Grammatical gender in the German multiethnolect

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Abstract

While major restructurations and simplifications have been reported for gender systems of other Germanic languages in multiethnolectal speech, the article demonstrates that the three-fold gender distinction of German is relatively stable among young speakers of immigrant background. We investigate gender in a German multiethnolect, based on a corpus of appr. 17 hours of spontaneous speech by 28 young speakers in Stuttgart (mainly of Turkish and Balkan backgrounds). German is not their second language, but (one of) their first language(s), which they have fully acquired from childhood. We show that the gender system does not show signs of reduction in the direction of a two gender system, nor of wholesale loss.

We also argue that the position of gender in the grammar is weakened by independent processes, such as the frequent use of bare nouns determiners in grammatical contexts where German requires it. Another phenomenon that weakens the position of gender is the simplification of adjective/noun agreement and the emergence of a generalized, gender-neutral suffix for pre-nominal adjectives (i.e. schwa). The disappearance of gender/case marking in the adjective means that the grammatical category of gender is lost in A + N phrases (without determiner).

1. Introduction

Modern German differs from most other Germanic languages in that it has preserved the Proto-Germanic system of three grammatical genders (called masculine, feminine, neuter). In this paper, we investigate the question of whether new ways of speaking that emerged in 1980s and 1990s among 'second generation immigrants', then mainly from a Turkish family background, (henceforth called the German multiethnolect[1]) show any innovative deviations from Standard German that might suggest an ongoing restructuring or even simplification of the system (as has been reported for other languages such as Dutch, cf. Cornips 2008, or Danish, cf. Quist 2000, 2008). The German multiethnolect is generally considered the most dynamic part of the German language today and might be expected to spearhead developments that will eventually also spread into other varieties of German. We show that there is no evidence for such an inno-

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[1] See Section 3 for further discussion of the term and its sociolinguistic justification.

vation, with the one (possible) exception of gender (and case) marking in the pre-nominal adjectival paradigm. However, we also show that restructuring in other parts of the multiethnolectal grammar leads to a reduction of grammatical contexts in which gender agreement is relevant.

We start out with a short overview of the gender system of standard German and its acquisition by L1 and L2 learners, as it is sometimes claimed that L2 features might be the basis of multiethnolectal innovations (section 2). We then move on to discuss non-canonical gender assignment in determiners and the non-marking of gender in bare nouns (section 3.1). In section 3.2, we analyze multiethnolectal innovations in the inflection of pre-nominal adjectives (3.2) and the emergence of a gender-neutral suffix for adjectival attribution. Section 4 concludes with a discussion of our findings and their interpretation.

2. Gender in German

The German gender system provides a tidy threefold classification of German nouns, with only a very small number of ambiguous cases (often regional variants). As an inherent category of the noun, formal gender is relevant both for agreement within the noun phrase and for disambiguating anaphorical and cataphorical pronominal cross-references (see Murelli & Hoberg 2017 for a recent summary).

In the singular, German marks gender on the determiners and prenominal adjectives/participles as well as in certain appositional structures within the noun phrase (internally controlled gender agreement), and on personal, relative and possessive pronouns outside the noun phrase (externally controlled gender agreement). In the plural, gender is neutralized in all contexts. Adjectives are only inflected in attributive function, not as predicates (with exceptions in some dialects). Only third person pronouns are gender-marked, first and second person pronouns show no gender distinction. Numerals apart from 'one' (*ein*) are no longer gender-marked (with traces of the older system surviving in some dialects). German does not mark gender in reflexive pronouns.

Let us first look at the noun-internal system of agreement relevant for our data. The noun as the controller here determines the morphology of the preceding determiners (definite, indefinite, demonstrative) and adjectives (including participles). In a noun phrase that contains either a determiner or an adjective (but not both), this element will receive gender marking. In a noun

phrase that contains more than one possible target of gender agreement, the second target (the adjective) may remain unmarked.

The system is most transparent with definite and demonstrative determiners, whose forms interact with case as follows:

	Definite determiner			Demonstrative determiner		
	Fem	Masc	Neutr	Fem	Masc	Neutr
Nom	*die*	*der*	*das*	*dies+e*	*dies+er*	*dies+es*
Gen	*der*	*des*	*des*	*dies+er*	*dies+es*	*dies+es*
Dat	*der*	*dem*	*dem*	*dies+er*	*dies+em*	*dies+em*
Acc	*die*	*den*	*das*	*dies+e*	*dies+en*	*dies+es*

Table 1: Gender and case in the German singular paradigms of the definite and demonstrative determiner.

The indefinite and the remaining determiners (possessives, negative) use the same suffixes as the demonstrative determiner, with the exception of the nominative, where the masculine and neuter are zero-suffixed (e.g. *kein* 'no'), and the accusative, where the neuter is zero-suffixed.

As can be seen, there are numerous syncretisms. The forms of the neuter and masculine show more syncretisms with each other than with the feminine. Despite this fact, there is no tendency toward a two-gender system (following e.g. the Romance pattern).

