

## GENDER-FAIR LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF CSR - HOW MUCH LANGUAGE RESPONSIBILITY DO ORGANIZATIONS HAVE?

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	30
II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	31
A. Gender Linguistics and Corporate Communication	31
B. Gender-fair Language in the Context of Gender Justice and Law	34
III. CASE	36
A. Status Quo	36
B. The Importance of Language in Change Processes	36
IV. CONCLUSION	40

## I. INTRODUCTION

The introduction and implementation of gender-fair language in organizations is a diversity measure and should be understood in the context of social justice and sustainability. Recently, this topic has received increasing attention, as a study conducted in 2021 by Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences in collaboration with Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) shows: 16 out of 30 DAX companies already gender or plan to introduce gender-fair language.<sup>1</sup> The only DAX company that has so far consistently changed its language to gender-fair wording is the VW subsidiary AUDI.

With the increasing focus on diversity and gender-fair language, the question of uniform guidelines and regulations that aid but also serve as sanctions is becoming more and more important: It is a question of (linguistic) compliance and the associated responsibilities. First, it must be clarified what is meant by the term *compliance*. This differs depending on the discipline. Often, the term *compliance* is used in the context of corruption or white-collar crime. It is about complying with legal requirements (corporate governance laws) or self-imposed guidelines such as the German Corporate Governance Code (*Deutscher Corporate Governance Kodex (DCGK)*). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN as part of the 2030 Agenda could also be subsumed under this heading.<sup>2</sup>

We understand compliance as the fulfillment of ethical standards in entrepreneurial action. From a linguistic perspective, compliance is characterized by specific linguistic features of self-commitment that serve an obligation function. Compliance therefore combines ethical and moral elements with legal requirements and has a motivating character for employees in terms of tone of voice.<sup>3</sup> The selection of verbs in compliance guidelines clearly shows this; these include, for example, *versprechen*, *sich verpflichten* or *garantieren* (*promise, commit, guarantee*). In this way, compliance guidelines are also a direct expression of the corporate identity of an organization, as we will show in chapter II.A. Laws, rules, guidance, etc., like most of our social world, are linguistic in nature. Social, or societal, conditions are created by language, while at the same time language is shaped by existing societal conditions.<sup>4</sup> Language and mind also influence each other. Language is always in flux and subject to various influences, socio-cultural or legal frameworks, trends, and social developments.

In public discourse, the focus is all too often on the "right" or "wrong" use of language when addressing certain ways of speaking. The topic of gender-fair language in particular is highly controversial. Causes for discussion include the addition of female personal designations in DUDEN Online (for more on this, see chapter II.A), the advocacy or rejection of gender-fair language as an election campaign issue in

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<sup>1</sup> Gustav Theile, *Mehrheit der Dax-Konzerne setzt auf Gendersprache*, faz.net. 3,25 (2021). <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/wirtschaft/unternehmen/mehrheit-der-dax-konzerne-setzt-auf-gendersprache-17261408.html> (last access: 03.09.21) - In addition, our thanks go to the project leader of the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, Prof. Dr. Lars Rademacher, who kindly made the entire results of the study available to us.

<sup>2</sup> The SDGs provide a global point of reference for implementing measures for a sustainable society. 231 indicators are intended to make the fulfillment of the goals nationally measurable and internationally comparable. Goal 5 concerns gender equality: women and girls should be empowered worldwide. However, gender-fair language is not listed in the subgoals and indicators. The relevance of the institutional implementation of gender-fair language should not be underestimated. <https://sdg-indikatoren.de/5/> (last access: 02.09.21)

<sup>3</sup> For communicating compliance policies in practice, see: <https://www.compliance-manager.net/fachartikel/wie-ein-werte-basierter-verhaltenskodex-die-compliance-kultur-foerdert-1222417519> (last access: 07.09.21).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Burel, Simone (2017): Vorständin und Allround-Papa: Geschlechterstereotype in der Online-Kommunikation in beruflichen Kontexten. In: *10plus1 Living Linguistics* 3: P. 121-139.

the 2021 federal election in Germany, the case of a female bank customer in the Saarland (Germany) who filed a lawsuit against the use of the so-called generic masculine<sup>5</sup> in forms, and the case of an employee of the car manufacturer AUDI who filed a lawsuit against the newly introduced gender strategy and the accompanying obligation to use gender-fair language.<sup>6</sup> The latter case shows: A pure top-down introduction of guidelines on gender-fair language causes resistance. The question arises: What does it take for language guidelines to be implemented and actually "lived" as part of CSR - namely as language responsibility?

