

# Mention topoi vs. plain use of German ethnophaulisms in social media discourse

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## Abstract

The article examines the two prominent German ethnophaulisms *Kanake* and *Neger*<sup>1</sup> in Facebook posts. It is shown that the K-word is mostly used to disparage the intended group of people, while the N-word is used conspicuously more often in meta-linguistic discussions in which the supposed appropriateness is to be justified (use vs. mention). The different topoi of the argumentation are presented and illustrated in the article.

The study is based on an extensive corpus (> 65 million words) of posts on relevant Facebook pages compiled within the research project “Towards Balance and Boundaries in Public Discourse: Expressing and Perceiving Online Hate Speech (XPEROHS)” (Baumgarten et al. 2019) at the University of Southern Denmark in Odense.

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## 1 An explosive topic

Hate speech cannot only be interpreted in a justiciable sense as an instantiation of hate crime. By far the most instances of hate speech, understood as “the use of expressions that serve to disparage and denigrate population groups” (Meibauer 2013: 1; my translation), are below the threshold of liability – and yet they are toxic for societies. They are poisoning the climate and the style of public debate by pushing boundaries and making the inexpressible expressible; they silence individuals and groups targeted by hate speech in societal discourse when these are no longer willing or able to expose themselves to it; and they lead to stress and other harmful health effects in the targeted people, to name just a few serious consequences. Rightly so, hate speech has been increasingly perceived as a pressing societal and political problem during the past decade or so. The use of channels of electronically mediated communication and the associated (supposed) anonymity seem to encourage the active disregard of communicative rules (cf. Marx/Weidacher 2014: 169). This makes social media a focus of hate speech, and all measures taken to contain the problem and to get a grip on it seem to be without real effect, be it legal measures to force platform operators to take responsibility and to remove hate speech content, be it campaigns for respectful behaviour in social media communication, or be it counter speech education: Hate speech flourishes, not least under the guise of freedom of speech. What this

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that all occurrences of ethnophaulisms in this article are cases of mention (and never use). Nevertheless, where possible, I try not to spell out the insult words but to replace them with alternative expressions (especially N-word).

article takes a closer look on is a hate speech phenomenon that is not as prominent as the direct disparaging and denigration of certain target groups, namely the different ways of mentioning an ethnophaulism (and discussing it) as opposed to making direct use of it. Nevertheless, it is highly relevant to submit the varying mention-occurrences and the patterns they are forming to a detailed analysis because this allows to reveal specific discourse practises in hate speech.

Based on observable data in the social media discourse on the usage and (in)appropriateness of certain ethnophaulisms, the article will examine how two prominent representatives of this category, namely the German N-word (*Neger*) and the K-word (*Kanake*), differ in terms of their occurrence in Facebook posts. Corpus data show that the two expressions differ from each other in the sense of use vs. mention in a striking way: While the K-word is generally used to disparage the intended group of people, the N-word repeatedly occurs in meta-linguistic mention contexts in which the usage of this racist expression is to be legitimised by different argumentations. That does not mean, however, that the N-word, like other ethnophaulisms, would not also be used to disparage the intended groups of people in use-contexts.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 sketches the phenomenon of hate speech, followed by an outline of the concept of ethnophaulisms in Section 3. The next Section 4 introduces the data and corpus of the analysis. Section 5 presents and discusses the results of both the qualitative and the quantitative analyses. Finally, a summary and an outlook are given in Section 6.

## 2 Hate speech

When dealing with hate speech – in German most often translated as *Hassrede* –, and even more so with hate speech mediated by digital technologies, one comes across many different terms. Fleischhack (2017: 23) lists a few of them for German. What they all have in common is that they have *Hass* ‘hate’ as their nominal head, which is modified by different attributes, such as *viral hate*, *net hate* or *hate 2.0*. This is problematic insofar as hate speech is paradoxically not so much about the emotion of hate (cf. Brown 2017; Geyer 2023),<sup>2</sup> but at least as much about calculated agitation. This is reflected by the most important paragraph relevant to hate speech under criminal law, on *Volksverhetzung* (‘incitement of the people’; German Criminal Code § 130) or *Verhetzung* (‘incitement’; *Austrian Criminal Code* § 283). Hate speech is therefore not to be understood as composed of *hate* + *speech* according to the semantic compositional principle but must be interpreted as a unit of meaning. At the same time, hate speech is much more a political than a linguistic term. However, it is not a legal object (as opposed to hate crimes), or only to a small extent, because most hate speech takes place below the threshold of criminal liability and is covered by the right to freedom of expression – with potentially serious consequences for those targeted by hate speech (cf. Amadeu Antonio Stiftung 2015).

The following definition by the Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) underlies the understanding of hate speech in this article:

Hate speech [...] entails the use of one or more particular forms of expression – namely, the advocacy, promotion or incitement of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat of such

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<sup>2</sup> For a different view, cf. Meibauer (2022), based on the various senses of hate as differentiated by Sternberg/Sternberg (2012).

person or persons and any justification of all these forms of expression – that is based on a non-exhaustive list of personal characteristics or status that includes “race”, colour, language, religion or belief, nationality or national or ethnic origin, as well as descent, age, disability, sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation.

