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Land der DichterInnen und DenkerInnen?

A linguistic analysis of the controversial suffix *-In*

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A linguistic analysis of the controversial suffix –In

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The suffix *-In* (*MitarbeiterIn*, *StudentInnen*, etc.) is usually discussed alongside other means of avoiding sex bias in language (e.g. *Studentinnen und Studenten*, *Student(innen)*, etc.) with the aim of establishing which is the most successful. As such, *-In* tends to be viewed subjectively, most often as a variant of the female marker *-in* (that is, not as a suffix in its own right), while its linguistic role is ignored. I describe the place of *-In* within the German linguistic system: its development and use are discussed in terms of its history, semantics, orthography, pronunciation, morphology and its relation with syntax. I conclude that *-In* is a suffix in its own right, performing a function not generally assumed in the literature: *collective sex marking* (in contrast to the *female sex marking* of *-in*). The sense of the *-In* nouns depends on whether they are singular or plural: singular *-In* nouns denote a hypothetical person of unknown sex, and whose sex is not specified, while plural *-In* nouns denote groups (either real or hypothetical) that are presumed to contain men and women. I examine the use of *-In* and conclude that, although its use is declining overall, it has found a niche in written texts with uncomplicated syntax, such job advertisements and other notices.

1. Introduction

As a product of the striving towards sex equality in language¹, the suffix *-In*, a relatively recent addition to the affix inventory of German, has tended to be seen in a very subjective way, with judgements ranging from enthusiastic approval to vehement denunciation: ‘Die Kommentare zu dieser sprachlichen Neubildung reichen von “unschön” über “unlogisch” bis hin zu Beschimpfungen, und es stellt sich die Frage, warum, die Reaktionen auf die wenigen Buchstaben so heftig sind’ (Braun 1996: 54). Consequently, despite having been the subject of many papers, articles and even a conference² (as an internet search with terms such as “das große I” or “Binnen-I” shows), *-In* has actually been neglected in comparison to the other German word formation affixes. For one thing, *-In* is rarely, if ever, regarded as a suffix in its own right but rather as a capitalised variant of *-in*, which is not

¹ In this investigation, *sex* is used to denote biological sex while *gender* denotes grammatical gender.

² “Sprachmächtig - 20 Jahre nach dem Binnen-I. Gendersensible Sprache als journalistische Qualität”. (http://www.journalistinnen.de/aktuell/sprachmaechtig/presse_zwd.html - accessed 31.5.05).

the case, as is discussed in section 2.1 below. Works on *-In* look at the suffix in the context of balancing out the masculine/male dominance in language, in particular with the aim of explicitly including women in the *generic masculine* forms, i.e. those in which a masculine (and therefore male-denoting) noun is taken to denote both men and women (Braun 1996: 54f.). Thus, they consider *-In* alongside other such means, usually with the aim of reaching conclusions about which method is best for avoiding sex bias. Regardless of the attitude of the writers towards *-In*, these portrayals always concentrate on the issue of sex equality rather than on the suffix itself. Accordingly, the characteristics of *-In* are rarely addressed from a linguistic point of view; usually the aim is to state that the suffix is “good” or “bad” rather than to look at what it does. As noted in section 2, the recent works on German word formation do not mention *-In*. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to address the neglected suffix *-In*, apparently for the first time, from a purely linguistic angle.

In this investigation, the history and development of *-In* is discussed and examples of its use are given (2.1.), then various characteristics of *-In* are discussed, such as its meaning, orthography, pronunciation, and so on (2.2.-2.6.). Finally, the outlook for this controversial suffix is evaluated (section 3). The data used here are taken from two corpora (the *Tiger* corpus of mid-1990s *Frankfurter Rundschau* texts³ and a corpus of *Spiegel Online* texts collected in winter 2004-5) and from occurrences of *-In* observed elsewhere, e.g. in the media, literature, notices, etc.