The article answers these questions on the basis of a case study that we conducted: As part of a change process, the *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* recognized that employees must also be involved in the process in order to ensure the sustainable anchoring of gender-fair language in the corporate culture – since they will be the ones actually using this language. For this reason, the *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* had planned the introduction of a guideline for inclusive language. On the one hand, this guideline includes gender-fair language that is intended to address people of all genders; on the other hand, it includes criteria for low-barrier language, which also has an inclusive character due to its easy comprehensibility.

The aim of this article is to sharpen the view on interactions between linguistic guidelines (top-down) and participatory feedback culture (bottom-up) in the paradigm of genderlinguistic language awareness and responsibility. In the following sections, therefore, we first provide a theoretical classification in the context of gender linguistics and corporate communication as well as related legal issues, then we present the case, and finally we address questions regarding the transferability of the case.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### A. Gender Linguistics and Corporate Communication

At the moment, the use of gender-fair language in companies is mainly a matter of reputation and strategically addressing certain target groups, e.g. women, LGBTQIA\*, or younger people, who value diversity aspects of organizations in communication.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, it is to be located in the context of organizational identity (*corporate identity*).

Corporate identity refers to “the strategically planned and operationally deployed self-presentation and behavior of a company internally and externally on the basis of a defined corporate philosophy, a long-

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<sup>5</sup> The so-called generic masculinum „bezeichnet den Sprachgebrauch, dass männliche Bezeichnungen für alle Personen ‚gelten‘, d. h. dass z. B. *Schüler* eine neutrale Bezeichnung für Schüler\*innen jeglichen Geschlechts sei [...]. Dabei ist es nicht so, dass dieses sogenannte generische oder geschlechtsübergreifende Maskulinum schon immer die Standardverwendung war.“ (Müller-Spitzer, Carolin (2021): Geschlechtergerechte Sprache: Zumutung, Herausforderung, Notwendigkeit? In: Sprachreport 37(2), S. 1-12. S. 1.)

<sup>6</sup> The lawsuit filed by *Sparkasse* customer Marlies Krämer is discussed in more detail in section 2.2. Background information on the Audi employee's lawsuit are to be found here: <https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/unternehmen/audi-gender-klage-101.html> (last accessed: 06.09.2021)

<sup>7</sup> According to a representative survey conducted by the career portal *Stepstone 2020* together with *Handelsblatt*, 77% of respondents are more likely to apply to a company that stands for diversity, tolerance and openness. More than 60% of participants said they currently do not see equal opportunities in decisions about job appointments. *Stepstone und Handelsblatt Media Group Diversity Studie (2020), Wie vielfältig die Arbeitswelt wirklich ist*, <https://www.stepstone.de/wissen/diversity/> (last access: 07.09.2021)

term corporate objective and a defined (target) image - with the intention of presenting all the company's instruments of action internally and externally in a uniform framework."<sup>8</sup>

Here, a line can be drawn to the area of compliance. The genres of texts in which organizations define their corporate identity and thus (among other things) their values, form the basis for ethical guidelines and compliance regulations. These include, for example, the text types *vision*, *mission statement*, *corporate history* and *corporate philosophy*. Compliance is therefore first and foremost communication. A linguistic study of these text genres makes this clear: In 2015, almost half of the DAX 30 companies ascribed to themselves the values *integrity* and *responsibility*, as can be seen from text genres that constitute a company's corporate identity (e.g., mission statement, vision, mission).<sup>9</sup> By now, many companies also explicitly mention the terms *diversity* and *inclusion*.<sup>10</sup> This also includes the use of gender-fair language. Using gender-equitable language "should be understood as "implementing the principle of gender-fair language in one's own language production in a way that is appropriate to the situation, appropriate to the subject matter, i.e. correct in terms of content, understandable and appealing".<sup>11</sup>

If an organization decides to introduce gender-fair language, this also directly affects corporate identity, in several ways: on the one hand, the value of gender equality is established as a value of the organization; on the other hand, the entire corporate communication has the task of using gender-fair language consistently.

