



## Generics and stereotypes in discourse: A cross-disciplinary perspective

International Conference  
5-6 June 2025  
Leiden University

Laure Gardelle, Université Grenoble Alpes  
Naomi Truan, Leiden University

The aim of this international conference is to bring together researchers from various disciplines – linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, communication and media studies, marketing, psychology, history, political science, among others – to further our understanding of **how and why generics and stereotypes are explicitly referred to in discourse** by speakers.

We are deliberately bringing generics and stereotypes together, because even though a “stereotype” is understood in everyday life as “a set idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is wrong” (Cambridge Dictionary 2024), the notion has been extended by a number of researchers in communication and social psychology to what Beukeboom & Burgers (2017: 2), for instance, describe as “the knowledge and expectancies about probable behaviours, features, and traits”. This is very close to what linguists regard as “generic” statements. While stereotypes in the everyday sense are harmful and must be combated, the more general cognitive reflex helps people to make sense of the world, including the social world for humans, and to gain some predictability (Mackie et al. 1996, Moskowitz 2005, Beukeboom & Burgers 2017). In this broader sense at least (but probably not solely), Hinton (2020) points out that while studies on stereotypes focus on humans, we can just as well have stereotypes of makes of cars, cats or types of vegetables (see also Schneider 2004).

Despite the wealth of research on generics and stereotypes, the issue of **why speakers would want to make a generic statement or make explicit reference to a stereotype** in a given context has been understudied to date. On the one hand, linguistic research on generics, which has focused mainly on how bare plural generics in characterising sentences license exceptions (e.g. *birds fly* is considered true even though penguins are flightless birds), has worked almost exclusively on fabricated, out-of-context examples. Formal linguists initially attempted models based on proportional quantification (e.g. Pelletier & Asher 1997, Asher & Pelletier 2012) or probability (Cohen 1996, 2004), all based on truth-conditional semantics. But Leslie (2007, 2008, 2012) and Brandone et al. (2012) in psychology showed that the cognitive process was in fact a low-



level one, available to children long before quantifiers were acquired, and crucial to survival. It is now understood that with many generalizing sentences, exceptions are not just licensed, but expected (Radden 2009), and are even treated as negligible (Gardelle 2023a).

Importantly, the same statement might be regarded as true or false (in other words, the same exceptions might be regarded as negligible or not) depending on the point being made in context and the target group. It has been shown, for example, that stating *mammals are viviparous* may be useful as a basic generic statement for young schoolchildren, but that a shift to *most mammals are viviparous* is needed when it comes to a teacher's guide to raising mammal young (Gardelle 2023b). Such diverse treatment might have **strong argumentative effects** (Amossy 1994), especially when reporting about statistics. For example, from a poll that finds that 59% of online college students want to have more interactions, an article concludes that *[Online college students] want to be part of a community*, discarding the other 41% as negligible, where another writer might have retained from the poll that *only a short majority of students* want to be part of a community (Gardelle 2023a). Such a choice has an immediate impact on what will be deemed the best course of action to be taken.

On the other hand, research in communication and psychology has established the **crucial importance of others in the negotiation of stereotypes**. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1969, 1970) has shown the importance of ingroup and outgroups as a filter on perceptions of individual behaviour, as well as the importance of ingroups for social cohesion. This process explains how, for instance, certain language varieties such as Kiezdeutsch in Berlin may be described by its users as the “language of the boys” (Truan & Oldani 2021: 15), selecting certain speakers as prototypical for the variety—even though Kiezdeutsch is, in fact, used by all genders (Wiese 2017; Bunk & Pohle 2019). More generally, categorisation of any set of objects increases the perceived differences between categories (Tajfel 1969, 1970). Any arbitrary group, such as people who eat carrots, once given a label (carrot-eaters), triggers filters for impression formation, because the category seems to bring together members in a meaningful way (Beukeboom & Burgers 2017: 3).

But beyond actual perceptions, some studies have pointed out **the importance of communication goals for stereotyping discourse**. In Discursive Psychology, stereotyping is regarded as a “discursive action”, “actively constructed in discourse for rhetorical ends” (Potter & Wetherell 1992: 77). Speakers may accommodate to what they think are their addressee's beliefs, because their aim might be to persuade, blame, refute, or ingratiate themselves. In linguistic anthropology, social meaning-based approaches to the construction of personae have also shown how specific linguistic forms may become metapragmatically linked to stereotypic personae through a process of enregisterment (Agha 2003; Agha 2005). For example, research on multiethnolects has



found that certain ways of speaking are metapragmatically commented upon as belonging to “foreigners” (Wiese 2015, 2017; Krämer 2017), which suggests that generalizations are mostly used to construct an image of the “other”.