2. The suffix *-In*

The basic assumption of this investigation is that *-In* is a suffix in its own right, and not a simple variant of *-in*, which *-In* is often dismissed as (e.g. by Eickhoff 1999). In the corpora, *-In* is present to a limited extent and it appears to be productive. The evidence of the corpus data, where the suffix appears in non-spontaneous texts aimed at wide audiences, as well as in other sources as noted above, undermines the assertion of Eickhoff (1999) that: ‘das große I [wurde] als Provokation verstanden und abgelehnt’. None of the

³ <http://www.ims.uni-stuttgart.de/projekte/TIGER/TIGERCorpus/>.

textbooks on German word formation mention *-In*, perhaps reflecting the fact that the suffix is recent. This is surprising, considering that the data used here date from the mid-1990s onwards, since which time new textbooks (e.g. Barz et al. 2004, Donalies 2002, Eichinger 2000, Motsch 1999) or revised editions of existing ones (Erben 2000) have appeared. More surprisingly, even works on *Movierung* ('sex/gender indication'), e.g. Hoberg (2004), Doleschal (1992), devote little, if any, space to the suffix. This is curious, especially as, in view of its usefulness in performing a function no other affix performs, namely mixed-sex marking, and the strong semantic coherence shown by the derivatives, the suffix *-In* is well placed to increase in use in German and in importance within the system of nominal derivation. At least, that would be the case if the suffix were not subject to prescriptive attempts to influence its use. Eickhoff (1999) notes that, although the suffix is very frequently used, it is just as frequently rejected and, indeed, is even prohibited in some institutions.

2.1. The history, development and use of *-In*

-In is a relatively new addition to the German derivational affix inventory (Durrell 2002: 6); certainly, Pusch (1983: 95) does not list it in her enumeration of the means of sex-neutral word formation. The first widespread use of *-In* is generally agreed to have been in Switzerland in the early 1980s: Braun (1996: 60) notes its introduction in 1983 in the *Zürcher Wochenzeitung* (also Scheub 2003, Kaißling 2003). Scheub (2003), however, gives an earlier – German – attestation from 1981: *HörerInnen* in a book about broadcasting (by a male author). While *-In* became widespread in Swiss Standard German, in Germany it has been restricted to left-wing and alternative registers (Braun 1996: 60, Knauf 2004: 28). A particularly enthusiastic exponent of *-In* was the German left-wing newspaper *tageszeitung*, which introduced the suffix in 1986 (Kaißling 2003) and whose association with the suffix is widely noted (e.g. Braun 1996: 60, Erdmann 2003, Scheub 2003). In spite of its left-wing credentials, *-In* did not catch on in the GDR, with the suffix still being perceived in the new *Bundesländer* as 'West(frauen)-deutsch' (TrempeImann 1998, cited in Knauf 2004: 45). Suggesting that *-In* took some years to catch on, the earliest examples in the DWDS

corpus⁴ date from 1990: *KollegInnen*, *Durchschnitts-DDR-BürgerInnen*, *FürstInnen*. The only example given by Hoberg (2004: 102), *PrüflingInnen*, dates from 1993, and found in the *tageszeitung*. While revolutionary at the time of its introduction (Kaißling 2003), the use of *-In* has always been uneven, which might be a consequence of its overtly political character in comparison to the other means of sex-neutralising (Braun 1996: 60): Scheub (2003), for instance, claims that the suffix has been used only once in the *Spiegel*, for instance (but compare the two forms found in the *Spiegel* corpus: table 1 below). Thus the downfall of this young suffix has already been forecast. Writing in 1998, Bernroitner (1998) observes that *-In* is becoming ‘immer beliebter’, while five years later Erdmann (2003) notes that *-In* has now all but disappeared from its former stronghold *tageszeitung*. As a means of word-formation operating within a relatively controlled area of language, the fate of *-In* may rest with official or influential bodies such as Duden or government institutions, and these do not appear likely to take any action that would support the use of *-In*: ‘Von offizieller Seite (etwa staatlichen Institutionen) ist eine Entscheidung im Sinne des großen I bis jetzt nicht getroffen worden und für die nähere Zukunft kaum zu erwarten’ (Braun 1996: 61). Thus *-In* may find itself restricted to more informal (and left-wing) contexts, such as flyers or university notice boards: ‘Für inoffizielle Texte wie Notizen, Briefe und Aushänge oder aber in den entsprechenden politischen Kontexten kann das große I eine geeignete Alternative zum generischen Maskulinum darstellen’ (Braun 1996: 61). In the recent novel *schöner_wohnen.doc* by the young author Nadja Sennewald (2000), which deals with students living in a *Wohngemeinschaft* (cf. the informal university use of *-In* noted above), the suffix appears several times, e.g. *KäuferInnen* (p.158), *VeteranInnen* (p.159), *ZimmerinteressentInnen* (p.189), *ET-ForscherInnen* (p.195)⁵.