(ECRI 2016: 16)

Two points should be noted here: Firstly, it is emphasised that the definition provides a “non-exhaustive list of personal characteristics and status features”, i. e. further categories such as homelessness or obesity can easily be integrated. Secondly, the expression *race* is marked by quotation marks for distancing use, thus challenging the misleading concept of human “races”. In a German context, this seems highly relevant e. g. in view of the overdue discussion on the term *Rasse* ‘race’ in article 3 (on equality and the non-discrimination rule) of the German Constitutional Law. The basic idea is to replace (discrimination on grounds of) *Rasse* by a formulation like *rassistisch[e]* (‘racist’) discrimination (the same applies to the *German General Act on Equal Treatment*, article 1).

Like ECRI, Sponholz (2017) emphasises group reference as a constituent element of hate speech. This does not mean that individuals cannot be the target of hate speech, on the contrary; when it happens, it is because of the individuals’ group membership in a minority group or a group with an otherwise “ungünstigen politischen/sozialen Position im gesellschaftlichen Machtgefüge” (‘unfavourable political/social position in the social power structure’) (Sponholz 2017: 48). Journalists, politicians, debaters, and other public actors, as long as they belong to the majority society, can therefore not become targets of hate speech; disparaging and/or aggressive invectives against them are rather to be understood as (“conventional”) threats, slander, insults and the like. Nor is hate speech by a discriminated group against the discriminators possible according to this understanding. The inflationary use of phrases like the “hate on the net” blurs essential distinctions.

### 3 Ethnophaulisms

The term “ethnophaulism” was coined by Roback (1944). Nuessel defines it as follows:

Ethnophaulisms are pejorative names or designations for people who belong to an ethnic group and they are usually based on several observable phenomena including skin color, clothing, customs, culturally-determined eating and drinking practices, and other aspects commonly associated with a particular group.

(Nuessel 2008: 29f.)

It remains somewhat vague how an ethnic group can be identified. Markefka (1999a) names four characteristic areas by which people are categorised as members of an ethnic group (or minority):

Race [sic] (such as physical characteristics),  
 Nationality/ethnicity (such as origin from abroad, from a foreign nation),  
 Religion (such as special religions of certain groups of persons/people) and  
 Culture (such as language, customs, traditions).

(Markefka 1999a: 99; my translation)

Most of the ethnophaulisms are based on these characteristics, although there are other source domains as well, such as personal names like *Fritz* (for Germans), *Ivan* (for Russians), *Tommy* (for the British), *John Bull* (for US-Americans), etc.

In his seminal analysis of offending expressions, Technau (2018a) classifies ethnophaulisms as belonging to the pejoratives and within these, they form the group of derogative expressions that refer to a group of people and for which a non-pejorative correlate (NPC) exists. An NPC is an expression that denotes the same group of people in a non-negative way, e. g. German *Polacke* (derogative) vs. *Pole* (neutral). Identifying an NPC can be problematic, however: As for German *Kanake*, Winkler (1994: 335) suggests “all people considered foreign” as potential NPC, whereas Markefka (1999b: 200) mentions *Türke* ‘Turk’. The former seems quite broad, the latter too restrictive. Viewed in the light of the data from the XPEROHS project, it is primarily, but not exclusively people from Turkey, the Maghreb, the Near and Middle East, but also from Southern (or South-East) Europe, who are designated with the K-word. It is precisely this vagueness, which is also expressed in the lack of a clearly assignable NPC, that seems to have contributed to making the K-word one of the most frequently used, quasi most “successful” German ethnophaulisms.<sup>3</sup>

The inventory of ethnophaulisms is subject to relatively rapid lexical change. Roback (1944), for example, lists neither *Kanake* nor *Neger* in his approximately 170 ethnophaulisms for German. Many of them, especially those with the elements *Jude/jüdisch* (‘Jew/Jewish’) and *Pole/polnisch* (‘Pole/Polish’) appear to be obsolescent or simply obsolete, at least if general language use is concerned. Winkler’s (1994) compilation of examples lists only the K-word, Markefka’s (1999a–c) extensive collection of hundreds of German ethnophaulisms includes both.

Regarding terminology, Winkler (1994) speaks of “ethnische Schimpfwörter” (lit. ‘ethnic swear words’), Markefka (1999a–c) of “ethnische Schimpfnamen” (lit. ‘ethnic swear names’), and Technau (2018a), among others, of “ethnische Beleidigungswörter” (lit. ‘ethnic insult words’). In (American) English, the term (*ethnic slur*) is common. If the term *ethnophaulism* is preferred here, this is done in order not to prematurely establish a communicative purpose: Not every use of an ethnophaulism is intended to insult or offend; under special circumstances, it can also be used as a symbol of common group membership and special closeness. The context or situation plays a decisive role in understanding ethnophaulisms (cf. Technau 2018b).

#### 4 Corpus and data

The study is based on a corpus of German Facebook posts compiled specifically for the research project XPEROHS<sup>4</sup>, which has been conducted at the University of Southern Denmark in

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<sup>3</sup> A similar case seems to be the Danish ethnophaulism *perker*, a morphological blend of *perser* ‘Persian’ and *tyrker* ‘Turk’. Interestingly, it has a comparable vague extension and a similarly high frequency of occurrence as German *Kanake*.