The aim of gender-fair language is to try to overcome old and familiar, but social disproportions, through linguistic patterns and thus also to influence people's mind. As Horvath/Sczesny explain: "languages differ in the linguistic forms they provide to refer to women and men. In languages with grammatical gender [e.g. German] most human nouns and pronouns are gender-marked and are differentiated for feminine and masculine. In English, on the other hand, which is a natural-gender language, most human nouns are gender-neutral and gender marking is largely restricted to pronouns (*he/she*). [...] In both types of languages, however, masculine-male forms (nouns and pronouns) are used as generics which means that they are used as forms referring to *both* women and men. [...] Past research on the interpretation of masculine generics in comparison to gender-fair forms has consistently demonstrated that the masculine forms are associated with a male bias in mental representations."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Translation by SB/FS. Original wording: „die strategisch geplante und operativ eingesetzte Selbstdarstellung und Verhaltensweise eines Unternehmens nach innen und außen auf Basis einer festgelegten Unternehmensphilosophie, einer langfristigen Unternehmenszielsetzung und eines definierten (Soll-)Images – mit dem Willen, alle Handlungsinstrumente des Unternehmens in einheitlichem Rahmen nach innen und außen zur Darstellung zu bringen“ Birkigt, Klaus; Stadler, Marinus M. und Hans Joachim Funk (Hrsg.) (2002): *Corporate Identity. Grundlagen – Funktionen – Fallbeispiele*. 11., überarbeitete und aktualisierte Auflage. München: moderne industrie.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Burel, Simone (2015): *Identitätspositionierungen der DAX-30-Unternehmen: Die sprachliche Konstruktion von Selbstbildern in Repräsentationstexten*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.

<sup>10</sup> For example, the DAX-30 company Merck: *Diversity and Inclusion*, <https://www.merckgroup.com/en/careers/diversity-and-inclusion.html> (last access: 02.09.21)

<sup>11</sup> Translation by SB/FS. Original wording: verwenden „sei zu verstehen als „situationsangemessen, sachangemessen, d.h. inhaltlich korrekt, verständlich und ansprechend den Grundsatz der geschlechtergerechten Sprache in der eigenen Sprachproduktion umsetzen“. Dieward, Gabriele und Anja Steinhauer (2020): *Handbuch geschlechtergerechte Sprache: Wie Sie angemessen und verständlich gendern*. Berlin: Dudenverlag. P. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Horvath, Lisa Kristina and Sabine Sczesny (2016): Reducing women's lack of fit with leadership positions? Effects of the wording of job advertisements. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 25. P. 316-328.

The connection between language and social conditions has already been postulated in the introduction. A look at the history of language and language change shows that social developments are also driven by changes in language use. This is because languages adapt flexibly to the ever-changing needs of society for communication.<sup>13</sup> A "living language develops essentially through acts of speaking and writing by those participating in the language."<sup>14</sup> However, language change has always also generated fear and criticism. Often, the groups that judge "right" or "wrong" language use have little experience with discrimination or linguistic interactions. For such a change, it is therefore indispensable to raise awareness and understanding. This is the prerequisite for acceptance of the (linguistic) change.<sup>15</sup> The management of an organization therefore has a high level of responsibility for language, because it must personally stand for and behind the change. Language awareness must be created among all employees so that they accept the change process positively and do not block it. Therefore, a form of accompanying meta-communication that supports this understanding is recommended as change communication in any case. In order to "meet the demands of employees, successful change communication creates dialog situations, thereby shaping relationships between management and employees and ideally leading to the optimization of communication activities."<sup>16</sup>

An organization's specific choice of words in change communication is not incidental: it helps shape the attitudes of organizational members and the construction of (organizational) realities. It also has an influence on much more, e.g., on the social impact of gender-fair language; this has been proven by numerous studies from psychology and linguistics.