It may be the case that, outside official contexts, *-In* is used more by younger speakers who are less inhibited by its novel status and who, whether or not they explicitly want to avoid discrimination, simply want a WFP that allows them expressly to denote that a group

⁴ The corpus of the *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache des 20. Jahrhunderts* (DWDS) consists of roughly 100 million words of text from text types such as literature, journalistic texts and specialist texts, as well as transcriptions of spoken language (http://www.dwds.de/pages/pages_info/dwds_info.htm).

⁵ Sennewald (2000) also makes use of other innovations such as replacing the pronoun *man* with *mensch*.

includes males and females, which is not possible with the ambiguous generic masculine forms.

In the corpora, 15 *-In* derivatives occur in total: 13 in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* (FR) data and two in the *Spiegel* data. These are listed in table 1:

Derivative	Tokens	Found in
<i>AnwärterIn</i>	1	Spiegel
<i>ArbeiterInnen</i>	1	FR
<i>ArbeitnehmerInnen</i>	2	FR
<i>BerlinerInnen</i>	1	FR
<i>BürgerInnen</i>	3	FR
<i>HandlungsträgerIn</i>	1	FR
<i>InformatikerInnen</i>	2	FR
<i>KäuferInnen</i>	1	FR
<i>KonsumentInnen</i>	2	FR
<i>KundInnen</i>	3	FR
<i>NutzerInnen</i>	2	FR
<i>PartnerInnen</i>	2	FR
<i>StudentInnen</i>	4	Spiegel & FR

Table 1. The *-In* derivatives found in the *Spiegel* and *Frankfurter Rundschau* (FR) corpora.

Some examples from the corpora are:

‘Zum zusätzlichen Problem wird damit die globale elektronische Vernetzung, die die zu erledigende Arbeit zu den preisgünstigsten *ArbeiterInnen* bringt’ (FR).

‘Diese Taktik hatte Erfolg, zwei Drittel der *BerlinerInnen* teilten diese Einschätzung’ (FR).

‘Doch ob der/die *HandlungsträgerIn* eines Realitätspartikels für eine Nachricht als tragende Figur anerkannt wird, hängt nach gängiger Praxis vom Grad der Bekanntheit ab’ (FR).

‘Doch in der Bundesrepublik nehmen seit 1991 die *StudentInnen*zahlen im Fachbereich Informatik ab’ (FR).

In the two corpora noted above, all but two of the derivatives, *AnwärterIn* and *HandlungsträgerIn*, occur in the plural, indicating that the suffix’s main use is to denote

groups of unknown (but presumably mixed) sex make-up. Had the corpora concentrated, for instance, on job advertisements in which an applicant of either sex is sought, there may have been more singular forms. The presence in the corpora of equivalent, exclusively female forms with *-in*, e.g. *Arbeiterin*, *Berlinerin*, *Studentin*, emphasises that *-In* is not a simple variant of *-in*: *-In* forms nouns denoting mixed sex (in a group) or unknown sex (singular or in a group) and must be treated as an independent, productive suffix in its own right.