<sup>4</sup> XPEROHS is a linguistic research project funded by the Danish Velux Foundation (project number P-16416) and investigates xenophobic hate speech in Danish and German. This is done on the basis of extensive data corpora (Facebook and Twitter) in several sub-projects on ethnophaulisms and dehumanising metaphors, which are relatively easy to determine because they are word-based, on the more indirect forms of expression of hate speech, for example by means of the well-known *I have nothing against refugees, but ...* (with the essential statement after the

Odense from February 2018 to December 2022. The corpus comprises (in the version no. 2, which is used here) around 65.3 Mio. running words and consists of posts from public pages of pre-selected channels of organisations relevant to the topic, such as media, political parties, civil society organisations and others.<sup>5</sup> Making such a selection is a technical necessity for automatic data harvesting. The second German language corpus in the project, the Twitter corpus with around 2,770 Mio. words, is significantly more extensive because it is not restricted by a pre-selection process. It is, however, not fully included in the study because of the fact that tweets with their restriction to 280 characters, in contrast to Facebook posts, hardly offer enough space to develop certain argumentation lines and, from the researcher's point of view, to reconstruct potential mention topoi – an essential aspect for the research question with regard to the qualitative analysis. Thus, the examples used in this article stem from the Facebook corpus.

The following analysis includes not only the N-word and the K-word, but entire lexeme clusters that are assigned to their respective leading forms (*Neger* or *Kanake*). This is mainly due to the particularities of the data material and the conditions of the work with it: On the one hand, the data contains plenty of spelling variants, some of which are lemmatised separately during automatic parsing. On the other hand, the clustering better captures the heuristically determined lexical variation, which in many cases represents a concealing strategy in order to prevent automatic detection and deletion by the moderators, e. g., discontinuous forms containing blanks or dots (*Ne ger*, *Ne.ger*).

In addition to the leading form *Kanake*, the lexeme cluster K includes the lexical or spelling variants *Kanacke*, *Kanaker*, *Kanacker*, *Kanak* and *Kanack*, whereby all of them except *Kanacke* are rarely or not even always found in the Facebook corpus (although they are present in the Twitter corpus). The lexical or spelling variants *Nega*, *Nigger*, *Nigga* and *Negro* are assigned to the lexeme cluster N, in addition to the leading form *Neger*. They occur somewhat more equally.

While the inherent derogatory potential or the “degree of insult” (according to Technau 2018a) is tentatively similar for the variants in cluster K, demonstrable differences can be found in cluster N. As Technau (2018a) shows, *Nigger*, together with e. g., *Krüppel* (‘cripple’), *Fotze* (‘cunt’), and *Schwuchtel* (‘faggot’), is in the group with the highest degree of offensiveness of the words he studied; medium degree of offensiveness is shown by e. g., *Arschloch* (‘asshole’), *Spast* (‘spaz’), and *Polacke* (‘Pole’), low degree of offensiveness by e. g., *Idiot* (‘idiot’), *Pussy* (‘pussy’), and *Warmduscher* (‘mollycoddle’). It is particularly worth mentioning that for *Kanake* and *Neger*, as well as for example for the ethnophaulisms *Zigeuner* (‘gypsy’) and *Schlitzauge/Schlitzzi* (‘chink’), the assessment results turned out to be so ambiguous in Technau's (2018a) analysis that it is not possible to assign them to one of the three degrees (high – middle – low).<sup>6</sup> This rather inconsistent assessment can plausibly be seen as one reason why these two ethnophaulisms and especially the N-word are subject to debates and discussions regarding appropriate language use.

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*but*), and, in experimental settings, on evaluations of and physiological reactions to hate speech stimuli; cf. Baumgarten et al. (2019); Geyer/Bick/Kleene (2022) and Niebuhr/Neitsch (2020).

<sup>5</sup> For the technical and especially the linguistic preparation of the data (morphosyntactic and semantic annotation, dealing with the (frequent!) norm deviations etc.) cf. for example Bick (2020).

<sup>6</sup> But cf. Kilomba (2009) on the degree of offensiveness from the perspective of those referred to by the N-word.

## 5 Analysis and results

### 5.1 Quantitative analysis

Searching the Facebook corpus for the elements of the two lexeme clusters N and K gives the following picture – cf. Tables 1 and 2:

<b>Ethnophaulisms in lexeme cluster N</b>	<b>Absolute frequency</b>
<i>Neger</i>	503
<i>Nega</i>	1
<i>Nigger</i>	11
<i>Nigga</i>	21
<i>Negro</i>	17
Total	553

**Table 1: Absolute frequency of elements in lexeme cluster N**

<b>Ethnophaulisms in lexeme cluster K</b>	<b>Absolute frequency</b>
<i>Kanake</i>	190
<i>Kanacke</i>	41
<i>Kanaker</i>	3
<i>Kanack</i>	3
Total	237

**Table 2: Absolute frequency of elements in lexeme cluster K**

First and foremost, it is noticeable that these expressions occur at all, despite the moderation of the Facebook platform and the existing obligation to delete illegal and otherwise offensive content (cf. the German *Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz* ('Network Enforcement Act')), even if this is not too frequently the case in relation to the large number of running words. Furthermore, it can be stated that the lexemes of cluster N occur more than twice as often as those of cluster K. In the Twitter corpus, which does not contain a content-based preselection of potentially relevant channels, both clusters are represented almost equally often (around 40,000 occurrences each). The corresponding Facebook channels thus seem to promote the occurrence of lexemes of cluster N, in the sense of mentioning them in a special way – an assumption that, however, requires closer examination.

