
Considerations about Gender Symmetry in the Dictionary of Bavarian Dialects in Austria

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Abstract

This poster summarizes the first results of a study that has been pursued as part of an internship at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. The aim was to investigate cases of gender symmetry or asymmetry in a dictionary. As case study we focused on a traditional dialectal dictionary. An annotation schema has been developed and first natural language processing steps have been established. In this poster, forms of gender symmetry as well as asymmetry are presented, on the basis of analysis of the vocabulary employed in example sentences or excerpts used in the dictionary. The analysis of gender asymmetry was also based on the consideration of a selection of derogatory names. The work described in this poster provides a critical insight into lexicographical work, design and implementation from a feminist perspective and opens new perspectives for the development of gender-symmetric lexicographic works.

Keywords: Dialectal lexicography; Gender asymmetry; Gender symmetry; Austrian dialects

1 Introduction

This paper presents work achieved in the context of a practical training at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) in summer 2013¹, and which has been pursued afterwards as part of a university seminar. A task designed for this internship was to analyze a traditional dialectal dictionary along the lines of gender-specific criteria.

While we know that the primary goal of a dialectal dictionary is to describe the authentic language use in a certain region, we consider this investigation on gender symmetry (or asymmetry) to be well motivated since the foundations of the dictionary we are considering were laid down well before any feministic concerns in the field of lexicography have been raised. In this paper describing the poster, we give first a brief description of the dictionary we have been selecting for the investigation on gender asymmetry, before presenting a selection of results.

1 In the context of this internship, Isabella Flucher, the main author of this poster, was collaborating with 3 other students, namely Nathan Balaz, Magdalena Schwarz and Andrea Steiner.

2 The Dictionary of Bavarian Dialects in Austria

For our work, we focused on language data contained in a traditional dialectal dictionary: The dictionary of Bavarian dialects in Austria (Wörterbuch der bairischen Mundarten in Österreich, WBÖ). This traditional scientific territorial dictionary was developed since the early 20th century: The main part of the collection took place between 1915 and 1950; the dictionary itself is published since the early sixties. More recently, in the early nineties, a project has been established for developing and maintaining an integrated database (Database of Bavarian dialects in Austria; Datenbank der bairischen Mundarten in Österreich, DBÖ²). This database supports the storage, visualization und querying of a variety of dialectal language data and related information sources. Since 2004 the dictionary is build up as a digital platform and is now also available online via the Austrian Academy Press. Since 2013 we are developing a machine readable version (using SKOS³ as the basic representation formalism), connecting also the data to the LOD.⁴

The whole project related to WBÖ gives thus an example for a transformation process of an encyclopedic dictionary type into the framework of cyberscience and digital humanities. .

2.1 The Project Framework at the Austrian Academy of Sciences

The investigation on gender (a)symmetry is embedded into the digital dictionary project, which we very briefly described above. In the framework of this project we are working on / with different methods and interdisciplinary knowledge to improve data access, enrichment and re-usability of data. In order to investigate if we could reduplicate results of the analysis on gender symmetry applied to the WBÖ, we decided to create a corpus containing annotation about the (semantic) genders and the type of vocabularies used. The development of this corpus is also aiming at supporting the development of natural language processing tools that could be trained on this set of annotations. Results of this work will be described in future publications, while we concentrate in this poster on the result of manual analysis applied to the annotated corpus.

2.2 The Gold Corpus

A basis for our work on gender symmetry is a WBÖ-XML-gold corpus, methodologically discussed and completely manually annotated: We were using 4 reference supplements of the WBÖ, namely 33-36. The first step of annotation included annotating headwords as well as reference entries that are

2 The DBÖ collection of mushrooms and related lexicographical materials is available online; see (Wandl-Vogt 2010).

3 SKOS stands for "Simple Knowledge Organization System" (<http://www.w3.org/2004/02/skos/>)

4 See (Wandl-Vogt 2008) and (Wandl-Vogt & Declerck 2013). LOD stands for Linked Open Data (<http://linked-data.org/>)

connected to the concept “person”. We annotated real persons as well as figures, such as legendary creatures or fairy-tale figures. The (informal) schema for the annotation was:

<h> </h> - Mensch (*human*)⁵

<f> </f> - feminine (*feminine*)

<m> </m> - maskulin (*masculine*)

<Bsp> </Bsp> - Beispiel (immer kursiv- dialektale Ausdrücke) (*marking an example in the dictionary, which is carrying a gender information*)

<Bed> </Bed> - Bedeutung (*same as above, but for a text span dealing with a definition*)