Given this background, the issue of the pragmatic function of stereotypes and generic statements appears crucial to understanding the circulation of generalizations and stereotypes, and the exact connections between the generalizing reflex of the brain and harmful stereotypes. We welcome talks that take naturally occurring generic or stereotypical statements as their starting point. Some points of particular interest could be the following (but the list is not meant to be exhaustive):

- 1) **Why produce a generic statement in a given context?** For what kinds of properties, with what form of the NP (bare plural, *a N*, *the N*, other), and with what consequences? Are there discursive clues for the communicative goal(s) identified?
- 2) **Do these communicative strategies solely concern humans?** Even though research on stereotypes has focused on humans, there are generalisations and harmful overgeneralisations about other categories as well. One example is sharks, for which a WWF website tries to disentangle “shark facts” from “shark myths”.
- 3) **How exactly are generic or stereotypical (in the harmful sense) statements phrased?** Earlier in this call for papers, we mentioned the contrast between bare plurals and the quantifier *most* to present exceptions as negligible or not; what about other strategies, such as adverbs (*sharks rarely ever attack humans*) or other forms of adjustment to generalizations?
- 4) **Is there room for diversity in the phrasing of stereotypes?** Knowledge-contributing statements might make room for variation among the members of a category (*trucks come in all shapes and sizes*), but is there a clear distinction between (harmful) stereotypical ones and mere generic statements?
- 5) **In a given discourse or set of extracts, does a given speaker show fluctuations or even contradictions in the generalizations or stereotypes they put forward?** Conversely, are there forms of standard statements in a given community of practice?
- 6) **How do addressees react to a generic statement or a stereotype?** In interactive settings, do some trigger agreement statements, or rejections, or other? On what grounds, and are there identifiable relations to the speaker’s initial strategy?

Even though the talks will be given in English, they may bear on any language(s). They should contain in-depth analyses of naturally occurring examples.

**Abstracts** of around 300 words (excluding references) should be addressed before 15 January 2025 to Laure Gardelle, Naomi Truan, and Ismaël Zaïdi: [laure.gardelle@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr](mailto:laure.gardelle@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr); [n.a.l.truan@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:n.a.l.truan@hum.leidenuniv.nl); [ismael.zaidi@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr](mailto:ismael.zaidi@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr).



The conference is sponsored by the Leiden University Fund / LUF ([www.luf.nl](http://www.luf.nl)), the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics, and the research lab LIDILEM (Université Grenoble Alpes).

**Keynote speaker:**

Camiel J. Beukeboom, Associate Professor

Department of Communication Science, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

PI on the NWO project “Uncovering biased language use: Implicit Communication of Stereotypes in Natural Language”

**Advisory board (under construction):**

Ruth Amossy (Tel Aviv University, Israel)

Claire Beyssade (Université Paris 8, France)

Dwi Noverini Djenar (University of Sydney, Australia)

Barbara De Cock (Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium)

Philipp Krämer (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium)

Susan Gelman (University of Michigan, US)

Pierre-Yves Modicom (Université Lyon 3, France)

Jonathan Potter (Rutgers University, New Brunswick, US)

Emmanuelle Prak-Derrington (Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, France)

Gijsbert Rutten (Universiteit Leiden, the Netherlands)

Sandrine Sorlin (Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3, France)

Tuija Virtanen (Åbo Akademi University, Finland)

**Schedule:**

Deadline for submission: 15 January 2025

Notification of acceptance: 15 February 2025

**Organizing committee:**

Laure Gardelle, Université Grenoble Alpes, France

Naomi Truan, Leiden University

Ismaël Zaïdi, Université Grenoble Alpes, France

**References:**

Agha, Asif. 2003. The social life of cultural value. *Language & Communication* (Words and Beyond: Linguistic and Semiotic Studies of Sociocultural Order) 23(3). 231–273. <https://doi.org/10/cw8z5c>.



