The effects of modality on gender agreement conflicts in German

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The specialty of hybrid nouns is their different agreement according to certain features of the agreement target. They result from a conflict within the gender assignment system. For example, the German noun *Mädchen* (semi-transparent diminutive for denoting a girl) is grammatical neuter but it refers to a female person. In German, nouns denoting females are feminine, but diminutives are neuter. Since both rules apply, you can refer to *Mädchen* with a neuter (*es*) but also with a feminine pronoun (<u>*sie*</u>). This presentation reports on a study investigating agreement conflicts focusing on the influence of modality (spoken vs. written language). My research examines how speakers and writers navigate these conflicts in different modalities, shedding light on the cognitive and linguistic processes involved. Written language has been extensively researched from both diachronic and synchronic perspectives (cf. Birkenes et al. 2014, Fleischer 2012, Hübner 2021, Thurmair 2006). However, there is a lack of research concerning spoken language. To address this gap, I conducted studies on gender agreement in spoken language as well as in informal language use in various corpora (DGD, DWDS). Key findings reveal significant differences in agreement patterns between the two modalities. Spoken language tends to favor semantic agreement, aligning with the natural gender of the referent, while written language shows a stronger preference for grammatical agreement, adhering to the neuter gender of the noun. The spoken modality is more spontaneous and prioritizes semantic aspects, whereas written language is more reflective and adheres more closely to grammatical norms. These results contribute to the understanding of how modality impacts linguistic choices and agreement resolution strategies. At the same time, the results demonstrate how language change concerning agreement tends to appear first in spoken language and subsequently makes its way into written language.

References. Birkenes, M., C. Chroni & J. Fleischer (2014). Genus- und Sexuskongruenz im Neuhochdeutschen: Ergebnisse einer Korpusuntersuchung zur narrativen Prosa des 17. bis 19. Jahrhunderts. *Deutsche Sprache* 42, 1-24. • Fleischer, J. (2012). Grammatische und semantische Kongruenz in der Geschichte des Deutschen: eine diachrone Studie zu den Kongruenzformen von ahd. *wīb*, nhd. *Weib. Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 134, 163-203. • Hübner, J. (2021). Der Einfluss des Kontexts auf Kongruenzformen hybrider Nomina. In A. Binanzer et al. (eds), *Prototypen, Schemata, Konstruktionen*. Berlin: De Gruyter. • Thurmair, M. (2006). Das Model und ihr Prinz. Kongruenz und Texteinbettung bei Genus-Sexus-Divergenz. *Deutsche Sprache* 34, 191-220.