

Please find the original Twitter thread here:

<https://twitter.com/dmncschmtz/status/1599667433509294080>



**Dominic** @dmncschmtz · 8:30 AM · Dec 5, 2022

#linguisttweets #linguisTW0730

Are masculine generics in German truly generic or are they, in the end, just masculine explicit in disguise?

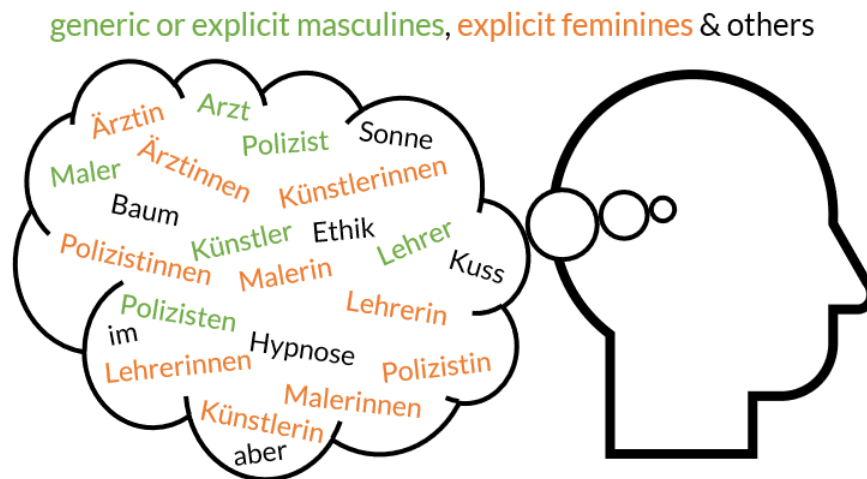
We tackled this question using 'discriminative learning', a framework which has been shown to meaningfully model human behaviour.



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Replying to @dmncschmtz

Based on news websites, we created mathematical representations of German words and their meanings. With these, we were able to simulate a person's mental lexicon, i.e. their word knowledge.



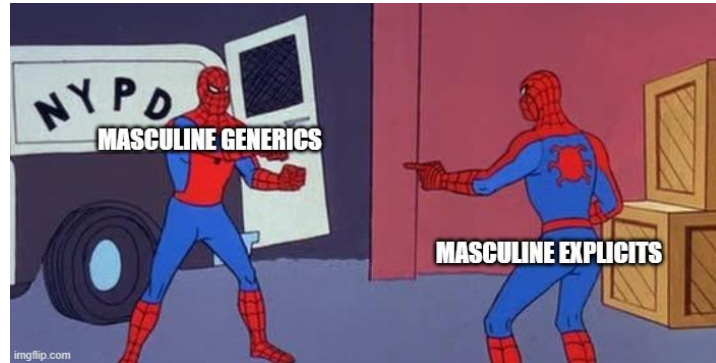
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From this simulation, we could extract measures further detailing the underlying nature of words. We can tell how well a word is understood, how dense its surroundings are, and how many other words are co-activated when one retrieves a pertinent word.



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Using these measures as well as a measure of stereotypicality to account for potential influences of stereotypes, statistical modelling tells us that masculine generics behave very much like masculine explicit. Indeed, there is no significant difference between the two.



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Feminine explicit, on the other hand, behave very differently - they are not similar to either masculine form. Further, stereotypicality does not play a significant role in all of this.



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Hence, masculine generics in German are not truly generic but are merely masculine explicit in disguise. They share their underlying semantic nature: If a form is meant to be a masculine generic, the semantics of masculine explicit are activated nonetheless.