For example, women are more likely to feel addressed in the text genre *job advertisement* when both forms, gender asterisk or neutral wording are used than by the generic masculine or a reference in brackets (e.g. *m/w/d*).<sup>17</sup> Girls are more likely to feel confident about taking a stereotypically male job if the female job title (*Ingenieurin*) is mentioned in addition to the male job title (*Ingenieur*).<sup>18</sup>

However, many organizations still prefer to use the masculine form in texts that require precise and legally compliant wording for fear of waves of lawsuits or poorer Google ranking in SEO. The DUDEN has made just 2021 an advance and in its on-line dictionary all 12,000 person designations also in female form taken up (*Lehrer/Lehrerin*). It was criticized for it among other things by the conservative *Verein Deutsche Sprache e. V.* (VDS – German Language Association), which stated in a press release:

"The Verein Deutsche Sprache e. V. calls on all friends of the German language to oppose the current efforts of the Duden editorial team to reorganize the German language. For example, the Duden's website abolishes the generic masculine, which is firmly anchored in German grammar and modern usage: 'Tenant: Noun, masculine - male person who has rented something.' Accordingly, women could

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Keller, Rudi (2014): *Sprachwandel. Von der unsichtbaren Hand in der Sprache*. Tübingen: Francke.

<sup>14</sup> Translation by SB/FS. Original wording: „lebendige Sprache entwickelt sich im Wesentlichen durch Sprech- und Schreibhandlungen der an der Sprache Teilnehmenden.“ Müller-Spitzer 2021: P. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Wagner, Eike und Stefanie Guse (2015): Herausforderungen und Erfolgsfaktoren von Change-Kommunikation. In: Hundt, Markus und Dorota Biadala (Hrsg.): *Handbuch Sprache in der Wirtschaft*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter. P. 177-199.

<sup>16</sup> Translation by SB/FS. Original wording: „Ansprüchen [der Mitarbeiter:innen] gerecht zu werden, schafft erfolgreiche Veränderungskommunikation Dialogsituationen, gestaltet dadurch Beziehungen zwischen Führung und Mitarbeiterschaft und führt im Idealfall zur Optimierung der Kommunikationsaktivitäten.“ Ibid. P. 194.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Horvath and Sczesny 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Anne Klostermann, *Geschlechtergerechte Sprache beeinflusst kindliche Wahrnehmung von Berufen*, idw-online, 6,9 (2015). <https://idw-online.de/de/news632492> (last access: 06.09.21)

not be tenants. In doing so, the Duden not only contradicts the rules of German grammar, but also the Federal Court of Justice, which in March 2018 held in the last instance that the term 'the customer' addressed people of any gender. The complaint of the plaintiff, who wanted to be addressed as 'customer' by her savings bank, was recently rejected by the Federal Constitutional Court.<sup>19</sup>

This criticism must be countered by the fact that the Duden is not prescriptive, i.e. it does not prescribe, but descriptive, i.e. it describes the current use of language in society. That is, it does not prescribe how to speak, but includes words in its inventory that are used frequently enough in society. With formulations such as firmly anchored or last-instance, the association quoted above indicates a rejection of social and linguistic change processes, which, however, can no longer be dismissed in 2021. For a closer examination of the so-called generic masculine, we refer to a recent article by Carolin Müller-Spitzer, who shows linguistically and historically that the use of the generic masculine in German is not as old as commonly assumed.<sup>20</sup> The case of a plaintiff savings bank customer mentioned in the association's press release will be discussed in the following chapter, which deals with the question of gender-fair language in legal contexts.

## B. Gender-fair Language in the Context of Gender Justice and Law

What is the legal situation with regard to gender-fair language? In Germany, only public authorities and schools - but not companies - are obliged to adhere to the rules of the Council for German Orthography when it comes to spelling. The Council has not (yet) committed itself to gender-fair spelling in 2021. Nevertheless, numerous universities and municipalities have already published their own guidelines for the handling and use of gender-fair language.<sup>21</sup> A look at other European countries shows a mixed picture: In France, gender-equal language has been banned in schools nationwide by the ministry; in Sweden, on the other hand, the gender-neutral personal pronoun "hen" has been officially introduced.<sup>22</sup>

What does it look like in German law? There are two different levels to consider here: First, whether there are laws that regulate, provide for, or reject the use of gender-fair language. Second, whether legal texts themselves are written in a gender-fair way. German legal texts still predominantly use purely masculine terms to refer to employers, managing directors or shareholders. The *Straßenverkehrsordnung* (Road Traffic Act), however, has already been worded in a largely gender-neutral way since 2013 (e.g. *An Fußgängerüberwegen haben Fahrzeuge mit Ausnahme von Schienenfahrzeugen den zu Fuß Gehenden sowie Fahrenden von Krankenfahrstühlen oder Rollstühlen, welche den Überweg erkennbar benutzen wollen, das Überqueren der Fahrbahn zu ermöglichen*). Single words, such