In a next step, explicit linguistic means are quantified which either serve to mark distancing use of an expression – these are double quotation marks “X”, for example “Neger” – or which indicate a use in meta-linguistic discourse – here: the combination of the word *Wort* ('word') plus the ethnophaulism under investigation, for example (*das Wort Kanake* ('(the) word *Kanake*'). The combination with the word *Wort* is searched for in two ways: On the one hand, as adjacent sequence of *Wort* and the ethnophaulism under investigation, and on the other hand – the corpus allows this search possibility – as a mere co-occurrence of the lexeme *Wort* and the ethnophaulism under investigation in the same post. The mere co-occurrence in the same

contribution is already sufficiently suitable to give an indication of a meta-linguistic discussion context, as the review of a data subset showed; however, isolated false hits cannot be excluded.

Tables 3 for cluster N and 4 for cluster K show a very clear difference in the use of linguistic means to mark distancing use by means of quotation marks:

<b>With quotation marks</b>	<b>Absolute frequency</b>	<b>Relative frequency</b>
<i>Neger</i>	73	14,5 %
<i>Nigger</i>	3	27,2 %
<i>Nigga</i>	3	14,3 %
<i>Negro</i>	3	17,6 %
Total	82	14,8 %

**Table 3: Frequency of elements with quotation marks in lexeme cluster N**

<b>With quotation marks</b>	<b>Absolute frequency</b>	<b>Relative frequency</b>
<i>Kanake</i>	8	4,2 %
<i>Kanacke</i>	4	9,8 %
Total	12	5,0 %

**Table 4: frequency of elements with quotation marks in lexeme cluster K**

Because of the low absolute frequencies, the percentages for some lexemes are subject to some degree of uncertainty; certain variants do not occur with quotation marks at all. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is a remarkable difference in usage, in that the elements of cluster N occur almost three times, and thus significantly more frequently<sup>7</sup> with quotation marks as a means of marking distancing usage, than those of cluster K.

Tables 5 and 6 show the frequencies for the co-occurrence with the lexeme *Wort* and the respective ethnophaulism. The adjacent position is integrated as a subset. The percentages given relate to the total numbers in Tables 1 and 2.

<b>Co-occurrence with <i>Wort</i></b>	<b>Absolute frequency</b>	<b>Thereof adjacent</b>
<i>Neger</i>	124	33
<i>Nigger</i>	13	2
<i>Nigga</i>	6	1
<i>Negro</i>	12	0
Total	155/28,0 %	36/6,0 %

**Table 5: frequency of elements in lexeme cluster N, co-occurrence with *Wort***

<sup>7</sup> A statement on statistical significance is not made because of the uncertainty of data mentioned above.

Co-occurrence with <i>Wort</i>	Absolute frequency	Thereof adjacent
<i>Kanake</i>	6	0
<i>Kanacke</i>	5	0
Total	11/4,6 %	0

**Table 6: Frequency of elements in lexeme cluster K, co-occurrence with *Wort***

In the case of co-occurrence with *Wort* in the same post, cluster N predominates by a factor of 6 compared to cluster K; adjacent position occurs exclusively with lexemes of cluster N.

In summary, the quantitative analysis of the corpus data supports the assumption that *Neger* and variants are linguistically marked for mention contexts many times more often than is the case with *Kanake* and variants. However, the two markings examined, i. e., quotation marks and co-occurrence with the word *Wort* ('word'), are not a necessary precondition for a mention context; there may be other mention-marking linguistic means as well, or implicit mention contexts without any formal linguistic means at all. The following qualitative analysis contains mostly explicitly marked examples, including some examples in which the mention is made without any marking at all.

## 5.2 Qualitative analysis: Topoi

In the following, the most frequently used argumentation topoi in the mention of words from the lexeme cluster N are presented and illustrated. In the few places where this is possible, examples of elements from the lexeme cluster K are added. Absolute frequencies for the occurrence of the different topoi are not given because the corpus contains a large number of repetitions due to re-postings, shared contributions and quoted passages. This leads to multiple counts with an undesirable effect on the frequency data. However, correcting this by manual post-processing of the data would go beyond the scope of this article.

A total of 8 topoi are identified. For the most part, the topoi are intended to counter criticism of the use of words from the lexeme cluster N or to delegitimise this criticism and thus justify the use in general. However, individual occurrences can also be interpreted as instances of counter-speech, namely when they critically reflect a topos. Quite a few of the examples given contain more than one topos.