On the attributive adjective/participle, gender is morphologically marked in the most transparent way when there is no preceding determiner, i.e. in the so-called strong inflection (shown for the adjective *schön* 'nice' in Table 2, left-hand column). As the grammatical contexts in which a noun phrase including a prenominal adjective does not need a determiner are highly restricted, these forms are quite rare. In the much more frequent case of a preceding determiner (with the exception of the indefinite determiner), all suffixes are neutralized to -*e* (schwa) in the nominative or -*en* in the dative/genitive (so-called 'weak' inflection, see right-hand column in Table 2). A gender distinction between feminine/neuter and masculine is only made in the accusative.

	No preceding determiner ('strong paradigm')			Preceding determiner (other then indefinite) ('weak paradigm')	
	Fem	Masc	Neutr	Fem/Neutr	Masc
Nom	*schön+e*	*schön+er*	*schön+es*	*die/das/schöne*	*der schön+e*
Gen	*schön+er*	*schön+en*	*schön+en*	*der/des/schönen*	*des schön+en*
Dat	*schön+er*	*schön+em*	*schön+em*	*der/dem/schönen*	*dem schön+en*
Acc	*schön+e*	*schön+en*	*schön+es*	*die/das schön+e*	*den schön+en*

Table 2: Gender and case of German attributive adjectives (here: *schön* 'nice') with and without preceding determiner (without indefinite article).

A 'mixed' system is in place after the indefinite pronoun *ein-*:

	Preceding indefinite determiner		
	Fem	Masc	Neutr
Nom	*ein+e schön+e*	*ein schön+er*	*ein schön+es*
Gen	*ein+er schön+en*	*ein+es schön+en*	*ein+es schön+en*
Dat	*ein+er schön+en*	*ein+em schön+en*	*ein+em schön+en*
Acc	*ein+e schön+e*	*ein+en schön+en*	*ein schön+es*

Table 3: Gender and case of German attributive adjectives (here: *schön* 'nice') after preceding indefinite determiner.

In this case, gender is overtly assigned in the nominative and accusative, but not in the dative and genitive (where *-en* is the gender- and case-unmarked suffix).

We have outlined this rather complex system in detail to show that there are numerous positions in the paradigms in which gender (and case) are neutralized. In these cases, the suffix (*-en* or *-e*) marks the attributive function of the adjective only (as distinct from its predicative and adverbial functions). This will be relevant for our discussion of the multiethnolectal structures found in the data.

Externally controlled gender assignment is somewhat more loosely organized, as natural and formal gender assignment may compete. Hence, phoric pronouns referring backward or forward to a neuter word such as *Mädchen* 'girl' may be marked for neuter (formal gender agreement) or feminine (natural gender agreement). The most frequent phoric pronouns in spoken German

are the 'strong' pronouns mostly identical in form with the definite determiners (*der, die, das*)[2], and the 'weak' (often cliticized) third person pronouns *er, sie, es* 'he, she, it', both with their respective case forms. The 'strong' forms are also used as relative pronouns (*der*, *die*, *das*).

The only element of the German gender system in which slight indications of change can be observed is the possessive. In the possessive determiners, external and internal control apply simultaneously. They take the gender suffix as required by the controlling noun within the noun phrase (*possessum*), and their stem is chosen according to the gender of the external controller (*possessor*), i.e. *sein* (non-fem.) and *ihr* (fem.). Hence, in a noun phrase such as *ihr+en Reiz* 'its/her fascination' (accusative), the external controller determines the female stem (*ihr*) and the internal controller (the masculine noun *Reiz*) determines the suffix *-en* (accusative singular feminine). When the external controller is a feminine non-human possessor, there are weak tendencies to generalize to the non-feminine stem *sein-* even in the written standard language; therefore, one can find examples such as *Abwechslung hat auch **sein**en Reiz* 'variation also has its fascination', instead of canonical *Abwechslung hat auch **ihr**en Reiz.*[3] In this case, externally controlled gender is neutralized. It is interesting that this candidate for an incipient change affects a part of the gender system in which the tripartite gender has already been simplified to the (Romance-type) two-gender system, with (human) animacy becoming an issue. As these inanimate possessive constructions are quite rare – and non-existent in our data – the issue is not pursued here any further.

Not surprisingly, the gender system is a considerable challenge in the acquisition of German as a foreign language (cf., e.g., Christen 2000, Krohn & Krohn 2008, Rieger 2011), as there is only little overt gender marking on the noun, i.e. gender assignment to morphologically simple nouns needs to be learned with each word.[4] In addition, gender agreement interacts with case and shows a high degree of syncretism, which makes the system relatively opaque. Apart from difficulties in assigning German nouns to the three gender classes, existing research documents the overuse of *e*-inflection in prenominal adjectives (cf., e.g., Diehl et al. 1991 or Dimroth 2008: 128): the suffix *-e* on the adjective (the nominative form of all genders) is generalized into the contexts requiring the 'strong' inflection (Binanzer 2017: 78, Wegener 1995: 108).

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[2] Differences pertain to the forms of the genitive which do not occur in our data, and to the plural, where gender is neutralized.

[3] More examples can be found in Peust (2004/5).

[4] But see the discussion in Köpcke (1982) and Wegener (1995) on the available cues, many of which are probabilistic in nature.