<sup>19</sup> Translation by SB/FS. Original wording: „Der Verein Deutsche Sprache e. V. fordert alle Freunde der deutschen Sprache auf, den aktuellen Bestrebungen der Dudenredaktion zu einem Umbau der deutschen Sprache entgegenzutreten. So wird auf den Internetseiten des Duden das in der deutschen Grammatik und im modernen Sprachgebrauch fest verankerte generische Maskulinum abgeschafft: ‚Mieter: Substantiv, maskulin – männliche Person, die etwas gemietet hat.‘ Frauen könnten demnach keine Mieter sein. Damit widerspricht der Duden nicht nur den Regeln der deutschen Grammatik, sondern auch dem Bundesgerichtshof, der im März 2018 letztinstanzlich festgehalten hat, dass mit der Bezeichnung ‚der Kunde‘ Menschen jeglichen Geschlechts angesprochen seien. Die Beschwerde der Klägerin, die von ihrer Sparkasse mit ‚Kundin‘ angeredet werden wollte, wurde kürzlich vom Bundesverfassungsgericht abgewiesen.“ Aufruf des Vereins Deutsche Sprache, *Rettet die deutsche Sprache vor dem Duden*, vds-ev. <https://vds-ev.de/allgemein/aufrufe/rettet-die-deutsche-sprache-vor-dem-duden/> (last access: 06.09.2021)

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Müller-Spitzer 2021.

<sup>21</sup> For example, the University of Leipzig as well as the German cities *Hannover, Kiel, Lübeck* and *Köln*.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Laarz, Diana (2021): *Wie gerecht ist Sprache?* In: *Geo* 09/2021. P. 30-38.

as *Fußgängerüberweg*, are still used in the masculine form).<sup>23</sup>

Equal treatment of the sexes is laid down, among other things, in the principle of equality and the prohibitions of discrimination in Article 3 of the Basic Law. Companies or the private sector are bound by the AGG. According to §§ 1, 3 AGG, discrimination on the grounds of gender is prohibited in private business transactions.

As already mentioned, the *Bundesgerichtshof* (*BGH*) dismissed the action of a customer of the defendant savings bank, from whom she demanded the use of forms with female personal designations (e.g., *Kontoinhaberin* (female account holder) instead of *Kontoinhaber* (account holder in the masculine form)). The *BGH* based this decision primarily on the argument that the generic masculine continues to be part of general linguistic usage - even the *Grundgesetz* still uses the generic masculine - and therefore the use of personal designations in the sense of the generic masculine alone does not constitute discrimination within the meaning of the AGG.<sup>24</sup> In the same judgment, however, the *BGH* also concedes that grammatically masculine personal designations, which refer to any natural gender<sup>25</sup>, are criticized as disadvantageous against the background of the question of the discrimination of women by the language system as well as language use, which has been discussed since the 70s of the last century, and are partly no longer perceived as generalizing as naturally as may have been the case in the past.<sup>26</sup>

The *Bundesverfassungsgericht* (*BVerfG*) ultimately did not accept for decision a constitutional complaint by the savings bank customer against the above ruling of the *BGH* because the complainant had not addressed the argument put forward by the *BGH* that the *Grundgesetz* itself uses the generic masculine.<sup>27</sup>

The legal situation is therefore not yet uniform or no one wants to adopt a clear regulation. However, a look at and beyond the law is certainly worthwhile: According to a survey by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (*Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes*), only 2.2 percent of the job advertisements evaluated there contain clear discrimination in the sense of the AGG (over 80 percent of these 2.2 on the basis of gender!) - but more than 20 percent of the job advertisements examined hold a risk of discrimination in that certain groups of people (e.g. men or younger people) are addressed to a particular extent and are thus favored over others.<sup>28</sup>

In order to discuss the topic and corresponding implications more vividly, we have chosen as an example the change process we accompanied at the Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz, in which gender-fair language was implemented in a participatory manner as part of a larger, albeit not legally mandatory, language responsibility. In the following, we describe the (linguistic) steps of the implementation by means of workshops and language guidelines.

