socio-economic rankings of gender equality and with structural features of a language. We decided to analyze online job advertisements, as they reflect common language use and can easily be compared across languages. Moreover, formulations in job advertisements have been shown to impact personnel selection via the way target groups are addressed and referred to. In the present study we examined to what extent job advertisements are formulated in a gender-fair way and how this correlates with factors such as language, culture as well as status and gender-typicality of the job advertised.

The data consisted of job advertisements published online in four European countries which occupy different positions in socio-economic rankings of gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2011): Switzerland (10), Austria (rank 34), Poland (42), and Czech Republic (75). We randomly selected 100 job advertisements from four lines of business characterized by different proportions of female employees – steels/metals, science, restaurants/food services, and health care. The advertisements were analyzed with regard to the linguistic form of the job title and the remaining text; we also noted indicators of job status, reference to gender-typical traits, pictures of women/men and other information which might be relevant to the use of gender-fair language (e.g., equal opportunity policies).

A first analysis of the data indicates that the phrasing of job titles is closely related to the gender-typicality of a profession. While mainly gender-fair forms are used in healthcare, masculine forms are used more often in the domain of steels and metals. Feminine forms only, however, are almost never used. Cultural differences as well as correlations with associated variables will be discussed.