By a topos, I understand recurrent and recognisable text (or: discourse) modules used in argumentation and giving at least the appearance of plausibility. They do not have the status of conclusions in the sense of predicate logic but belong to the sphere of everyday argumentation patterns. A topos in this sense needs to be reconstructed inductively from a given discourse; it cannot be deduced from a given set or inventory of topoi – even if these inventories can be used for inspiration in a fruitful way.<sup>8</sup> Thus for this analysis, the understanding of what a topos is, goes back to the Roman paradigm of rhetoric represented by e. g. Cicero, rather than to the Ancient Greek tradition of logic as outlined by e. g. Aristoteles (cf. Kienpointner 2017).

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<sup>8</sup> Wengeler (2003) has reconstructed an extensive and detailed set of topoi used in the German immigration discourse 1960–1985. These topoi have proven to be a powerful tool for analysis of different migration and (anti)racism-oriented discourses (cf. e. g., Friedemann 2017), but do not work properly with the meta-linguistic mention data analysed in this article.

All examples are reproduced basically in the original spelling without corrections; some obvious mistakes, however, have been corrected in order to facilitate reading. For the sake of exactness, German ethnophaulisms are maintained in the English translations and, if necessary, explained.

The socio-political discourses forming the background of some of the examples are (i) the adaptation of *Negerkönig* ('Negro King') to *Südseekönig* ('South Sea King') in the German translation of Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Långstrump* (Pippi Longstocking), including the debate around the nursery rhyme *10 kleine Negerlein* (~ 10 Little Indians; *Negerlein* = diminutive of *Neger*); (ii) the racist insult of the former tennis player Boris Becker's son Noah Becker as "kleiner Halb neger" ('little half Negro') by Jens Maier, member of the Federal Parliament 2017–2021 for the partially extreme right wing political party *Alternative für Deutschland* in 2018, and (iii) the publicising of experiences of racism in the German Football Association and the German men's national football team by the player Mesut Özil in connection with the world cup in 2018; (iv) initiatives to re-name certain foods and dishes, whose traditional lapsed denotations include ethnophaulisms, e. g. *Negerkuss* or *Mohrenkopf* (lit. 'Neger's kiss' or 'blackamoor's head'; a kind of a small chocolate-covered cake filled with foamy sugar/beaten egg whites ~ 'chocy marshmallow'; now *Schokokuss* lit. 'chocolate kiss'), *Zigeunerschnitzel* (lit. 'gypsy schnitzel'; now *Balkanschnitzel* lit. 'Balkan schnitzel'), *Zigeunersauce* (lit. 'gypsy sauce'; now *Paprikasauce* 'paprika sauce').

### 5.2.1 The topos of etymology

The topos of etymology is by far the most frequently observed topos in the data. It is well known in folk linguistics, too. As an *argumentum a nomine* it confuses a word's meaning, that is conceived as historically original, with the actual<sup>9</sup> one, that may have changed remarkably. Examples (1) and (2) illustrate the topos:<sup>10</sup>

- (1) Das deutsche Wort Neger ist per se kein Schimpfwort und keine Verunglimpfung. Es kommt von negro und das war es auch schon.  
'The German word *Neger* is per se not a swear word and not denigrating. It comes from negro, and that's it.'
- (2) Neger heißt nix anderes als Schwarzer! Leitet sich ab von dem Wort „Negro“ aus dem Spanischen oder „Nigrum“ aus dem Lateinischen. Das Wort „Neger“ ist kein Schimpfwort oder rassistisch, weil das Wort „Schwarzer“ ist ja auch nicht rassistisch.  
'*Neger* means nothing other than black! It is derived from the word "Negro" in Spanish or "Nigrum" in Latin. The word "Neger" is not a swear word or racist, because the word "Black" is not racist either.'

The topos of etymology is also found with *Kanake*, see example (3):

- (3) Alle schimpfen auf die Kanaken! Kanaken sind melanesische Ureinwohner in Neukaledonien (Südwestpazifik), wo sie 45 % der Einwohner Neukaledoniens ausmachen. Das Wort stammt von kanaka maoli, einer hawaiischen Bezeichnung für „Mensch“ (kanaka), welche in der Vergangenheit von europäischen Entdeckern, Händlern und Missionaren Ozeaniens oft für sämtliche nicht-europäische Insulaner benutzt wurde

<sup>9</sup> Not to be confused with folk etymology.

<sup>10</sup> Orthography in all German examples is as in the original postings.

‘Everybody is complaining about the *Kanaken!* *Kanaken* are Melanesian aborigines in New Caledonia (Southwest Pacific), where they make up 45 % of the inhabitants of New Caledonia. The word comes from *kanaka maoli*, a Hawaiian term for “man” (*kanaka*), which was often used in the past by European explorers, traders and missionaries of Oceania to refer to all non-European islanders.’

It is noteworthy that the etymology of the word *Kanake* is possibly different. Aman (1996: 88), long-time editor of the journal *Maledicta*, describes the origin as “unsicher: < Kanake *Südseeinsulaner?* < Hannake *mährischer Volksstamm?*” (‘uncertain: < Kanake South Sea Islander? < Hannake Moravian tribe?’).