The *Wortschatz Lexikon*⁶ corpus of 2.5 million tokens (Quasthoff 1998: 93) lists the following *-In* derivatives (table 2), both singular and plural:

Derivative	Tokens
<i>AutorIn</i>	10
<i>BesucherIn</i>	16
<i>BesucherInnen</i>	492
<i>BewohnerInnen</i>	468
<i>BremerIn</i>	9
<i>BremerInnen</i>	413
<i>BürgerIn</i>	14
<i>BürgerInnen</i>	651
<i>DemonstrantInnen</i>	280
<i>KandidatIn</i>	10
<i>KollegInnen</i>	413
<i>KundIn</i>	11
<i>KundInnen</i>	280
<i>KünstlerIn</i>	10
<i>KünstlerInnen</i>	438
<i>LehrerInnen</i>	666
<i>LeserIn</i>	24
<i>LeserInnen</i>	320
<i>MieterIn</i>	21

⁶ <http://wortschatz.uni-leipzig.de/>.

Derivative	Tokens
<i>MieterInnen</i>	298
<i>MitarbeiterIn</i>	9
<i>MitarbeiterInnen</i>	978
<i>PartnerIn</i>	13
<i>PatientInnen</i>	360
<i>PolitikerInnen</i>	282
<i>SchülerIn</i>	12
<i>SchülerInnen</i>	941
<i>StudentIn</i>	16
<i>StudentInnen</i>	835
<i>TeilnehmerIn</i>	13
<i>TeilnehmerInnen</i>	434
<i>VerbraucherIn</i>	10
<i>VertreterInnen</i>	300
<i>ZuschauerInnen</i>	302

Table 2. The -In derivatives found in the Wortschatz Lexikon corpus.

Table 2 illustrates the dominance over plural *-Innen* forms over singular *-In* forms: where a derivative occurs both as a singular and as a plural, the plural form is by far the more frequent, e.g. *LeserIn* (24 tokens) vs. *LeserInnen* (320 tokens), *TeilnehmerIn* (13 tokens) vs. *TeilnehmerInnen* (434 tokens).

2.2. Semantics

-In performs sex-marking derivation to form nouns that specifically denote both men and women at once; its function might therefore be termed *collective and indeterminate sex marking*. As Pusch (1983: 97) argues, ‘es gibt doch Zusammenhänge, wo eine geschlechtsneutrale Form einfach eine Notwendigkeit ist’, and this suffix has arisen through the trend towards (and the need for) sex-specifying in public language (Hoberg

2004: 104) in which the other derivational means of collective sex marking, besides *-In*, include⁷:

- parentheses, e.g. *Schauspieler(in)*, *Fahrer(innen)*
- splitting by means of a forward slash, e.g. *Sportler/innen*
- double form, in which the female noun usually comes before the male noun, e.g. *Künstlerinnen und Künstler (Spiegel)*, *Kommunistinnen und Kommunisten (Tiger)*. In compounds, only the head element of the male noun may be given, e.g. *Sportwagenfahrerinnen und -fahrer (Spiegel)*, but cf. *Arbeitnehmerinnen und Arbeitnehmer (Tiger)*⁸. The male noun sometimes precedes the female noun, e.g. *Sprachwissenschaftler und -wissenschaftlerinnen (Spiegel)*.

Compared to the paraphrasing and doubling listed above, *-In* is an economical measure (Braun 1996: 60) allowing collective sex marking to be indicated by a simple WFP. This is noted by Sick (2004: 169f.) in his tongue-in-cheek look at collective sex marking in German: ‘Immer neue SchülerInnengenerationen wachsen mit der Innenmajuskel heran, einem umstrittenen typografischen Notbehelf, mit dem man zusammenpresst, was man zuvor verdoppelt hat’.