<sup>23</sup> Ingo Pickel, *Straßenverkehrsordnung jetzt auch für Frauen*, in *dw made for minds*, 5,17 (2013) <https://www.dw.com/de/stra%C3%9Fverkehrsordnung-jetzt-auch-f%C3%BCr-frauen/a-16821106> (last access: 06.09.21)

<sup>24</sup> *BGH*, Urteil vom 13. März 2018 - VI ZR 143/17 - NJW 2018, 1671 (1675 Rn. 38).

<sup>25</sup> For a critical discussion of the use of masculine personal terms in a "generic" sense, see Müller-Spitzer 2021.

<sup>26</sup> *BGH*, Urteil vom 13. März 2018 - VI ZR 143/17 - NJW 2018, 1671 (1675 Rn. 37).

<sup>27</sup> *BVerfG*, Beschluss vom 26. Mai 2020 - 1 BvR 1074/18 - BeckRS 2020, 13963 Rn. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes (2018): *Diskriminierung in Stellenanzeigen. Studie zur Auswertung von Stellenanzeigen im Hinblick auf Diskriminierung, Ausschlussmechanismen und positive Maßnahmen.*



### III. CASE

#### A. Status Quo

The Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz was founded in 1987 as *Landesmedienanstalt*. At the end of 2020, the state parliament amended the state media law, and since then it has officially been called *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz*. Last year (2020-2021), the Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz also restructured itself organizationally, initiated by the director Dr. Marc Jan Eumann, who has been in office since 2018. The *Medienanstalt* consists of four teams, which handle the core work areas of *Medienregulierung* (media regulation), *Medienförderung* (media support), *Medienkompetenz* (media competence) and *Bürgermedien* (citizen media). *Zentrale Dienste* (central services) and *Kommunikation* (communications) are organized into two *Stabsstellen* (staff units). Another central body is the *Versammlung* (Assembly) of the *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz*, which consists of 42 delegates from various organizations and associations and thus forms an independent decision-making body. The *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* cooperates with 13 other state media authorities (*Landesmedienanstalt*). Their joint activities are bundled in the *Geschäftsstelle der Medienanstalten* (Media Authorities' office) in Berlin. The *Landesmedienanstalten* are financed by the monthly license fee (*Rundfunkbeitrag*), which every household in Germany has to pay. Around 1.9% of the monthly *Rundfunkbeitrag* is earmarked for financing the *Landesmedienanstalten*. This corresponds to 33 cents per household (as of 2021). The *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* works on behalf of the approximately 4 million inhabitants of the federal state of *Rheinland-Pfalz*.

#### B. The Importance of Language in Change Processes

The director of the *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz*, who has been in office since 2018, initiated a change process that went beyond the mere restructuring of organizational units. In line with a modern self-image of an authority as a service provider, the *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* also developed a new self-image around the claim "enabling participation," as Figure 1 shows.



Figure 1: "Wie wir arbeiten" - Self-conception of the Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz on its Website

"How we work: Our work is multifaceted. We strengthen and support, we qualify and protect. We are open and objective, competent and reliable. We base our work on what we can do for you. For your

participation in the media, for an open and diverse media society that offers opportunities for everyone."<sup>29</sup>

Among other things, this is in the context of public discussions on the topics of service society, but also gender-fair language, diversity and inclusion, which are becoming increasingly relevant to business, as already outlined in the previous sections. Therefore, following the restructuring of its organization, the *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* has taken further steps in the change process.

#### **Steps of the change process:**

1. Restructuring of the organizational chart
2. Analysis of target groups and derived development of brand core by storytelling method<sup>30</sup>
3. Implementation of the brand core in design
4. Implementation of the brand core in language: image texts of the teams as well as language guidelines (implementation of barrier-free, gender-appropriate, inclusive language)
5. Launch of the texts
6. Quality management
7. Evaluation (after one year)

Why is language such a neuralgic point here? Language is a central component of change processes and fulfills a dual function. On the one hand, it is a medium for conveying the brand core and thus enables the externalization of the organizational attitude and identity. On the other hand, it is firmly anchored in the brand core and thus helps shape the organizational form. Through the targeted use of language, an organization can precisely direct its orientation and communication.