For the spontaneous acquisition of German as a second language by adults, omission of the determiner as well as overgeneralization of the (Std.G. feminine) determiner *die* have been reported (Krohn & Krohn 2008: 87, Wegener 1995: 108). For bilingual children (German as L2 in sequential acquisition, L1 = Turkish, Russian or Polish), Ruberg (2015) found that the acquisition of the gender system by bilingual children follows the same pattern as in monolinguals, but lags behind considerably. In his study (based on an elicitation task), even monolingual children had not fully acquired the 'strong' inflection of the adjective at the age of 5;0 (appr. 75% correct answers); the bilingual children (who were about a year older than the monolinguals and had been exposed to German for 30 months), achieved about 58% correct answers (for the respondents with Turkish as their L1, the number was even lower). However, his numbers do not distinguish between case and gender and are therefore somewhat difficult to interpret.

Finally, it is revealing to look at the spontaneous acquisition of German by first wave immigrants in the 1970s. In the so-called guest worker pidgin (an early fossilized learners' variety of German), determiners are often lacking. Keim (1984: 205) mentions an average number of NPs containing a determiner of 26% (including possessive determiners which cannot be omitted for pragmatic reasons; the definite determiner would therefore appear to be used even less frequently); the same percentage is reported for NPs with an adjective, among which she includes numerals. The forms of the determiners *ein/kein* and the possessive determiners in Keim's data often show "overgeneralization of the feminine form", i.e. the *e*-suffix. Her examples suggest that the same applies to a considerable share of the prenominal adjectives.[5] The following utterance comes from a learner at a very elementary stage:

(1) (from Keim 1984: 207)

Türkisch-e	*Kollege,*	*Auto*	*park-en*	*mach-en*
Turkish-SUFF[6]	colleague,	car	park-INF	make-INF

'the/a Turkish colleague parked the car'
(Std.G. *(ein) türkisch+er Kollege*)

The same overgeneralization of the *e*-suffix in the adjective inflection is also attested in her data for linguistically more advanced 'guest workers':

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[5] See the list of NPs in Keim (1978: 256–260).

[6] Keim analyzes this suffix as a feminine. We will argue later that it is better analyzed as a generalized marker of adjectival attribution and therefore use SUFF in the gloss.

(2) (from Keim 1984: 207)

*und dann hab ich <u>ein</u>   <u>deutsch-**e**   Freund</u> kennen-ge-lern-t   in Walldorf*
and then have I   a:NOM/ACC   German-SUFF friend got.to.know:PTCP   in Walldorf
'and then I got to know a German friend in Walldorf'
(Std.G. *ein+en deutsch+**en** Freund*)

3.   Gender agreement in the German multiethnolect

In this paper we look at multiethnolectal German as the variety of spoken German in which grammatical innovations are most likely to originate in the contemporary language,[7] asking whether gender is affected by such innovations. We use the term *multiethnolect(al)* here (following Clyne 2000, Quist 2000), although we are aware of the terminological problems and discussions surrounding it (see, for instance, the discussion in Cornips, Jaspers & de Rooij 2015, Jaspers 2017, Cheshire, Nortier & Agder 2015). Some of this criticism is based on the claim that structural innovations that are generally assumed to have originated among speakers from immigrant backgrounds, have started to spread into groups of speakers without migration background (de-ethnicization; cf. Wiese 2009, who claims that the former multiethnolect has turned into a general youth variety in certain urban neighborhoods). Without denying this de-ethnicisation, the empirical focus of this paper is on young people living in multiethnic networks and coming from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, for whose way of speaking the term 'multiethnolect' seems adequate. We ask whether there is any indication of change in the German gender system in their speech, not whether these changes are restricted to the core group. This empirical focus is based on the assumption that if such an innovation is ermerging at all, it should first become manifest in this group.

The data were collected in Stuttgart in 2009-2012 among 32 young speakers and analyzed in detail in Siegel (2018). Of the group members, 28 were multilingual speakers from immigrant families of various, mainly Turkish and Balkan, backgrounds, born in Germany or living there with their families from a very young age. Four were monolingual Germans living in close network contacts with the multilingual speakers. All of them had acquired German from childhood and lived in highly multi-ethnic, low income neighborhoods in the city of

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[7] Details on the sociolinguistics and structure of German multiethnolect can be found, e.g., in Auer (2003, 2013), Dirim & Auer (2000), Keim (2007), Wiese (2009, 2012). Further information on the corpus used in this study can be found in Siegel (2018).

Stuttgart. Data were collected in informal group conversations, but mostly with an adult ethnographer present. According to Siegel (2018) the participants' speech showed typical multi-ethnolectal syntactic features occurring with considerable frequency, which suggests that they did not monitor their language for grammatical correctness according to Standard German rules during the recordings. Obviously, we cannot exclude the possibility that the frequency of these features might even have increased in situations in which no adult ethnographer was present. Although our corpus is restricted to Stuttgart, the same features that are reported in Siegel (2018) are attested for similar groups of speakers in other German cities as well (see, e.g., Wiese 2008, Wiese & Pohle 2016, Wiese & Rehbein 2016 for Berlin). Note that none of the participants of our study spoke a Swabian dialect (see Auer, forthc.).