<hist> </hist> - historisch (*same as above, but marking an historical context*)

<gauspr> </gauspr> - gaunersprachlich (*language of the „crooks“*)

<geschlT> </geschlT> - Geschlechtsteil (*words on genital parts*)

A few examples of annotation are given below:

- <Bsp> es mit <m>einem</m>/<f>einer </f> tun| </Bsp> (*to do it [namely: have sex] with someone [namely: him or her]*)
- <Bed> es treibt <f> ihr</f>(vor Scham) d. Röte ins Gesicht</Bed> (*she is blushing*)
- <Bsp>¿ <m>e </m>verdrosch seine<f>Mutter</f> </Bsp> (*he was beating his mother*)
- <m><geschlT>Penis</geschlT></m>

The manual analysis of the annotated data was done on the base of theoretical aspects described in the next section.

3 Gender Symmetry and Gender Asymmetry

3.1 Linguistic Perspective

The feminist linguistics aims to make visible an androcentric predominance, which is resulting in a critique of the language system on the one hand and of the language use on the other hand.⁶

The semantic field “human” is dominated by men. In that context, Pusch (1984) describes the woman as a “subclass of the men’s class” and she goes even further when she says: “Human is the man”.⁷ Often, by “people” or “human” only man is meant, therefore it seems necessary to identify the woman with the female attribution. Thus, masculinity is enhanced in contrast to femininity, when the man is represented as a human being.⁸ The attribution of the female will be used, because otherwise only the male group would be targeted, although it is a gender- neutral term.⁹

5 Annotation of this concept has been performed by Natahn Balasz.

6 See (Kollmann 2010: p. 14).

7 See (Pusch 1984: p. 17).

8 See (Poerber 2007: pp. 408-409).

9 See (Breiner 1996: p. 79).

In terms of the article entries of the WBÖ one notice that definitions which include the keyword “human” often contains a definition of woman. What looks at first glance like an imbalance in favor of the female sex, after closer analysis, is to be interpreted as the opposite phenomenon. The woman is called that often rather for the reason of a differentiation, whereas the man must not also be named because he embodies the prototype of human, the “universal human”.

3.2 Examples for Gender Symmetry and Gender Asymmetry

Aiming at gender symmetry means not to reverse a possible androcentric language in a gynocentric one, but to reach a state in which the same criteria are applied to both sexes.

A positive example of a WBO entry to illustrate the case of symmetry is the following: The verb “trackeln , - gg -” means being stupid. Its derivatives are symmetrical in relation to the two sexes, both in the length of the entry as well as their semantic shape: “Trackle , - gg -” : stupid woman [..] and “Trackler , -g (g) -” : stupid man.¹⁰

A counterexample is “Trab” and “traben”.¹¹ “Traben” has besides its first meaning of a horses walk two other meanings in their sample-sentences, where a clear gender asymmetry is found. Namely, when *he* goes on the “Trab”, he is sent abroad, but when *she* goes on the “Trab”, she works as a prostitute. This difference is confirmed by the term “Trab”, as the male form “Traber” is referred to herein and the trotting horse, whereas the female “Traberin” stands for a prostitute.¹²

Gender asymmetry can emerge as well from unequal treatment of the length of masculine and feminine entries, for example when the male thief “Dieb” has six columns and the female thief “Diebin” has only a slim column.¹³ Also within an entry the example sentences in relation to each other manifest a different rating of the sexes. For example “Ferdienst” has such various ratings of the sexes: three example-sentences reflect the man as an appreciative, rewarding power, whereas the fourth rating, which refers to the woman, is the earning that comes from a “dirty business“, which could refer to prostitution again.¹⁴

Another form of asymmetry is to be shown on the basis of the lemmas “Trantsch”, “Träntsche” and “Träntscher”¹⁵ : “Trantsch” and “Träntsche” provide both in its primary meaning an insult mainly for women. The term “Trantsch” has six female classifications and four neutral, which means related on both gender. Thus, referring to this, most often the woman is meant with this insult, the man is not explicitly marked, only indirectly by writing “human”. “Träntsche” has the same meaning, this time

10 WBÖ, S. 234.

11 WBÖ, S. 220-221.

12 WBÖ, S. 221.

13 WBÖ, S. 35-43.

14 WBÖ, S. 55-56.

15 WBÖ, S. 314-316.

with the mention of “woman” and “person”.¹⁶ Even “Träntscher”, the male modification of “Trantsch”, refers only to “human” and one time to a “person”. These examples are unbalanced from a gender perspective, because the gender-classification of these three abusive terms, which belong together, is much more female-oriented.

3.3 Distribution of Gender (a)symmetric Cases across Topics

Current work is dedicated to the establishment of classes of topics in which a gender (a)symmetry in WBÖ can be established, looking at examples used for illustrating the meanings of entries. The topics we are studying are for now are “alcohol”, “talkativeness” and “violence”. The aim is to examine, if there are female- and male-specific categories of meaning in the WBÖ, and if so to analyse them in terms of gender criteria.

3.3.1 Alcohol

The word field of drunkenness is clearly dominated by men. Alcohol use of women is only manifested in the individual cases as “Trinkerin”¹⁷ (female form of drinker), “Alkoholikerin”¹⁸ (a female alcohol-addict) and “Schnapsdorothea”¹⁹ (“Schnaps” as a sort of strong alcohol combined with the woman’s name Dorothea, means a woman, that drinks a lot). But what is significant, is that there exist as good as no female example-sentences referring to alcohol consumption.

- Der Lump, .. der sein ganz’s Geld versauft²⁰ (*a man, who spends all his money for alcohol*)
- ols a nüachta [nüchtern] is er eh recht sölt n aonztreffn²¹ (*he is rarely sober*)
- er hat a weng z’ tief ins Glasl g’ schaut er hat einen Rausch²² (*he is drunk*)

3.3.2 Talkativeness

Talkativeness is the one meaning category, which is attributed widely to women. It is also remarkable that the context of meaning differs regarding the sexes, where “Tratschweib” (a talkative woman in a negative sense) faces the “Maulheld” (a talkative man, but who is called a hero, a boaster).

- *Postentragerin*: Frau, die andere Personen ausrichtet, abschwächend für Verleumderin²³ (*a woman who speaks about a person in a defaming way*)
- die ist eine rechte/alte Tratsche²⁴ (*she talks a lot and she is old*)

16 To which extent the term “person” suggests “woman” as well is debatable, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. However, “person” appears increasingly in association with “woman” and “man” in connection with “human”.

17 WBÖ, S. 520, S. 523.

18 WBÖ, S. 523.

19 WBÖ, S. 189.

20 WBÖ, S. 238.

21 WBÖ, S. 373.

22 WBÖ, S. 45.

23 WBÖ, S. 290.

24 WBÖ, S. 332.

- Sie soll ná was drein rödn../ Da is má nôt bang, wir [werde] ihr´s Mudl schan tedten - / I kimm ihr schan grob gnua²⁵ (*she shouldn´t interfere my talk, if she does i will be aggressive against her*)

3.3.3 Violence

In the WBÖ-entries almost examples for words of violence are given by sentences that show violent-acting men. Women are more connected with a softened version of violence, as they are more often called böse (*evil*), launenhaften (*capricious*), zänkischen (*quarrelsome*), streitsüchtigen (*contentious*) women and wives.

- Töterling: grober Kerl, Raufbold²⁶ (*a rough man, sb.who likes to beat/fight*)
- töten ęa wiad des mäd (Mädchen) no ęwidra´n²⁷ (*to kill he will kill the girl*)
- daß sie von ihm noch ihre Treff (Schläge) kriegen werde²⁸ (*that she will get beaten up by him*)
- Drache: zänkische, herrschsüchtige Frau; streitlustige Ehefrau²⁹ (*dragon: a quarrelsome, dominant woman; a contentious wife*)

We are currently extending the list of concepts, either adding new ones, or further specifying existing ones. For this we are consulting work by Dornseiff (2004) and lexical resources like WordNet³⁰ or Wiktionary³¹, which are helping us in better classifying the words used in the dictionaries for describing the entries.

4 Conclusion

We presented actual work on gender (a)symmetry in the context of a dialectal dictionary. In the next future we will extend this work and also consider the underlying data of similar dictionaries, like collections of slips of papers, databases, or questionnaires to find out reasons of asymmetries. We also plan to focus more on natural language processing aspects and to be able to mark up relevant words in computational lexicons with this kind of gender interpretation, beyond the case of pure grammatical genders.

The work is to be continued, deepened, and extended as a research infrastructure for the comparison of lexicographical works as well as languages.

25 WBÖ, S. 210.

26 WBÖ, S. 212.

27 WBÖ, S. 248.

28 WBÖ, S. 369

29 WBÖ, S. 222-223.

30 <http://www.sfs.uni-tuebingen.de/GermaNet/>

31 <https://de.wiktionary.org/wiki/Wiktionary:Hauptseite>

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