

**From predicate to subject:**  
**A reversal of durational differences in generic and specific masculines**

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Previous research found morphology-based fine-phonetic durational variation between homophonous units, for example, in different types of word-final /s/ (Plag et al. 2017; Schmitz et al. 2021; Schmitz and Baer-Henney 2024). Investigating the acoustic duration of the *-er* suffix in autohyponomous generic and specific masculine nouns in German, Schmitz (2025) and Schmitz & Keller (2025) showed that fine-phonetic durational variation may also be conditioned by semantic differences beyond morphology in both real words and pseudowords, using reading and recall production experiments.

One limitation of these previous studies is that target nouns exclusively used predicatively, see Example 1 from Schmitz (2025). As nouns used predicatively may differ from nouns in other sentence functions with respect to information structure, incremental interpretation, and prosodic organisation, it remains unclear whether the observed durational patterns generalise beyond this context. To address this limitation, the present study investigates targets in subject position, see Example 2.

- (1) *Eins ist Thea und Wiebke klar. Sie möchten niemals **Kosmetiker** von Beruf werden.*  
(2) *Thorsten und Anna sind endlich im Hotel angekommen. Die **Urlauber** freuen sich schon auf den Pool.*

In the present experiment, 40 L1 speakers of German each produced 18 items. Each target was embedded in a carrier sentence in which it functioned as part of the subject. Targets were selected based on previous studies showing that they are typically rated as gender-neutral (Misersky et al. 2014; Gabriel et al. 2008). Each carrier sentence was preceded by a context sentence disambiguating whether the masculine noun was intended specifically (male-only reading) or generically (mixed-gender reading). In the online experiment, participants recruited via Prolific first listened to AI-generated recordings of both sentences while simultaneously reading them on screen. Participants were told that the aim of the experiment was to compare human and AI reading, with the AI recordings described as mostly natural-sounding but somewhat odd in places by pre-test participants. This procedure aimed at ensuring processing of the context and, with that, the intended interpretation of the masculine noun. Fillers included masculine nouns not ending in *-er* as well as feminine role noun counterparts. Participants were instructed to produce sentences as naturally as possible.

The data were analysed using linear mixed-effects regression models, following standard procedures. The analysis shows that generic masculines are associated with significantly shorter *-er* durations than specific masculines ( $p < 0.001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.55$ , 95% CI [0.31, 0.79]).

The findings demonstrate that fine-phonetic durational differences between generic and specific masculine nouns are not restricted to predicative position. However, unlike previous studies, which found longer *-er* durations for generic masculines, the present study revealed the opposite pattern. This reversal may reflect differences in discourse structure. Unlike previous studies, the present design provided contextual information that primed the target lexeme more strongly before production, potentially affecting the fine-phonetic realisation of the masculine noun.

## Literature

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