-In differs in sense depending on whether it is used in the singular or plural, the plural form being more frequent than the singular (2.1.):

- Singular *-In* denotes a hypothetical person of unknown sex, and whose sex need not (or, in some cases, must not) be specified, e.g. the target of a job advertisement. As a means of avoiding gender specification and any resulting discrimination, real or linguistically implied, this suffix may be found in advertisements for jobs, flats, etc., and in official literature, e.g. ‘MitarbeiterIn gesucht’⁹, ‘StudentIn als Hilfskraft oder

⁷ Adapted from Hoberg (2004: 104). Eickhoff (1999) lists the Duden-approved means of collective sex marking. Compare also Braun (1996: 58f.).

⁸ The entire form *Arbeitnehmer* might be repeated because, unlike *Sportwagenfahrer*, it is a lexicalised compound whose head element *Nehmer* rarely occurs alone.

⁹ <http://www.bund.net/lab/reddot2/867.htm> (accessed 31.5.04).

als PraxissemesterstudentIn gesucht’¹⁰, ‘Suche ZwischenmieterIn für kleine, zentral gelegene Wohnung [...], NichtraucherIn erwünscht’¹¹, ‘Ich bin AbonnentIn. Bitte buchen Sie den Betrag von meinem Abokonto ab’¹².

- Plural *-Innen* denotes a group of people that expressly includes both males and females. Usually the derivatives refer to groups of unknown gender composition but which are presumed to include both men and women.

An accusation levelled at the diacritic-based means of sex-neutralisation is that they give the impression that the female-denoting affix, for example enclosed in parentheses, appears secondary and omissible (Braun 1996: 59). In contrast, the *-In* derivatives do actually include both sexes without an implication that one of the sexes is secondary. If we bear in mind the sense of the suffix *-In* ‘male and female/male or female’, we can make the following comparison with the female-denoting suffix *-in*:

- *Student* (male) → *Studentin* (female)
- *Student* (male) → *StudentIn* (single person: male or female), *StudentInnen* (several people: male and female)

That is, the suffix is added to a base to denote a mixed-sex group or person of unknown sex, just as *-in* is added to a base to denote a female. Removing the suffix leaves just the male-denoting word. *-In* is thus seen to be as important and non-omissible as *-in*. To claim that the suffix *-In* is as omissible as parenthetical (*in*), for example, would be to misunderstand the relationship between the base and WFP of a derived word.

2.3. Orthography

Aside from the arguments surrounding its meaning and connotations, another controversial characteristic of *-In* is its orthography. This suffix is namely the only one in the German affix inventory to begin with a capital letter, thus earning the ire of purists. Eickhoff (1999) speaks of the ‘Rechtschreibwidrigkeit des großen I’, while the following appears in the

¹⁰ cms.fh-wolfenbuettel.de/servlet/ContentServlet/r_6aZgN8/zafrap_doc/ps_angebot_2004_03_03_trilology1.pdf (accessed 31.5.04).

¹¹ <http://mannheim.studenten-wohnung.de/details.php?object=30263> (accessed 2.6.05).

Rechtschreibduden: ‘In bestimmten Kontexten gebräuchlich, aber nicht Gegenstand der amtlichen Rechtschreibregelung, sind Großbuchstaben im Wortinnern zur Vermeidung der Doppelnennung männlicher und weiblicher Formen (BürgerInnen, KollegInnen)’ (Duden 2004: 48). This explains why no derivatives featuring the suffix appear in *Der große Duden* (Duden 2000). Although word-internal capital letters are forbidden by Duden, *-In* is certainly not unique in this respect. *Binnengroßschreibung* has been found in product names such as *BahnCard*, *NaturRohstoffe* and *PostGiro* since the 1990s (Donalies 2002: 59): ‘Die Tendenz zu einem entspannteren Umgang mit der Orthografie ist [...] unverkennbar’ (Donalies 2002: 59). Furthermore, word-internal capitals are permitted in other languages, e.g. Italian *arrivederLa* ‘goodbye’ (Braun 1996: 60). In any case, there does not appear to be a compelling theoretical reason as to why a capital letter is forbidden word-internally, indeed it seems strange when word-internal punctuation marks *are* allowed and, in Eickhoff (1999), encouraged; thus a form such as *KollegInnen* is prohibited by Duden while *Kolleg(inn)en* and *Kolleg/-innen* are allowed (Eickhoff 1999). The reason clearly is not one of aesthetics.