In the case of the *Medienanstalt*, a particular concern was to integrate the topics of gender-fair language and accessibility in order to do justice to its own brand core in terms of language and design. Both topics include linguistic aspects that ensure that all people feel addressed and that participation is made possible (see step 4 in the change process). In this way, responsibility for people and addressing them also become clear as linguistic responsibility. This is where the linguistic expertise of LUB came into play.

First, LUB analyzed the language of the brand core. In joint workshops, awareness was created at *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* for a linguistic self-image as well as the topic of gender-fair language, and criteria for barrier-free language were also presented. This was followed by the texting of profile texts for the individual teams, in which they defined their respective identities.

A corporate identity or an organization's self-conception is traditionally set out in an image brochure.<sup>31</sup> In the spirit of the inclusive idea, the *Medienanstalt* wanted all employees to participate in the textual

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<sup>29</sup> Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz, *Wie wir arbeiten*, Über uns, <https://medienanstalt-rlp.de/ueber-uns/wie-wir-arbeiten> (letzter Zugriff: 02.09.21)

<sup>30</sup> In its brand core, an organization records its corporate identity linguistically. The different types of words correspond to different aspects of identity: nouns (Verantwortung, Chancengleichheit; responsibility, equal opportunities) indicate the values the organization ascribes to itself; verbs define its actions (fördern, qualifizieren; support, qualify, as in the case of the Medienanstalt); adjectives define the way in which the organization sees itself and its actions (dynamisch; seriös; unkonventionell; dynamic, respectable, unconventional). The storytelling method is particularly well suited for developing a brand core. For example, target groups are asked how they see the organization, and the employees can compare these answers with their self-image.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Burel 2015.

development process. Together with LUB, team representatives of *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* were therefore empowered to develop the introduction and the team ideas in the new image brochure along the brand core and to lay the foundations for a general language guide. The description of the teams, their expectations and tasks were a central intermediate step in helping the teams to identify themselves linguistically.

The following excerpt (Figure 2), which can now be found on the website of the *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz*, is intended to illustrate how a corporate identity is constituted through text and how brand core (content level) and linguistic categories (expression level) go hand in hand in the process.

**Mediale Teilhabe für alle Menschen in Rheinland-Pfalz ist unser Ziel. Mit unseren Schwerpunkten Bürgermedien, Medienkompetenz, Medienförderung und Medienregulierung wollen wir alle Bürger\*innen stärken, qualifizieren, unterstützen und schützen. So sichern wir Medien- und Meinungsvielfalt.**

Figure 2: The brand core of the Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz

"Our goal is media participation for all people in *Rheinland-Pfalz*. With our focus on *Bürgermedien*, *Medienkompetenz*, *Medienförderung* and *Medienregulierung*, we want to empower, qualify, support and protect all citizens. That's how we secure diversity of media and opinion."<sup>32</sup>

The brand core of the *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* is represented in this self-description on several linguistic levels. It is made explicit literally by using the words defined in the brand core (*Mediale Teilhabe*, *qualifizieren*, *stark machen*, *unterstützen*, and *schützen*). The clear, simple sentence structure and limited sentence length ensure easy comprehension. Gendering with gender star (*Bürger\*innen*) addresses all people. This is called form-content correlation in linguistics: The outer form of the text supports the content. Furthermore, the corporate identity is built up by the vision of the organization (*Our goal is media participation*) taking into account the target group (*all people in Rheinland-Pfalz*) as well as the self-designations of the teams (e.g. *Medienkompetenz*, *Medienregulierung*).

Ultimately, consistency is central to a linguistically effective corporate identity. A language guide is therefore the tool of choice for creating a uniform image at all linguistic touchpoints of the organization in the future, in which the corporate identity is clearly recognizable.

LUB supported the *Medienanstalt* - this was the third of the above steps - in the concrete implementation of the criteria selected for the *Medienanstalt* in a language guide. Concrete language examples from the *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* were also integrated. While categories such as the explanation of foreign words and an adapted sentence length, facilitate the comprehensibility of the *Medienanstalt* texts, the non-binary variant of gender in combination with the symbolic power of the gender star<sup>33</sup> appeals to all people.

<sup>32</sup> Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz, <https://medienanstalt-rlp.de/> (last access: 30.09.21)

<sup>33</sup> The use of the gender star originated in the LGBTQIA\* community. The rays of the star, pointing in all directions, symbolize openness to a wide variety of human identities and orientations.