There were no examples of gender agreement in anaphoric/cataphoric or relative pronouns in the data that did not conform with Standard German. Externally controlled gender assignment to the nouns to which these pronouns refer follows the Standard German pattern. We therefore focus on internally controlled gender agreement.

3.1. Gender agreement in determiners

The most frequent grammatical context in which gender agreement is internally controlled is the determiner. There were 1479 instances of noun phrases in our data set which included a definite or indefinite determiner. Only in 15 of these cases (appr. 1%) did gender marking on the determiner deviate from Standard German; cf. the examples in (3).

(3) Gender assignment in determiners that does not follow Standard German

    a. *ja aber voll   <u>das   Aufwand</u>* (MA, N_JH_01, 548)
        yes but totally the:N.NOM/ACC.SG[8] effort
        'yes, but totally <u>the effort</u>'
        (Std.G. [<u>*der* *Aufwand*</u>]M.NOM)

    b. <u>*der   Viertel*</u>   *ist scheiße* (BU, N_JH_05, 991)
        the:M.NOM.SG   neighborhood is shit
        '<u>the neighborhood</u> is shit'
        (Std.G. [<u>*das Viertel*</u>]N.NOM.)

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[8] Note that here and in the following, the glosses represent the Std.G. pattern. They are provided, following the journal's editorial policy, in order to help the reader understand the structure of the non-English examples. However, in the case of an emergent non-standard variety, they must be treated with utmost caution as they presuppose an analysis which is the very object of our article.

c. *Mein-e Schwester hat <u>den Kind</u> bei mein-er Mutter gelassen*

my-F.NOM.SG sister has the:M.ACC.SG with my-F.DAT.SG mother left:PTCP

(MAR, N_RS_04, 4329)

'my sister left <u>the kid</u> with my mother'

(Std.G. [<u>*das Kind*</u>]_{N.ACC})

d. *wechsel jetzt nicht <u>den   Thema</u>* (NAS, H_MJ_03, 384)

change:IMP now not the:M.ACC.SG topic

'do not change <u>the topic</u> now'

(Std.G. [<u>*das Thema*</u>]_{N.ACC.})

The non-standard gender assignments always occur with definite determiners and affect masculine (cf. 3a) or neuter (cf. 3b, d, d) nouns, while there are no instances of feminine nouns being affected. Yet, given the extremely small number of these cases, this finding seems irrelevant for the analysis of gender in the German multiethnolect as a whole.

We also looked at gender agreement in pre-nominal possessive determiners. Out of 560 tokens (mostly first and second person singular), a small number of twelve instances before feminine nouns showed non-standard zero inflection (appr. 2%). Zero inflection is only possible in the neuter and masculine nominative in Std.G. (see Table 3 and Table 8). The deviations from the Std.G. pattern in this case might indicate a (very weak) tendency to eliminate gender control in the possessive determiner:

(4) Gender assignments in pre-nominal possessives not following the Standard German pattern

a. *weil <u>mein   Mutter</u> ein-e Gaststätte hat-te* (MAR, N_RS_04, 444)

because my:N.NOM.SG mother a-F.ACC restaurant have-PST

'because <u>my mother</u> had a restaurant'

(Std.G. [*mein<u>-e</u> Mutter*] _{F.NOM.})

b. *ich muss mit <u>mein   Tante</u> putz-en geh-en* (SO, N_JH_05, 2313)

I must with my:N/M.NOM.SG aunt clean-INF go-INF

'I have to go cleaning with <u>my aunt</u>'

(Std.G. [*mein<u>-er</u> Tante*]_{F.DAT})

c. *aber ich denke <u>mein   mutter</u> sag-t mir auch*

but I think my:N/M.NOM.SG. mother say-3SG.PRS me:DAT also

(YAS, N_RS_02, 1575)

'but I think <u>my mother</u> [would] tell me after all'

(Std.G. [*mein-e Mutter*] F.NOM)

    d.   *wenn mein   klein   Schwester irgendwas mach-t*
        when my:M/N.NOM.SG little:M.NOM.SG sister   something do-3SG.PRS
        (YAS, N_RS_02, 1633)

        'when <u>my little sister</u> does something [bad]…'

        (Std.G. [*mein-e klein-e Schwester*]F.NOM)

    e.   <u>*mein*</u>   *Zukunft sieht*   *besser aus*   *wie ihre*   *grad*
        my:M/N.NOM.SG future   look:3SG.PRS better PARTICLE than her:F.NOM.SG now
        (YAS, N_RS_02, 1941)

        '<u>my future</u> looks better than hers right now'

        (Std.G. [*mein-e Zukunft*]F.NOM)

The predominance of kinship nouns (*Mutter* 'mother', *Tante* 'aunt' or *Schwester* 'sister') in the list (seven of twelve examples) is striking.[9] But since kinship terms occur frequently in the data (for instance, there are 205 instances of possessives before the word *Mutter* in the corpus), the relative frequency of these zero markings is too small to warrant any hypothesis on a structural innovation regarding kinship terms. (For instance, the occurrence of zero markings on possessives before the lexeme *Mutter* amounts to 3.4% only, which just a little higher than the occurrence of zero marked possessives in general.)