Although the capitalised *I* is an innovation, it appears that the plural of the female marker *-in* has seen earlier use in the mixed/unknown sex-marking function, or at least was advocated to be used in this function by Pusch (1983) in her feminist article ‘Frauen entpatrifizieren die Sprache’: such use of *-innen* is termed ‘das geschlechtsneutrale Femininum’ and would give examples such as *Sind Männer tatsächlich die besseren Mathematikerinnen?* (Pusch 1983: 97). The inadequacy of this use of *-innen* in this function is obvious: the female-specific marker and the sex-neutral marker are formally identical to one another and the context in which the derivative is used will not always remove the arising ambiguity. Indeed, the ambiguity is the same as that caused by the generic masculine with the difference that, whereas before women were not explicitly included, now men are not explicitly included. Such use contravenes the word-formation system’s striving for economy because, in a construction such as *männliche Linguistinnen* (from Pusch 1983: 101), aside from its seemingly oxymoronic character to speakers used to *-innen* being the female plural marker, sex-specification is carried out twice. This use of

¹² <https://www.taz.de/pt/etc/nf/taz-Archiv-CD> (accessed 2.6.05).

-innen does not seem to be noted by any of the major works on German word formation (listed in section 2 above), which suggests that it has not been accepted, probably because of its ambiguity. Thus the *-In* suffix is more successful; compare the sentences *die Studentinnen sind glücklich* (which would denote male students and female students, according to Pusch 1983) and *die StudentInnen sind glücklich*. Only in the latter it is clear that both male and female students are included. *-In* is a clearly a suffix in its own right. To dismiss it simply as a capitalised version of the female-denoting *-in*, or as *das "große I"* as Eickhoff (1999) does, is to miss the point that *-In* denotes something quite different to *-in*. *-in* denotes only females, as was illustrated clearly above with the example of *Studentinnen* – *StudentInnen*. Just as with suffixes which develop from nouns, where we consider the suffix to be a suffix when its meaning is quite distinct from that of the corresponding noun (compare the prefix *Haupt-* and the noun *Haupt*), the meaning of *-In* is sufficiently distinct from *-in* that they must be treated as separate suffixes.

2.4. Pronunciation

A further controversy surrounding *-In* is its pronunciation. Orthographically, *-In* differs from the homonymous *-in* only in that it is written with a capital *I* (2.3.). Their pronunciation, though, is identical. This has been raised as an objection to *-In*, i.e. that its homophony with *-in*, and the clumsiness of paraphrasing its derivatives (e.g. *StudentInnen* as *Studentinnen und Studenten*), makes it unusable (Scheub 2003). Nevertheless, other than the paraphrasing using full forms, all the means of sex-equalising, such as the use of brackets and slashes, can have the same objection raised about them (Knill 2004); furthermore, this is also the case with abbreviations like *bzw.*, *usw.*, *vgl.* in which the pronunciation of the full forms is not seen as a problem (Schneider et al. 2003: 55). In those cases, when encountered in a text, the full forms are read out, as recommended by Eickhoff (1999) for *-In*: ‘Begegnet das große I in einem vorzulesenden Text, so sollte es wie oben erwähnt in die Doppelform [*MitarbeiterInnen* as *Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter*, etc.] aufgelöst werden; die gebräuchliche Aussprache als “Mitarbeiterinnen” sollte nur in informellem Sprachgebrauch verwendet werden’. With the latter pronunciation possibility, Eickhoff (1999) presumably means that the form *MitarbeiterInnen* is pronounced identically to *Mitarbeiterinnen*, i.e. making no distinction between the two.

If the double form is still to be avoided, there appear to be two methods of pronouncing *-In* and differentiating it from female-denoting *-in*:

- *-In* can be pronounced with a long [i:] to contrast with *-in* which is pronounced with a short [i] (Durrell 2002: 6).
- *-In* is preceded by a glottal stop as if it was a word beginning with *i* serving as the second element in a compound (Bernroitner 1998, Knauf 2004: 25).

