

New Approaches to Gender and Queer Research in Slavonic Studies

DIE WELT DER SLAVEN
SAMMELBÄNDE · СБОРНИКИ

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Band 59

2015

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

New Approaches to Gender and Queer Research in Slavonic Studies

Proceedings of the International Conference
*“Language as a Constitutive Element
of a Gendered Society – Developments, Perspectives,
and Possibilities in the Slavonic Languages”*

(Innsbruck, 1-4 October 2014)

Edited by
Dennis Scheller-Boltz

2015

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

The series was published until volume 56 by Verlag Otto Sagner München.

Vignette: Queering Power by Florian Jenewein

Photography: Marko Bußmann

www.beauty-shooter.de/

This publication was made possible with a grant by the Vizerektorat für Forschung of the Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck, by the Dekanat der Philologisch-Kulturwissenschaftlichen Fakultät of the Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck and by the Tiroler Wissenschaftsfonds.



Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

For further information about our publishing program consult our website <http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

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Printed on permanent/durable paper.

Printing and binding: Hubert & Co., Göttingen

Printed in Germany

ISSN 2363-8605

ISBN 978-3-447-10540-8

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The current proceedings contain selected full articles based on presentations that were given at the international conference “Language as a Constitutive Element of a Gendered Society. Developments, Perspectives, and Possibilities in the Slavonic Languages” [Sprache als konstituierendes Element einer gegenderten Gesellschaft. Entwicklungen, Perspektiven und Möglichkeiten in den slawischen Sprachen]. The conference took place at the University of Innsbruck in October 2014. It should be seen in line with previous international conferences on gender linguistics which have tried to advance and promote Slavonic gender linguistics – especially in Slavonic linguistics outside Slavonic-speaking countries – and which, primarily, aimed at gathering different perspectives, approaches, and results concerning the (possibilities of) research on gender and language. One must mention, for example, the conference on gender and gender research in Slavonic Studies at the University of Jena in 2001 (published proceedings: J. van Leeuwen-Turnovcová et al.: Gender-Forschung in der Slawistik. Beiträge der Konferenz Gender – Sprache – Kommunikation – Kultur. Wien 2002) as well as the rather recent conference “Doing Gender – Doing the Balkans” at the Humboldt University of Berlin in 2011 (published proceedings: R. Kersten-Pejanić et al.: Doing Gender – Doing the Balkans. Dynamics and Persistence of Gender Relations in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States. Berlin 2012).

There is no denying that these conferences are all separated by long stretches of time. As a consequence, it was not far-fetched to imagine a significant change or, at least, a certain development in the field of Slavonic gender linguistics to have taken place. Not only was it conceivable that a more differentiated and detailed discussion of the general relation between gender and language had evolved, we could also expect a more profound understanding of the phenomenon of *gender* and, especially, of *gender identity*. Why? Because, in recent years, awareness has grown in Slavonic Studies that dealing with men and women as strictly hermetic and uniform concepts is no longer adequate for respectable gender linguistic research. It leads in the wrong direction. Studying gender linguistics or the interconnection between gender and language means much more than focusing exclusively on women or the relation between women and language. It also means more than analysing the constellation of man versus woman. Currently, studying gender linguistics means, first of all, to operate with a concept of gender that is fluent and variable, a concept that can adopt various dimensions and transcends the uniformity of a binary system. Secondly, it means to investigate gender ideology, i.e. the stereotypical belief that gender identities have to appear, have to be, and have to be performed in a special manner. Accordingly, one must look at how certain gender ideologies actually appear in real life and how they are socially reflected.

If one challenges gender and gender identities as fixed entities and if one questions, as a result, their place in a rigid binary system, one cannot avoid directing one’s focus immediately and inevitably on the binary system *per se*. Inevitably, this leads to challenging the system and, particularly, its main feature: its heteronormativity. The criticism of heteronormativity is at the centre of queer studies. Hence, it is not un-

reasonable to consider that the confluence of gender and queer studies will yield a promising and more precise methodological approach for investigating the connection between gender and language, not least because it provides interesting perspectives on this topic and opens up new or hitherto unexplored areas of research.

Last year's gender conference at the University of Innsbruck had its primary focus on Slavonic gender and queer linguistics. In order to widen its scope, I chose to include presentations that dealt with gender and identity from a literary and cultural perspective (see therefore the corresponding conference report of D. Scheller-Boltz/M. Milošević in *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 1/2015). The objective of the conference was to map innovative approaches. I am confident that its outcomes will be useful for the further development of Slavonic gender linguistics because of the following reasons:

- 1) Seven Slavonic languages were presented at the conference. Not only did this give an insight into gender research in all of the corresponding Slavonic sub-disciplines. This variety also guaranteed an explicit intra-Slavonic comparison and confrontation, which is often missing in Slavonic research, even though it is absolutely necessary.
- 2) There was a mix of gender and queer linguistics that offered the possibility to look at gender topics in more detail – even in Slavonic linguistics – and to include different approaches to investigating the relation between gender and language.
- 3) Including literary and cultural studies in a linguistics conference, i.e. choosing an integrative approach to deal with gender and identity, emphasised the interdisciplinary character of gender research. This comprehensive approach showed that doing justice to gender research requires the inclusion of other disciplines.

These proceedings embody the spirit of last year's conference and, moreover, reflect the essential meaning and the necessity of conferences on Slavonic gender and queer linguistics. The proceedings contain 29 contributions of acclaimed scholars that were presented at the conference. In addition, selected papers have been included in the proceedings to complement and enrich the volume in different ways.

* * *

I would like to thank the people who have made this publication possible:

I express my gratitude to Peter Rehder for his cooperation and support, and, particularly, for including the current proceedings in his series.

I thank Barbara Krauss and Michael Fröhlich from the Harrassowitz Publishing House for their support and helpful advice which made a smooth and timely publication of this volume possible.

A special thank-you goes to Ingeborg Ohnheiser for her always attentive eye, her critical and very useful remarks, and the long and fruitful discussions we have had and continue to have.

Furthermore, I am indebted to Ann Coady, Sonja Koroliov, Ekaterina Malysheva, Marijana Milošević, Iwona Nagórek, Dorothea Toptemel, and, especially, to Stefan Boltz for spending so much time on proofreading and translating.

I thank Roswitha Kersten-Pejanić, Simone Rajilić, Saška Štumberger, and Jana Valdová for helpful suggestions which have broadened my horizon.

I would like to thank all contributors of these proceedings for their interesting and important articles and, in particular, for their cooperation and patience, which made a timely publication possible.

Last but not least, my sincere thanks go to the Vice Rectorate for Research of the Leopold Franzens University of Innsbruck, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities II (Language and Literature) of the Leopold Franzens University of Innsbruck as well as to the Tyrolean Science Fund (TWF) whose financial support made the printing of this publication possible.

Thank you very much to all of you!

Dennis Scheller-Boltz