In sum, the determiners (including possessive determiners) give us no evidence for a restructuring of the German gender system in the multiethnolect.

There is, however, an independent grammatical process which indirectly affects gender agreement by eliminating some of its contexts. This is the non-use of (definite and indefinite) determiners where Standard German would require them (cf. Siegel 2018: 56–91, Wiese 2012: 59–61). Here are some examples of such bare nouns:

(5) Bare nouns instead of Std.G. determiner NPs (expected determiner in brackets in the translation)

    a.   *ich hab   Geldbeutel hier* (ER, BC_JA_08, 345)
        I   have:1SG.PRS purse   here

        'I have (my/the) <u>purse</u> here'

        (Std.G. [<u>*mein-en/den* *Geldbeutel*</u>]M.ACC 'my/the purse')

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[9] This phenomenon is also mentioned in Wiese (2012: 60–61) with the same example of a female kinship term: *Ich frag <u>mein</u> Schwester* 'I ask my sister'. Her explanation is the general tendency of German to delete final schwa in the 1st person present tense and preterite of the verb which is overgeneralized to this syntactic context.

b. *hast   du nächst-e   Woche Freitag Bus*? (MAD, H_MJ_03, 354)

have:2SG.PRS you next-F.ACC.SG week   Friday   bus

'do you take (the) bus next week on Friday?'

(Std.G. [*den Bus*]M.ACC 'the bus')

c. *der is Hauptschule   am   Nachholen* (BU, N_JH_05, 879)

he   is 'Hauptschule' PROG repeat

'he is about to repeat (the) Hauptschule'

(Std.G. *die Hauptschule*]F.ACC[the lowest school level in Germany at the time])

d. *wir haben da   Mischung geraucht* (BU2, N_RS_01, 2605)

we have   there mixture   smoke:PTC

'we smoked (a) mixture there'

(Std.G. [*eine Mischung*]F.ACC 'a mixture')

e. *wir ham* (.)   *Zweihundert Quadratmeter Haus* (EDI, N_JH_03, 2239)

we have:1PL.PRS twohundred square.meters house

'we have (a) house of 200 square meters'

(Std.G. [*ein Zweihundert-Quadratmeter-Haus*]N.ACC 'a house of 200 square meters')

f. *dem leucht-et   Gesicht voll rot* (SM, BC_JA_03, 530)

him shine-3SG.PRS face   full red'

(= 'his face lights up full red')

 (Std.G. [*das/sein Gesicht*]N.NOM 'the/his face')

Table (4) shows the quantitative distributions of bare nouns according to (Std.G.) gender

	Bare noun	Determiner NP	*n=*	Percentage of bare nouns
Masculine NPs	118	521	*639*	18.5
Feminine NPs	165	599	*764*	21.6
Neuter NPs	117	334	*451*	25.9

Table 4: Non-use of definite/indefinite determiners (from Siegel 2018: 76)

The relatively small difference between the masculine and neuter determiners is significant (χ^2 (2, 1854)=8.734; p<0.05; with low strength of association: Cramer's V=0.069). Semantic reasons may be involved (cf. Siegel 2018: 76–77). Yet it is clear that noun phrases of all genders are affected.

The percentages of bare nouns in the Stuttgart multiethnolect can be compared with a study on the Berlin multiethnolect by Wiese & Rehbein (2016: 50), which shows that bare nouns are not restricted to Stuttgart. However, these authors found a considerably lower percentage of bare nouns (4.23%). One explanation for this quantitative difference is the inclusion of possessive determiners in their study - possessive determiners are rarely omitted due to their high pragmatic salience.

Without going into details, it should be noted that determiners are a vulnerable domain of German grammar, as the original pragmatic function of the determiner, i.e. to mark definiteness vs. indefiniteness, has become irrelevant in many contexts over the course of language history. Leiss (2010) argues that the (definite, but also indefinite) determiner is "overdetermined" today, i.e. its use has become generalized to contexts in which there is no choice between definite and indefinite determiner for other (syntactic and semantic) reasons. Paradoxically then, the historical 'success' of the determiner system has simultaneously undermined its raison d'être and hence (according to Leiss) will in the long run lead to the collapse of its original function of expressing definiteness. From that perspective, the tendency of the German multiethnolect to use bare nouns instead of determiner NPs just follows a prefigured path of a language change. Leiss' theory predicts that bare nouns should become more frequent without functional restrictions due to the erosion of the functional basis of the determiner. Alternative approaches have tried to explain the occurrence of bare nouns instead of determiner NPs on pragmatic grounds, for instance by referring to the referential strength of the noun (cf. Broekhuis 2013:168, Swart 2015 for Dutch, Demske, submitted, for further discussion). Cornips & Auer (submitted) show that, at least in the syntactic context of prepositional phrases, this pragmatic approach does not sufficiently explain bare nouns in the multiethnolect.