It may be the case that the two methods are combined; that is, following the glottal stop, the vowel is tense and longer than the usual lax vowel in *-in*. Neither of the above pronunciations was confirmed by all the native speakers consulted about the suffix, indicating that uncertainty over its pronunciation as well as the similarity or identicalness of its pronunciation to *-in* restricts the suffix *-In* to the written language. Braun (1996) has a sober view of the pronunciation of *-In*. While not agreeing with the view that *-In* derivatives cannot be pronounced, she simply states: ‘In gesprochener Form müsste in Kauf genommen werden, dass das große I mit der totalen Feminisierung zusammenfällt’ (Braun 1996: 60); this corresponds to the second possibility mentioned by Eickhoff (1999) and noted above.

2.5. Morphology

-In can be used wherever *-in* is used. All the bases of the *-In* derivatives – in common with other sex-marking suffixes such as *-in* and *-(e)rich* – are nouns. Among the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and *Spiegel* data (2.1., table 1), 12 of the bases (92.31%) are derived agentives with a masculine suffix (*-ent*, *-er*, *-ner*, *-iker*). All the derivatives are transparent. This is a consequence of the recency of the suffix: with reference to new derivatives in general, Aronoff notes that, ‘simply because they have not existed long, these words have not had any opportunity to become fixed in some idiosyncrasy’ (Aronoff 1976: 19). The *-In* derivatives have not had time to undergo function shift although, based on the evidence of the long-established, related suffix *-in*, it is unlikely that the *-In* forms will lose their transparency.

-In derivatives can serve as bases for other derivatives. Most often, a plural *-Innen* form is used as a base, e.g. *StudentInnenschaft* (Spiegel and Tiger corpora)¹³, *LeserInnenschaft* (1995, DWDS corpus)¹⁴, *HochschülerInnenschaft* (2004)¹⁵. The preference for plural, i.e. inflected, nouns as bases is a violation of Greenberg's Universal 28, which states that 'if both the derivation and inflection follow the root, or they both precede the root, the derivation is always between the root and the inflection' (Carstairs-McCarthy 1992: 156). It may be the case that the plural *-Innen* forms are, like their singular bases, lexical units and therefore themselves capable of serving as derivational bases. Their possible status as lexical units may be a result of the difference in sense between the singular and plural forms: while both denote an unknown person (or persons) of unknown sex, the latter additionally denotes a mixed-sex group. Thus the additional 'collective' sense of the plural *-Innen* seems to be sufficient to make the plural derivatives lexical entries on a par with other collective WFPs such as *-schaft* and *-tum*. *-In* is also involved in compounding: *StudentInnenausschuß*, *StudentInnenzahlen* (Tiger corpus).

2.6. Syntax

A problem that *-In* derivatives present for syntax is their uncertain gender and therefore their article use. That is, while the male-denoting *-er* is masculine, and the female-denoting *-in* is feminine, the situation is less clear for *-In*, which denotes both sexes. Like the pronunciation uncertainties (2.4.), the same problems arise with when parentheses or other diacritics are used, e.g. *ein/e langjährige/r Mitarbeiter/in* (Braun 1996: 59). For *-In*, a number of types of article use have been suggested or observed:

- Retaining the feminine gender of the homophonous suffix *-in*: 'Die BremerIn an sich jammert gerne und ausgiebig' (Wortschatz Lexikon; *tageszeitung* 1997).

¹³ The singular *StudentInschaft* was not found at all in a Google search (performed 2.6.05).

¹⁴ The singular *LeserInschaft* occurs only once in a Google search (<http://www.divanova.net/texts/sexandthecity/site/> – accessed 2.6.05).

¹⁵ 'HochschülerInnenschaft will das "Bildungswesen" aufpäppeln' (<http://derstandard.at/?url=/?id=2012459> – accessed 2.6.05); the singular *HochschülerInschaft* did not occur at all in a Google search (performed 2.6.05).