The language guide was developed in three processual steps: language analysis, texting & prototyping, and implementation in everyday life. These are illustrated and explained in Figure 3.

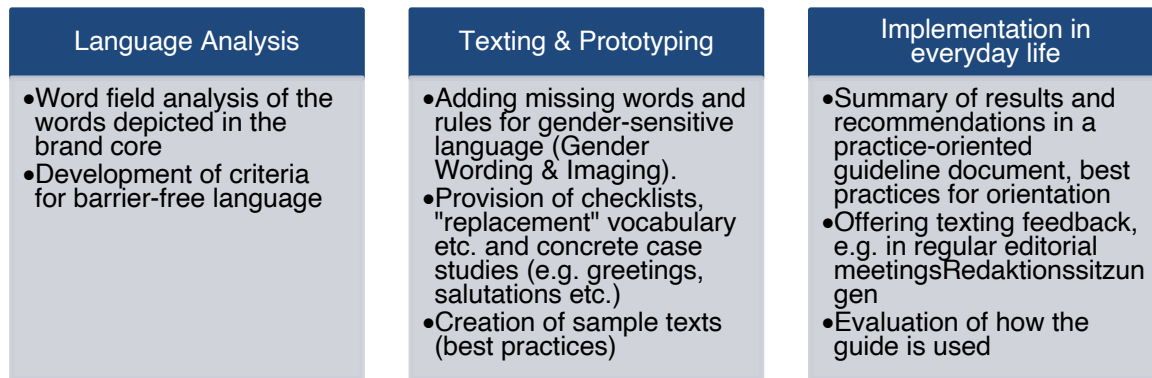


Figure 3: Developing a Language Guide in 3 Steps

The language guide (see Figure 4) has been structured by LUB according to the classical levels of language structure that need to be considered in writing and speaking - from the small to the large: Individual chapters cover the levels of spelling, word choice, and sentence structure. In addition, there are sections on gendering, media comprehensibility, images, and agents.

The language guide also contains a chapter with text templates and best practices, as well as a reference section with a glossary of certain definitions and a printout of the organization's brand core. In addition, the language guide has an introduction in which the management level and the equal opportunity officer explain the relevance of the topic.

Leitfaden Sprache Medienanstalt RLP

#### Inhalt

Einleitung .....	2
Rechtschreibung .....	3
Wortwahl .....	4
Satzbau .....	6
Gendering .....	8
Medienverständlichkeit .....	11
Bilder .....	12
Akteur*in .....	13
Textvorlagen .....	14
Nachschlageteil .....	15
Glossar .....	15
Markenkern .....	15

Figure 4: Language Guide of the Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz - Table of Contents

Throughout the entire process, the various opinions and positions in the workshops were successfully aligned to a common base. The workshop participants, as "delegates" of their respective teams, then carried this line into their teams. This is how it is ensured that the employees of *Medienanstalt Rheinland-Pfalz* identify with the new language of their brand core and can draw on the language guide as a compass for orientation. Gender-fair language thus becomes part of their rules and regulations

(compliance).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The case presented has shown: Any organization that seriously addresses the issue of compliance also has a linguistic responsibility. Even if not yet regulated by law, it must find a response to deal with the topic of gender-fair language & identity. The social pressure from inside and outside is growing with regard to a uniform attitude and implementation. In the first step, this means above all to be clear about who should be reached with one's own language and where (type of medium, internal or external). After that, the organization should make a clear decision on how this will be implemented in a uniform way in terms of language (form of gender-fair language), whereby a participatory approach through workshops (as shown) guarantees a higher level of acceptance. In most cases, a favored gender variant is already present in the organization, but has not yet been explicitly standardized in terms of language. Linguistic guidelines that explain and summarize decisions for/against etc. in a way that is understandable for everyone also ensure better implementation in everyday life, since employees need constant support and there are many cases of doubt, be it in communication, personnel, technical documentation, etc.

The support of management and the top management level is central to all project steps, i.e., a change project in the area of gender-fair language cannot only be suspended in the areas of personnel or communication. After all, the decision for or against a certain language choice is part of corporate and thus social responsibility. It has measurable effects for organizations, including employee satisfaction, and image effects on an entire society, as could also be shown by means of the judgments.