### 5.2.2 The topos of permanence

Similar to the topos of etymology, the topos of permanence also appears frequently in the data. By denying a change or development of the meaning or the conditions of use of a word since a mostly unspecified “earlier” point in time (possibly one’s own infancy?), it shows a certain affinity with the topos of etymology, since like the latter it opposes the dynamics of language change; see (4):

- (4) Früher war das Wort „Neger“ gar keine Beleidigung. Als Kinder war es für uns eine normale Bezeichnung für Leute mit dunkelbrauner Hautfarbe ... völlig ohne Wertung. Da kommt schon Unverständnis auf wenn man heute dafür vor Gericht zieht!  
 ‘In the past, the word “Neger” was not an insult. When we were children, it was a normal term for people with dark brown skin ... without any judgement. It is hard to understand how people can go to court for this today?’

However, the topos of permanence is also the one that is most often critically reflected upon in terms of counter-speech, as (5) and (6) demonstrate:

- (5) ich bin in der Generation aufgewachsen in der das Wort Neger benutzt wurde. Wir dachten nie, dass dieses Wort rassistisch sein könnte. Wir aßen Negerküsse und sangen gedankenlos 10 kleine Negerlein. Inzwischen ist Zeit vergangen und auch die Einstellungen und Bedeutung zu diesen Wörtern. Ich sage heute nicht mehr Negerküsse und finde 10 kleine Negerlein nur noch ein schreckliches Lied, das ich meiner Tochter nie vorgesungen habe.  
 ‘I grew up in the generation where the word *Neger* was used. We never thought that this word could be racist. We ate *Negerküsse* and sang *10 kleine Negerlein* (10 Little Indians) thoughtlessly. In the meantime, time has passed and so have the attitudes and meanings to these words. Today I no longer say *Negerküsse* and find *10 kleine Negerlein* just a terrible song that I never sang to my daughter.’
- (6) Früher war es auch nicht schlimm. Aber Sprache wandelt sich. Heute ist z. B. Ist das Wort „Neger“ negativ besetzt.  
 ‘It wasn’t indeed bad in the past. But language changes. Today, for example, the word “Neger” has negative connotations.’

The fact that the topos of permanence does not play a role in the K-word can probably be explained by the recent age of ethnophaulism.

### 5.2.3 The topoi of the guarantor

The topos of the guarantor is an integral part of argumentation. The generalisation of individual statements is meant to support one's own point of view (cf. Rettig 2014). Guarantors, even invented ones or those known only from hearsay, play an essential role in the context of hate speech narratives. Example (7) illustrates the topos:

- (7) Ein ehemaliger Arbeitskollege kam aus dem Senegal. Der sagte, als sich mal wieder einer wegen seiner Hautfarbe bald die Zunge verknotet hat: Bricht dir keine ab. Ich bin ein Neger, und fertig.  
 'A former work colleague came from Senegal. He said, when someone tied his tongue in a knot because of his skin colour: Don't make a fuss. I am a Neger, and that's it.'

### 5.2.4 The topoi of self-designation

One of the topoi that is only occasionally seen in the data is the topos of self-designation: From the fact that a discriminated group or individual group members use an ethnophaulism to designate themselves in certain contexts, it is inferred that the designation is not offensive even if it is used by members outside the group.

- (8) und stop ich darf Neger sagen da ich selbst Negerblut habe!  
 'and stop I may say *Neger* because I have Neger blood myself!'  
 (9) Der schwarz Afrikaner der hier schon Jahrzehnte lebt lacht darüber und sagt selber Neger und schwarzer Mann ... ich habe schwarze Freunde und die finden das lächerlich.  
 'The black African who has lived here for decades laughs about it and says *Neger* and black man himself ... I have black friends and they think it's ridiculous.'

Examples (9) as well as (7) above instantiate a combination of the topos of the guarantor with the topos of self-designation, but in different orders.

The topos of self-designation also occurs with *Kanake*, see (10) in the typical football context:

- (10) Ich wünsche mir das auch das sie zurücktreten mal sehen was dann mit der Nationalmannschaft passiert Özil und Gündogan sind die Schlüssel Spieler im Mittelfeld Als würden sie ein besseren spieler haben als die beiden ohne uns Kanaken seid ihr nichts ihr Dullis  
 'I wish they would resign too let's see what happens to the national team Özil and Gündogan are the key players in the midfield As if they would have a better player than those two without us *Kanaken* you are nothing you fools'

### 5.2.5 The topoi of (ir)relevance

The topos of (ir)relevance is likewise used only occasionally in the data. The legitimacy of the concern for discrimination-free language is questioned because there are, as is stated, more important problems to solve – without, however, naming them specifically; see examples (11) and (12).

- (11) Was für ein wichtiges Thema für Deutschland als hätten wir keine anderen Probleme! Das Zigeunerschnitzel ist die Art der Zubereitung gemeint wie es die Z ... zubereiten! Neger heißt übersetzt nichts weiter als schwarz! Uns Deutsche nennt man auch Weissbrote oder Kartoffelfresser! Ihr seid alle paranoid! Zigeuner sind ein herumreisendes Volk ohne festen Wohnort gewesen! Mehr nicht es stört auch niemanden außer unser Politik! Haben wir nicht über

größere Probleme zu reden! Genderwahn und politische Korrektheit lösen keine Probleme!!! Hier werden Probleme benannt die vorher nie ein Problem waren!!!