- Using the full form of both the masculine and feminine articles: ‘Der oder die AnwärterIn muss sich auf eine Art Holzpferdchen setzen und bekommt einen Hut auf’ (*Spiegel corpus*).
- Diacritics to separate the full form of both the masculine and feminine articles: ‘der/die HandlungsträgerIn’ (*Tiger corpus*; full example given in 2.1. above).
- Diacritics to separate the masculine and feminine endings: ‘ein/e StudentIn’ (Bernroitner 1998); ‘Treffer, die zurückliegende Texte betreffen, sind erst abrufbar, sobald Sie registrierte/r BenutzerIn des tageszeitung-Online-Archivs sind’¹⁶.
- By analogy with the suffix *-In* itself, the article and adjectival endings are capitalised: ‘einE neuE MitarbeiterIn’ (Braun 2000)¹⁷.

Certainly, the least problematic use of *-In* is in contexts which do not require a gender-indicating article or adjective, or where the noun is plural and the problem of gender assignment is therefore not applicable. In such cases, the non-sex-specific sense of *-In* is clear, as is its usefulness and inclusiveness in comparison to the generic masculine and the diacritic-using methods already noted:

- ‘Werden Sie GenossIn und fördern Sie so dessen tägliche Arbeit für die Pressefreiheit.’¹⁸
- ‘Hier können Ihnen BibliothekarInnen und BuchhändlerInnen besser helfen als wir.’¹⁹
- ‘Die GenossInnen sollen die Interessen der Genossenschaft fördern.’²⁰

¹⁶ <http://www.taz.de/pt/archiv/suche.demo.1> (accessed 2.6.05).

¹⁷ Bernroitner (1998) also notes such use with adjectival nouns, e.g. *AnspruchsberechtigteR*.

¹⁸ <http://www.taz.de/pt/etc/nf/geno/genossenschaft> (accessed 2.6.05).

¹⁹ <http://www.taz.de/pt/etc/nf/recherche/recherche1> (accessed 2.6.05).

²⁰ <http://www.taz.de/pt/etc/nf/geno/genofunktion> (accessed 2.6.05).

3. Conclusion – the future for -In

Predicting the future of the suffix *-In* is tricky because it is very dependent on language-external factors, namely, whether or not it is in favour with groups who seek to spread or repress its use. Certainly, from a purely linguistic point of view, *-In* is well-placed to increase in use: it is a concise derivational means of denoting something – mixed or unknown sex – which hitherto could only be denoted by paraphrase or diacritics. The disadvantages of *-In* – problems of pronunciation, article use, etc. – are shared by all the means of mixed sex marking. On balance, *-In* appears to be the most effective means of such marking, not least in its plural form *-Innen* where the problem of article use is absent. Nevertheless, a look at the many non-linguistic analyses of *-In*, regardless of their position for and against the suffix, suggests that it is falling out of use. An indicator for this suggested by Erdmann (1999) is that even the *tageszeitung*, which was once a most enthusiastic exponent of *-In*, no longer uses the suffix. This was confirmed by some random checks on the *tageszeitung*'s website (May-June 2005)²¹; while *-In* was not found in any of the news articles, it did remain on pages which are presumably older, such as those dealing with subscriptions, membership of the *tageszeitung*'s *Genossenschaft*, and so on. On the other hand, *-In* appears to remain in steady use in advertisements and notices as the examples given in 2.2. above have shown. Following its initial use in a variety of text types, it seems that difficulties such as pronunciation and syntactic integration have led to *-In* becoming text-type-specific. That is, it has found a niche in written texts (thus avoiding the problems of pronunciation) in which the syntactic constructions are uncomplicated, thus avoiding problems of gender assignment, e.g. job advertisements and other notices. Perhaps this indicates the way ahead for *-In*: as a suffix denoting mixed or unknown sex, and used in informal written documents.

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²¹ <http://www.taz.de>.

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Biodata

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