Against the background of the general vulnerability of the determiner system, it might appear questionable whether the vernacular non-use of determiners in contexts in which it is required in Standard German can be attributed to multiethnolectal influence alone. We therefore checked our results against a control group of monolingual students living in a non-immigrant neighborhood in the periphery of Stuttgart, none of whom had a migration background (12 speakers aged 13-15 from a *Realschule*, recorded in group interviews in order to assure comparability with the multiethnolectal data). Figure (1) shows the occurrence of bare nouns per 1000 words in the two data sets:[10]

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[10] In this count, the four speakers without migration background in the core group were omitted.
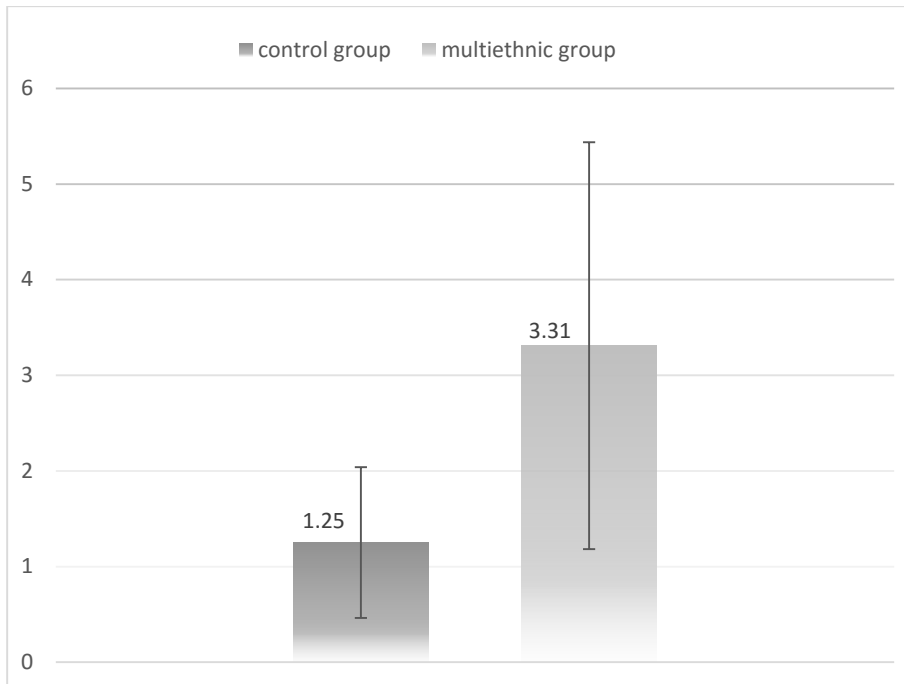
Fig. (1): Average occurrence of bare nouns per 1000 words in a monoethnic German (left) and a multiethnic group of young speakers

With an average of 1.25 (SD = 0.79) in the control group as compared to 3.31 (SD = 2.13) in the multiethnic group, bare nouns are almost three times as frequent in the multiethnolect (a difference that is significant at the <.0001 level, t-test for unequal sample variance, t=-4.46, df=36.6). Apprimately the same ratio was found in Wiese & Rehbein 2016: 49. The non-use of the determiner indirectly weakens the multiethnolectal gender system by eliminating a number of its contexts, much more than this is the case in a comparable group of monoethnic German speakers.

However, the results for the control group also show that bare nouns that do not follow the rules of Standard German also exist in vernacular German outside the multiethnolect. This indicates that various sources of innovation lead to the same structural result (bare nouns). For instance, the students in the control group often used terms referring to school institutions without deter-miners, hence: *in fünfte* ('in fifth grade', Std.G. *in der fünften [Klasse])*, *in Gruppenarbeit* ('in group work', Std.G. *in der Gruppenarbeit*), etc. These bare nouns seem to be a general feature of modern German 'school language' and an innovation which is independent of the multieth-nolect.

3.2. Gender agreement in attributive adjectives

Std.G. case and gender marking of the attributive adjective differ depending on whether (and which) determiner precedes. We first look at the adjective in noun phrases that are introduced by a determiner. In this case, many case/gender distinctions on the adjective are neutralized even in Std.G.. Forms deviating from the standard were therefore observed only in the accusative in our data, and mostly before a masculine noun (13 out of 90, i.e. appr. 14%). Almost all of them (12 out of 13) occurred after the indefinite determiner.

	non-standard forms	standard forms	*n=*
Masculine	9	21	*30*
Feminine	3	40	*43*
Neuter	1	16	*17*
n=	*13*	*77*	*90*

Table 5: Deviations from the Std.G. gender agreement pattern in the attributive adjective after a determiner in the accusative singular (n=90; 57 after indefinite, 33 after definite determiner).

In most cases (8 of 13), the suffix chosen by the multiethnolectal speakers is *-e* instead of *-en* before a masculine noun (e.g. *ein-en gut-e Freund* instead of *ein-en gut-en Freund* 'a good friend/ACC'). Note that there is no tendency to delete the case- and gender-marking suffix entirely (as sometimes observed in the possessive determiner, see above). In two of the three cases in which the neuter *es*-suffix is chosen for the adjective before a (Std.G. feminine) noun, the determiner also follows the neuter pattern, i.e. the speaker apparently has assigned a non-standard lexical gender to the noun ([*n*[11] *schönes Zukunft*]NEUTR for Std.G. [*ne schöne Zukunft*]FEM). All in all, the tendency to over-generalize the schwa-suffix is minor in this context, at best, and no systematic restructuring is visible.[12]

The more interesting case are noun phrases in which the attributive adjective is not preceded by a determiner, although such a determiner would be required in Std.G.. With 26.7% omissions of the determiner, the tendency not to use the determiner is even slightly (but significantly) higher in an NP that contains an adjective than in an NP which only consists of a noun (see Table 6).