- Agha, Asif. 2005. Voice, Footing, Enregisterment. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 15(1). 38–59. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jlin.2005.15.1.38>.
- Amossy, Ruth. Stéréotypie et argumentation. In *Le Stéréotype*, Alain Goudet (ed). Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 1994. 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.puc.9695>.
- Asher, Nicholas & Pelletier, Francis Jeffry. 2012. More truths about generic truth. In *Genericity*, Alda Mari, Claire Beyssade & Fabio Del Prete (eds). 312–333. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beukeboom, Camiel J. 2014. Mechanisms of linguistic bias: How words reflect and maintain stereotypic expectancies. In *Social Cognition and Communication*, Joseph P. Forgas, Orsolya Vincze & János László (eds). 313–330. New York: Psychology Press.
- Beukeboom, Camiel J. & Christian Burgers. 2017. Linguistic Bias. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.439>.
- Beukeboom, Camiel J. & Christian Burgers. 2019. How stereotypes are shared through language: A review and introduction of the Social Categories and Stereotypes Communication (SCSC) Framework. *Review of Communication Research* 7. 1–37. <https://doi.org/10.12840/issn.2255-4165.017>.
- Brandone, Amanda C. et al. 2012. Do lions have manes? For children, generics are about kinds rather than quantities. *Child Development* 83(2). 423–433.
- Bunk, Oliver & Maria Pohle. 2019. “Unter Freunden redet man anders”: The register awareness of Kiezdeutsch speakers. In *The Sociolinguistic Economy of Berlin. Cosmopolitan Perspectives on Language, Diversity and Social Space*, Theresa Heyd, Mengden Ferdinand von & Britta Schneider (eds). 97–124. Berlin/Boston: Mouton de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501508103>.
- Cambridge Dictionary* online. 2024. Cambridge University Press & Assessment. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>.
- Cohen, Ariel. 1996. *Think Generic: The Meaning and Use of Generic Sentences*. Ph.D. dissertation. Department of Linguistics. Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburg, PA.
- Cohen, Ariel. 2004. Existential generics. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 27. 137–168.
- Gardelle, Laure. 2023a. *Lions, flowers and the Romans: exception management with generic and other count plurals*. In *Reference from Conventions to Pragmatics*, Laure Gardelle, Laurence Vincent-Durroux & Hélène Vinckel-Roisin (eds). 71–87. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Gardelle, Laure. 2023b. Génériques et généralisations plurielles : ce qu’apporte l’étude textuelle à la théorisation [Generics and plural generalisations: what the study of texts brings to theorisation]. Invited talk, *Syntaxe, Sens et Textualités* seminar, Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon, France, March 2023.
- Hinton, Perry R. 2020. *Stereotypes and the Construction of the Social World*. Oxon/New York: Routledge.



- Krämer, Philipp. 2017. Delegitimising Creoles and Multiethnolects: Stereotypes and (Mis-)Conceptions of Language in Online Debates. *Caribbean Studies*. Institute of Caribbean Studies 45(1). 107–142. <https://doi.org/10/gg9dc2>.
- Krifka, Manfred. 2012. Definitional generics. In *Genericity*, Alda Mari, Claire Beyssade & Fabio Del Prete (eds), ch.15. 372–389. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199691807.003.0015>.
- Leslie, Sarah-Jane. 2012. Generics articulate default generalizations. *Recherches Linguistiques de Vincennes* 41, *New Perspectives on Genericity at the Interfaces*. 25–44.
- Leslie, Sarah-Jane. 2008. Generics: cognition and acquisition. *Philosophical Review* 117(1). 1–47.
- Leslie, Sarah-Jane. 2007. Generics and the structure of the mind. *Philosophical Perspectives* 21. 375–403.
- Mackie, Diane M., David L. Hamilton, Joshua Susskind, & Francine Rosselli. 1996. Social psychological foundations of stereotype formation. In *Stereotypes and stereotyping*, C. Neil Macrae, Charles Stangor & Miles Hewstone (eds). 41–78. New York: Guilford.
- Moskowitz, Gordon B. 2005. *Social Cognition: Understanding self and others*. New York: Guilford.
- Pelletier, Francis Jeffrey & Asher, Nicholas. 1997. Generics and defaults. In *Handbook of Logic and Language*, Johan van Benthem & Alice ter Meulen (eds). 1125–1179. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Radden, Günter. 2009. Generic reference in English: a metonymic conceptual blending analysis. In *Metonymy and Metaphor in Grammar*, Klaus Uwe-Panther, Linda L. Thornburg & Antonio Barcelona (eds). 199–228. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Schneider, David J. 2004. *The Psychology of Stereotyping*. New York/London: The Guilford Press.
- Semin, Gün R. 2011. The linguistic category model. In *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology*, Paul A. M. Van Lange, Arie Kruglanski & E. Tory Higgins (eds). 309–326. London: SAGE.
- Tajfel, Henri. 1969. Cognitive aspects of prejudice. *Journal of Social Issues* 25(4). 79–97. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1969.tb00620.x>
- Tajfel, Henri. 1970. Experiments in intergroup discrimination. *Scientific American* 223. 96–102.
- Truan, Naomi & Martina Oldani. 2021. The view from within: Gendered language ideologies of multilingual speakers in contemporary Berlin. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 25(3). 374–397. <https://doi.org/10/gjv9sg>.
- Wetherell, Margaret & Jonathan Potter. 1992. *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the legitimation of exploitation*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.



Wiese, Heike. 2015. "This migrants' babble is not a German dialect!": The interaction of standard language ideology and 'us'/'them' dichotomies in the public discourse on a multiethnolect. *Language in Society* 44(3). 341–368.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404515000226>.

Wiese, Heike. 2017. Die Konstruktion sozialer Gruppen: Fallbeispiel Kiezdeutsch. In *Handbuch Sprache in sozialen Gruppen*, Eva Neuland & Peter Schlobinski (eds). 331–351. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter.