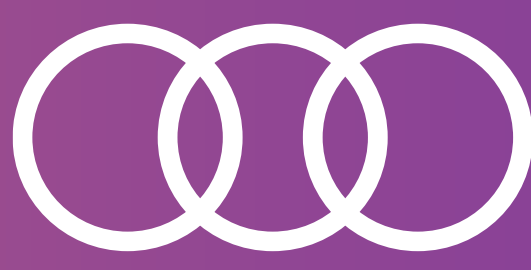


Do English generic masculine pronouns lead to a male bias for L1 German speakers, too?^{1,2}
And is singular *they* any better?




Linguistic Intersections
of Language and Gender
20-21 July 2023 | HHU Düsseldorf




Simon David Stein
Viktoria Schneider

Method The short story approach³

Write a short story about a fictional character that fits the following theme:

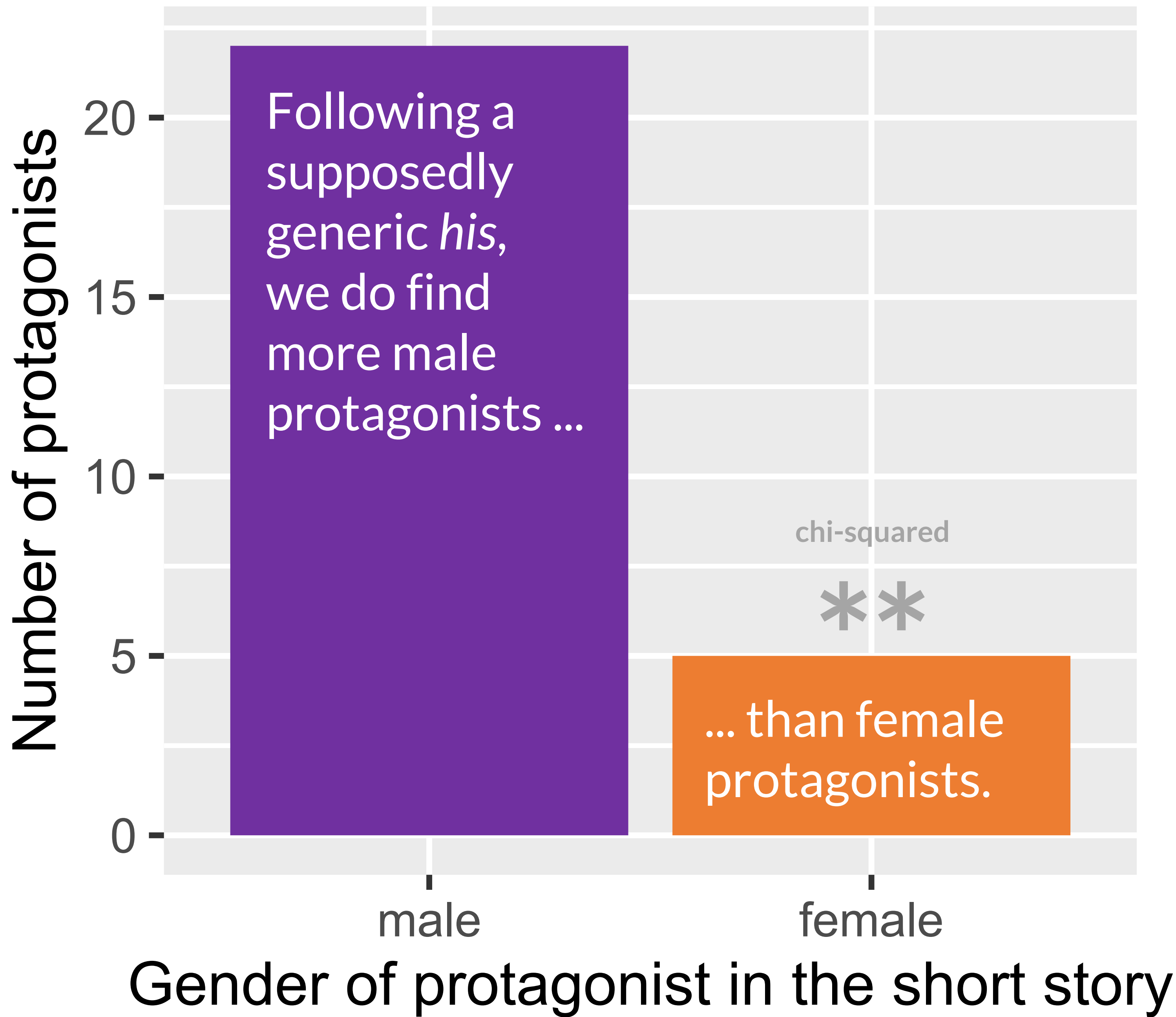


generic masculine
↓
On **his** first day at school, a pupil is usually very nervous ...



our expectation

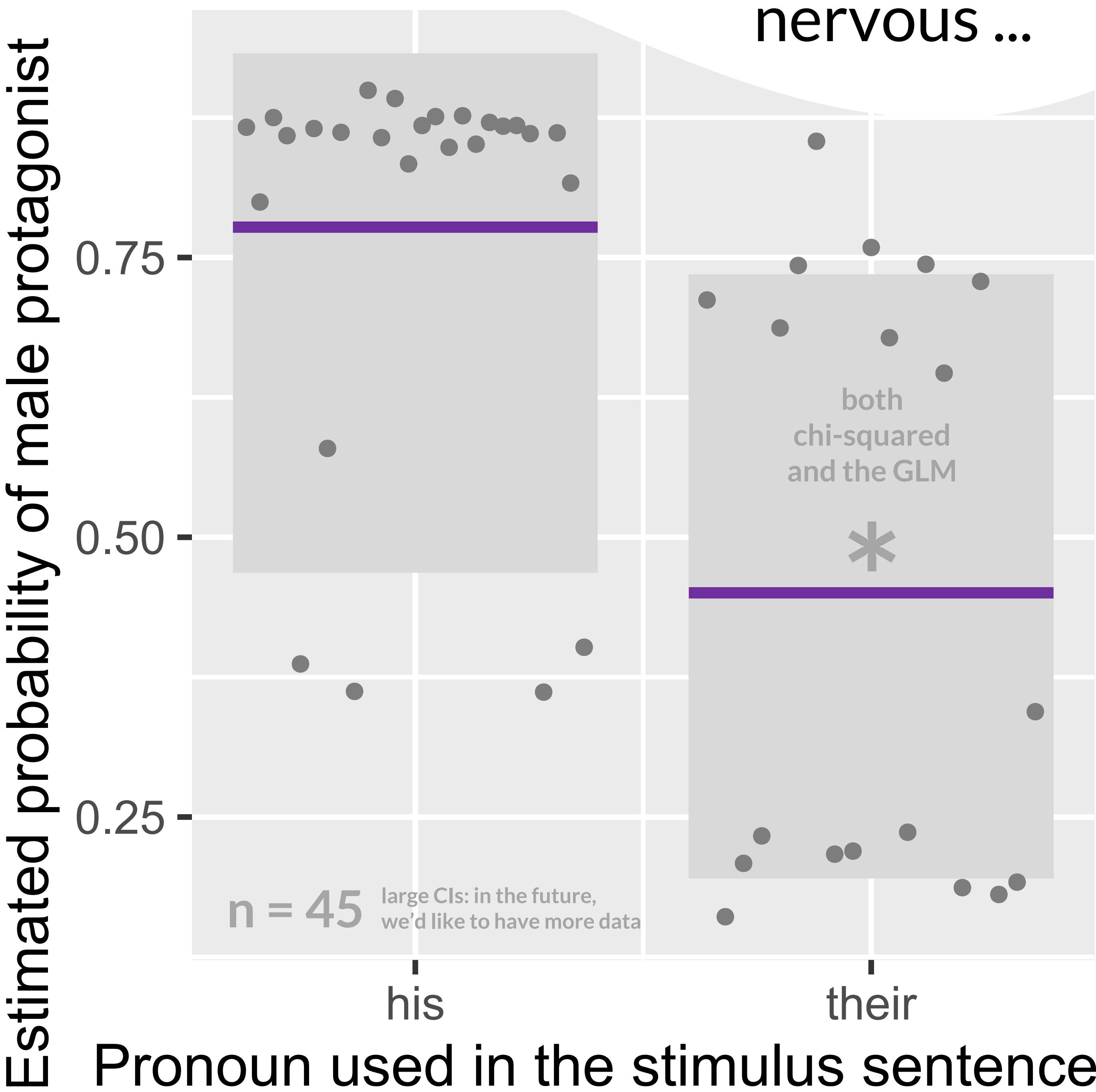
Result Bias following gen masculine



But what if for other participants, we replaced **his** by **their**?

generic singular *they*
↓
On **their** first day at school, a pupil is usually very nervous ...

Result his vs their



Discussion Crosslinguistic biases

Previous studies found that both generic masculine pronouns and role nouns produce a male bias.¹⁻¹⁰
We find crosslinguistic support for this when L1 German speakers encounter English generic *his*. This may be a case of L1-L2 gender bias transfer.¹¹⁻¹³
Generic singular *they*¹⁴ has no straightforward one-to-one mapping onto a German neutral alternative. However, we show that German speakers are subconsciously aware of its potential gender-neutrality, ruling out a general PEOPLE = MALE effect.¹⁵

data and scripts

Binomial logistic GLM with protagonist gender
~ pronoun his or their
+ age of participant
+ gender of participant
+ p has additional L1
+ age of English onset
+ duration spent abroad



References 1 Martyna, Wendy. 1978. What does 'he' mean? *Journal of Communication* 28.1: 131-138. 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1978.tb01576.x. 2 Miller, Megan M. & Lori E. James. 2009. Is the generic pronoun he still comprehended as excluding women? *The American Journal of Psychology* 122.4: 483-496. 10.2307/27784423. 3 Moulton, Janice, George M. Robinson & Cherin Elias. 1978. Sex bias in language use: "Neutral" pronouns that aren't. *American Psychologist* 33.11: 1032-1036. 10.1037/0003-066X.33.11.1032. 4 Rothmund, Jutta & Brigitte Scheele. 2004. Personenbezeichnungsmodelle auf dem Prüfstand: Lösungsmöglichkeiten für das Genus-Sex-Problem auf Textebene [Putting gender-neutral reference terms to the test: Constructive solutions to the problem of grammatical vs. referential gender on the textual level]. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie* 212.1: 40-54. 10.1026/0044-2409.212.1.40. 5 Braun, Friederike, Sabine Szesny & Dagmar Stahlberg. 2005. Cognitive effects of masculine generics in German: An overview of empirical findings. *Communications* 30.1: 1-21. 10.1515/comm.2005.30.1.1. 6 Gabriel, Ute, Pascal Gyssax, Oriane Sarasin, Alan Garnham & Jane Oakhill. 2008. Au pairs are rarely male: norms on the gender perception of role names across English, French, and German. *Behavior Research Methods* 40.1: 206-212. 10.3758/brm.40.1.206. 7 Gyssax, Pascal, Ute Gabriel, Oriane Sarasin, Jane Oakhill & Alan Garnham. 2008. Generically intended, but specifically interpreted: When beauticians, musicians, and mechanics are all men. *Language and Cognitive Processes* 23.3: 464-485. 10.1080/01690960701702035. 8 Gyssax, Pascal, Ute Gabriel, Oriane Sarasin, Jane Oakhill & Alan Garnham. 2009. Some grammatical rules are more difficult than others: The case of the generic interpretation of the masculine. *European Journal of Psychology of Education* 24.2: 235-246. 10.1027/0959172014. 9 McConnell-Ginet, Sally. 2013. Gender and its relation to sex: The myth of "natural" gender. In Greville G. Corbett (ed.), *The expression of gender (The Expression of Cognitive Categories 6)*, 3-38. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. 10.1515/9783110307337.3. 10 Schmitz, Dominik, Viktoria Schneider & Janina Esser. 2023. No genericity in sight: An exploration of the semantics of masculine generics in German [Revision invited for Glossa Psycholinguistics]. *PsyArXiv*. 10.31234/osf.io/c27z9. 11 Cook, Svetlana V. 2018. Gender matters: From L1 grammar to L2 semantics. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 21.1: 13-31. 10.1017/S1366728916000766. 12 Koster, Dietha & Hanneke Loerts. 2020. Food for psycholinguistic thought on gender in Dutch and German: A literature review on L1 and L2 production and processing. In Gunther Vogelaar, Dietha Koster & Torsten Leuschner (eds.), *German and Dutch in contrast*, 329-356. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter. 10.1515/9783110668474-012. 13 Schoenmakers, Gert-Jan, Theresa Redl, Sebastian Collin, Rozanne Versendaal, Peter de Swart & Helen de Hoop. 2022. Processing mismatching gendered possessive pronouns in L1 Dutch and L2 French. *Dutch Journal of Applied Linguistics* 11. 10.51751/djal.12948. 14 Conrod, Kirby. 2020. Pronouns and gender in language. In Kira Hall & Rusty Barrett (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of language and sexuality*. Oxford University Press. 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190212926.013.63. 15 Silveira, Jeanette. 1980. Generic masculine words and thinking. *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 3.2-3: 165-178. 10.1016/S0148-0685(80)92113-2.