If no determiner is used, the speakers could either follow the pattern of the Standard German adjective inflection without a preceding determiner (see Table 2, left-hand column, 'strong'

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[11] *n* is the clitic version of the indefinite determiner *ein*.

[12] In the control group, only one instance of this type was found (in addition to two zero markings of the prenominal adjective), presumably production errors.

paradigm), which requires a rather complex system of gender- and case-marking, or they could simplify this system according to the 'weak' or 'mixed' inflection prescribed in Std.G. after the determiner. In the latter case, they would treat the noun phrase as if the determiner was still there, and the deletion could be regarded as a phonological process only.

	Without determiner	With determiner	*n=*	Non-use of determiners (in %)
NPs with prenominal adjective	75	206	*281*	26.7
NPs without prenominal adjective	325	1272	*1597*	20.4

Table 6: Non-use of determiners in NPs with and without prenominal adjectives (cf. Siegel 2018: 71); (χ^2 (1, 1878)=5,729; p<0,05; low strength of association: Phi=0,055).

The solution chosen by our speakers is shown in Table 7, which summarizes all inflectional suffixes of prenominal attributive adjectives in NPs without determiners in the data set, by case and gender.[13] The Std.G. suffixes for adjectives not preceded by a determiner (see Table 2) are printed in boldface; the Std.G. suffixes for adjectives preceded by a (definite or indefinite) determiner (see Table 2 and 3) have grey shading. All other forms are non-standard.

	Masc	Neutr	Fem
Nom	*-e* (3) *-en* (1) ***-er* (4)**	*-e* (5) ***-es* (2)**	***-e* (16)**
Acc	*-e* (19) ***-en* (2)** **-er** (1) **-ø** (1)	**-e** (13) ***-es* (5)** **-ø** (1) *-en* (0)	***-e* (31)** *-ø* (3)
Dat	**-e** (3) ***-en* (1)** ***-em* (0)**	**-e** (3) ***-en* (0)** ***-em* (0)**	*-e* (13) ***-en* (1)** ***-er* (1)**

Table 7: Suffixes of prenominal adjectives in NPs without determiners in the multiethnolectal dataset (n=129).

It is clear that the speakers do not follow the Std.G. 'strong' paradigm of adjective inflection required for NPs not preceded by a determiner. The forms expected in this paradigm only account for 43% of those found in the data set (56 of 129); and even this percentage is only reached because the feminine suffix for the nominative and accusative of the 'strong' paradigm

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[13]   There are no genitive nouns in the corpus.

(schwa) is identical with the 'weak' and 'mixed' paradigms. Leaving out the feminine nominative/accusative, only 11% of the forms (9 out of 82) are well-formed according to the 'strong' paradigm in the standard. The 'weak'/'mixed' paradigms account better for the data: they explain 70% of the forms (90 of 129). However, both accounts do not capture the pattern our speakers choose precisely. Indeed, they follow a different strategy which is to select the schwa-suffix as much as possible. If the 'strong' inflection of the Std.G. already has schwa (as in the accusative and nominative of the feminine), this option is almost always selected; if the 'weak' or 'mixed' inflection shows schwa in Std.G. (as in the dative of the feminine, in the nominative of the masculine, or the nominative/accusative of the neuter), it is also selected. But if neither of the adjectival paradigms of Std.G. has schwa, as in the masculine accusative or masculine/neuter dative, it is still schwa which is chosen as the adjectival suffix. Hence, we find examples such as in (6):

(6) Non-std. schwa inflection of the pre-nominal adjective in the multiethnolect

(a)   *der geh-t   sogar <u>in billigst-**e**   Raum</u> ganz oben* (IL, BC_JA_02, 340)

   he go-3SG.PRS even into cheapest-SUFF   room right on.top

   'he even goes <u>into the cheapest room</u>, right on top'

   (Std.G.:   *in* [*den billigst-**en** Raum*]_M.ACC_; without   determiner: [*billigst-**en***

   Raum]_MASC.ACC._)

(b)   *weil   des von ander-**e**   Land   komm-t* (DA, H_MJ_02, 1267)

   because it   from other-SUFF country come-PTCP

   'because this comes from another country'

   (Std.G.:   *von*   [*ein-em   ander-en   Land*]_N.DAT_;   without   determiner: [*ander-em*

   Land]_NEUTR.DAT._)

(c)   *wir bekomm-en äh (.) <u>fünfseitig-**e**   Papier</u> halt* (BC_JA_20 MAR2, 2203)

   we get-1PL.PRS uhm   five.page-SUFF paper   PARTICLE

   'we get a five-page paper you see'

   (Std.G.:   [*ein fünfseitig-**es** Papier*] _N.ACC_; without   determiner: [*fünfseitig+**es** Papier*]_N.ACC_)

(d)   *wir mach-en   so richtig gechillt-**e** Abend* (N_JH_03, LE 1480)

   we make-1SG.PRS like really   chill-SUFF evening

   'we'll have a really chilled evening'