‘What an important topic for Germany as if we had no other problems! The *Zigeunerschnitzel* is meant the way the Z .... prepare it! *Neger* means nothing more than black! We Germans are also called *Weissbrote* (white bread/tin loaf) or *Kartoffelfresser* (potato eater)! You are all paranoid! Gypsies were a travelling people with no fixed residence! That’s all it doesn’t bothers anyone except our politicians. Don’t we have bigger problems to talk about? Gender madness and political correctness won’t solve any problems!!! Here problems are named that were never a problem before !!!’

- (12) Genauso ist diese Debatte mit *Neger*, *Zigeuner*, *Türke* oder *Ossi* totaler Schwachsinn. Es kommt wohl immer auf den Kontext an in dem solche Worte benutzt werden. Man kann Deutscher genauso negativ sehen wie *Neger* also was soll dieser Schwachsinn wir haben andere Probleme in unserem Land.

‘In the same way, this debate with *Neger*, *Zigeuner*, *Türk* or *Ossi* (person from the area of former GDR) is total nonsense. It always depends on the context in which such words are used. You can see Germans just as negatively as *Neger* so what is this nonsense we have other problems in our country.’

Not untypically, the critique of ethnophobia is combined with other fields of conflict (e. g., the alleged “gender delusion” to form a thematic complex.

### 5.2.6 The mirror topos

The mirror topos as a kind of reflexive whataboutism seems to be at least as prominent in social discourse as it is in the data material – just consider that “Germanophobia”, a concept of the (extreme) political right, has at least managed to enter the police crime statistics of the Federal Criminal Police Office in 2019 as a category for the motivation of hate crime (albeit without significant case numbers). The mirror topos is based on a simple “tit-for-tat” reversal, without taking into account the hierarchical relationships of majority and minorities that are essential in the context of hate speech (see Section 2); see examples (13) to (15):

- (13) Es ist Fakt das wir deutschen angefeindet werden im eigenen Land. Man darf uns Kötterrasse nennen und vieles mehr wenn ich z.bsp. *Neger* sage bin ich schon Rassist.  
‘It is a fact that we Germans are being attacked in our own country. It is allowed to call us Kötterrasse (‘mutt race’) and much more. If I say *Neger*, for example, I am already a racist.’
- (14) Beleidigungen hier muss sich ein ganzes Volk beleidigen lassen als Kötterrasse ... Als Nazis, Als Mob, Als Ratten, Als Mischpoke und hier wird sich aufgeregt wegen so einem kleinen Jüngelchen wie verblödet sind die Deutschen eigentlich ... im m übrigen *Neger* (von französisch *nègre* , spanisch *negro* , lateinisch *niger* für „schwarz“) Ergo ein Halbschwarzer ... wo ist jetzt der Rassismus oder die Beleidigung????  
‘Insults here an entire people must allow itself to be insulted as a Kötterrasse (‘mutt race’) ... As Nazis, As mob, As rats, As Mischpoke (‘clanship’) and here they get upset because of such a small boy how stupid are the Germans actually ... by the way *Neger* (from French *nègre*, Spanish *negro*, Latin *niger* for “black”) Ergo a half-black ... where is the racism or the insult now????’
- (15) Ich sehe keinen Rassismus darin, wenn man mal *Neger* sagt oder Schlitzauge. Ein Schaumkuss im Brötchen bleibt immer noch ein „Negerkussbrötchen“! Und aus dem *Zigeunerschnitzel* wird auch nie ein Roma-Kotellet. Wir Deutschen sind die *Kartoffelfresser* und *Sauerkrauts* und heulen auch nicht in der Welt rum, dass wir diskriminiert werden.

‘I don’t see any racism in saying *Neger* or Schlitzauge (‘chink’). A Schaumkuss in a roll is still a “Negerkussbrötchen”! And the Zigeunerschnitzel will never become a Roma cutlet. We Germans are Kartoffelfresser (‘potatoe eaters’) and Sauerkrauts, and we don’t cry to the world that we are discriminated against.’

A variation of the mirror topos, which is not aimed at the designated, but at the designating subjects, consists of citing discriminatory statements by (potential) members of the “opposing” group. This is intended to present one’s own position as less unacceptable; see (16):<sup>11</sup>

- (16) Seine Briefe entlarven Marx auch als Rassisten. So wird Ferdinand Lassalle, der Gründer des Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeitervereins und politischer Konkurrent von Marx, wegen seiner jüdischen Herkunft erst als Jüdel Braun, Ephraim Gescheit und Itzig verunglimpft. Nachdem Lasalle ihn 1862 in London besucht hatte, beschimpft Marx ihn als „jüdischen Nigger Lasalle“ und schreibt: „Es ist mir jetzt völlig klar, dass er, wie auch seiner Kopfbildung und sein Haarwuchs beweist, von Negern abstammt, die sich dem Zug des Moses aus Ägypten angeschlossen. Nun, diese Verbindung von Judentum und Germanentum mit der negerhaften Grundsubstanz müssen ein sonderbares Produkt hervorbringen. Die Zudringlichkeit des Burschen ist auch niggerhaft.“