(Std.G. [*ein-en richtig gechillt-**en** abend*]_{M.ACC}; without determiner: [*richtig gechillt+**en** abend*]_{M.ACC})

(e)   *weil die schwarz-**e** Pass hat...* (N_RS_02 KA, 284)

        because she black-SUFF passport have:3SG;PRS

        'because she has the/a black passport'

        (Std.G. [*den schwarz-**en** Pass*]_{M.ACC}; without determiner: [*schwarz-**en** Pass*]_{M.ACC})

(f)   *du bist doch aus kurdisch-e Krieg gekommen (n_JH_05, BU, 1112)*

        you be:2SG.PRS PARTICLE from kurdish-SUFF war come:PTCP

        'you came from the kurdish war, didn't you'

        (Std.G. *aus* [*dem kurdisch-**en** Krieg*]_{M.DAT};without determiner: [*kurdisch-**em** Krieg*] _{M.DAT}).

In total, 82% (106) of all prenominal adjectives in our data set receive the schwa-suffix, regardless of case or gender. It is therefore fair to assume that the schwa-suffix as used by these speakers is a passe-partout suffix that only has the function of marking the attributive function of the adjective.[14]

It can be concluded that the speakers switch between two systems. They either use the determiner, and in this case by and large follow the Std.G. pattern of adjectival inflection in prenominal position, which shows only little gender marking due to numerous syncretisms anyway. Or, alternatively, they do not use the determiner, and in this case simplify adjectival inflection quite radically, to the degree of almost always using gender- and case-neutral schwa as a marker. Here, then, we can indeed speak of a restructuring of the morphological system which is applied in tandem with the omission of the determiners. Noun phrases without determiners but with a prenominal adjective almost regularly lose their gender- (and case-) marking in favor of a generalized attributive suffix *-e*. With the determiner lacking, these NPs therefore usually[15] have no overt gender marking at all.

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[14] There was no example of an overuse of schwa in pre-nominal adjective inflection in a NP without determiner in the control group.

[15] Case/gender-marking on the noun is restricted in Std.G. to the genitive of masculine/neuter nouns and the dative of so-called weak neuters/masculines (such as *dem Löwe-n*_{DAT} 'lion'). The genitive is almost non-existent in our data, and the weak neuters/masculines are a very small lexical group (many of which do not receive the dative suffix due to an ongoing language change in German any longer).

4. Conclusion

Seen against the background of the L2 acquisition of gender as sketched in Section 2, the results prove that the German multiethnolect is not a learners' variety – which, of course, is to be expected given the speakers' language biographies. Gender assignment has been fully mastered.

Neither have we found evidence for an ongoing or incipient language change affecting the gender system in the German multiethnolect. This contrasts to what has been reported for Dutch or Danish multiethnolects and is true despite the fact that the participants in our study otherwise show a number of innovative grammatical features with considerable frequency (of which only the non-use of determiners has been discussed in this paper). The number of gender assignments that diverge from Std.G. in our data is very low. Considering that the German multiethnolect is often said to spearhead vernacular language change, this finding is evidence for the stability of the three-gender system of German.

When explaining this stability, it must be kept in mind that

-   German has not reduced the three-gender system to a neuter/utrum system as in Dutch or Norwegian (Bokmal), with the ensuing frequency imbalance between the two remaining genders which weakens the neuter; and
-   the German determiners have remained in pre-nominal position in all contexts (other than in the North Germanic languages) and are clearly separable from the nouns.

However, we have also shown that multiethnolectal speech has a tendency to eliminate grammatical contexts for gender agreement through an independent process, i.e. the tendency to replace determiner NPs by bare nouns. Bewer (2004: 84) thinks that about 15% of the words in (non-ethnolectal) German running speech are either nouns with an inherent gender or words whose gender is controlled by these nouns. It is likely that this percentage is significantly lower in multiethnolectal speech due to this process.

The only possible innovation affecting gender in the German multiethnolect which we found is the simplification of the inflection of prenominal adjectives in noun phrases without determiners; the traditional German system is here replaced by a generalized suffix -*e* marking attribution only. The same restructuring of the pre-nominal inflectional paradigm of the adjective is known from the spontaneous acquisition of German by adult immigrant learners, and indeed, one possible explanation for its occurrence is that it was copied from the learner variety of the

first generation of migrants (still very much present in our speakers' families and neighbor-hoods) into the multiethnolect. But the same overgeneralization of the schwa suffix is also found in the L1 acquisition of the German gender system (Bewer 2004, Bittner 2006, Mills 1986, Müller 2000, Ruberg 2015, Szagun 2013). Children start out with bare nouns. The use of the determiner then gradually increases from two to four; in the pre-determiner phase, they may use NPs with an adjective ending in schwa (such as *groß+e Haus* 'big house', for St.G. *(ein) groß+es Haus/das groß+e Haus*). In all these cases, the choice of schwa is easily explained: schwa is the most frequent suffix in the paradigm, and since it also marks the plural nominative in all genders, it also has the largest token frequency. It therefore is a 'natural' target of analog-ical levelling just as well as a 'natural' intermediate stage in (L1/L2) language acquisition.

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