‘His letters also expose Marx as a racist. Thus Ferdinand Lassalle, the founder of the General German Workers’ Association and a political rival of Marx, is first denigrated as Jüdel Braun, Ephraim Gescheit and Itzig because of his Jewish origin. After Lasalle visited him in London in 1862, Marx called him the “Jewish nigger Lasalle” and wrote: “It is now quite clear to me that he is descended from *Negern* who joined Moses’ march out of Egypt, as his head formation and hair growth also prove. Well, this combination of Judaism and Germanism with the *Neger*-like basic substance must produce a strange product. The fellow’s intrusiveness is also niggerish”

### 5.2.7 The topos of humorous distraction

Humour is generally considered a positive quality of people, but humour also serves as a concealing strategy for hate speech (cf. Amadeu Antonio Stiftung 2020). By citing examples of the word *Neger* as a name (name of a person, a place, a river, a commodity) and not as a derogatory designation for a person, as it were, as “argumentative smoke grenade”, the actual focus of the discussion is deflected in a humorous (?) way.

- (17) Jeder sollte seinen Namen behalten. Da kann sich der Karnevalist, Ernst Neger freuen, dass er nicht mehr lebt. Nur weil so viele, „Forderer“ in unser Land reingelassen wurden, sollen wir uns ändern? Die, die das fordern, haben alle einen Knall in der Birne  
‘Everyone should keep their name. The carnivalist Ernst Neger can be happy that he is no longer alive. Just because so many “demanders” have been let into our country, should we change? Those who demand that all have a brain full of crap.’
- (18) Neger bei Olpe ist ne Ortschaft, wird die jetzt auch umbenannt?  
‘Neger near Olpe is a village, will it also be renamed now?’
- (19) Die Neger ist ein südwestlicher bzw. linker Nebenfluss der Ruhr im m nordrhein-westfälischen Hochsauerlandkreis. Nach einem generell nordwärts gerichteten Lauf von 17,7 km Länge erreicht sie eine Wasserführung von im m Mittel gut 1,3 m<sup>3</sup>/s. Wikipedia

<sup>11</sup> For a critical discussion of Marx’ letter, cf. Hund (2018).

‘The Neger is a southwestern or left tributary of the Ruhr in the Hochsauerland district of North Rhine-Westphalia. After a generally northward course of 17.7 km, it reaches a water flow of a m average of a good 1.3 m<sup>3</sup>/s. Wikipedia’

- (20) Resi, bring mir no oan Neger!  
‘Theres, bring me another Neger!’

In (20), the term for a mixed drink of wheat beer and cola in Bavarian is alluded to (*Theres, bring mir noch einen Neger!* ‘Theres, bring me another Neger!’), the appropriateness of which seems quite worthy of discussion.<sup>12</sup>

### 5.2.8 The topos of axiomatic truth (no need for justification)

Occasionally, the data contain examples of the topos of axiomatic truth that does not require justification: One’s own statement is set absolute without being supported by an argument. Example (21) illustrates the topos.

- (21) Und ja ist ein Neger. Das ist KEINE rassistische Bezeichnung, sondern das normale deutsche Wort für Schwarze. Fertig  
‘And yes (he) is a *Neger*. That is NOT a racist term, but the normal German word for blacks. And that’s it’

## 6 Summary and outlook

This article has shown that the prominent German ethnophaulisms *Kanake* and *Neger* actually tend to occur in different contexts: While the K-word is used almost exclusively to disparage the intended group of people, the N-word occurs conspicuously more often in meta-linguistic discussions in which the supposed appropriateness is justified. In the linguistic data examined – Facebook posts from certain public channels from 2017–2019 – 8 topoi of argumentation could be identified as to why the N-word is not an insulting word: the topos of etymology (“N. comes from Latin *niger* meaning just ‘black’.”), the topos of permanence (“N. used to be a completely normal term back then.”), the topos of the guarantor (“I know a person of colour, and they don’t mind it.”), the topos of self-designation (“They say that themselves!”), the topos of (ir)relevance (“As if we didn’t have more important problems to solve!”), the mirror topos (“They say ugly names like potato-eaters to us too, and we don’t whine about it!”), the topos of humorous distraction (“Resi, bring us another N.!”) and the topos of axiomatic truth (“N. is not a swear word. Period.”). It should be investigated whether these topoi are also used for other media or text types and the ethnophaulisms under discussion in German (here especially *Zigeuner* (‘gypsies’)) and in equivalent discourses in other languages. Furthermore, whether and how a changing inventory must be modified, especially in terms of possible developments over time, could reveal illustrative insights in the dynamics of the topic.

The topic has, of course, considerable teaching potential as well. A combination with the concept of group-based misanthropy, as developed by Heitmeyer (2012), seems obvious and fruitful, even if group-based misanthropy is primarily about attitudes and not about their communicative expression, as is the case with hate speech. Hofmann (2018) shows how both can be profitably combined. Particularly for the teaching of German as a foreign language at universities outside the German-speaking area, with the connection of topical, explosive regional-

<sup>12</sup> The neutral and unmarked term, however, would be *Cola-Weizen* ‘Cola-wheat beer’.

cultural issues with recognition value in the reality of the students' lives and linguistic issues on very different levels, didactic possibilities open up that should be explored in the future, provided that the topics are treated with appropriate caution due to the offensive language material.

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