Social interactions in Science
Opening conversations

Program

WISE Annual Event
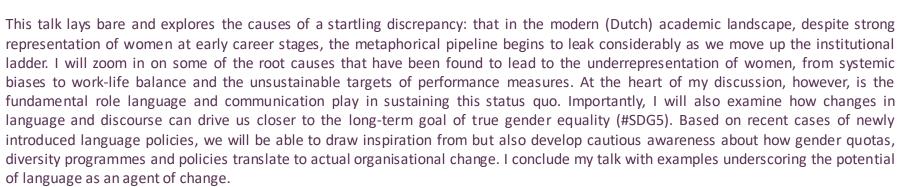### Monday 30th October
@Blauwe Zaal, Auditorium

13.30 Registration & Welcome

13.50 First speaker – Dr. Erika Darics

#SDG5 and the Role of Language: One step closer to Understanding Gender Imbalance in Academia

This talk lays bare and explores the causes of a startling discrepancy: that in the modern (Dutch) academic landscape, despite strong representation of women at early career stages, the metaphorical pipeline begins to leak considerably as we move up the institutional ladder. I will zoom in on some of the root causes that have been found to lead to the underrepresentation of women, from systemic biases to work-life balance and the unsustainable targets of performance measures. At the heart of my discussion, however, is the fundamental role language and communication play in sustaining this status quo. Importantly, I will also examine how changes in language and discourse can drive us closer to the long-term goal of true gender equality (#SDG5). Based on recent cases of newly introduced language policies, we will be able to draw inspiration from but also develop cautious awareness about how gender quotas, diversity programmes and policies translate to actual organisational change. I conclude my talk with examples underscoring the potential of language as an agent of change.

→ break (~5 min.) ←

14.40 Second speaker – Dr. Wyke Stommel

Gender in language and interaction: the case of a gender ambiguous robot

Gender relates to the language system in various ways, including person reference. When we talk about other people we use nouns to refer to them. Speakers do not always include gender ("my boss"), but normatively do include gender as a minimum in there referencing ("a man", "this girl"). By using such nouns, we may not just reference the other, but also categorize them, that is, make the gender of the other relevant to the talk. Gender rarely becomes a topic of conversation as a result of reference. However, non-binary identities and gender ambiguity challenge these interactional dynamics. In this presentation I focus on language and interaction in the context of gender ambiguous robots, (e.g., Pepper, Jibo, ASIMO). Such robot design should solve stereotypical design of humanoid robots and echoes similar developments in Voice User Interfaces (GenderLess Voice, n.d.) and "gender free" robot voices. Producers propose that users may refer to the robot in a way that "makes most sense to [them]" (Aldebaran-Softbank, n.d., para. B) and that their gender is "anything a human wants it to be…". On the basis of a conversation analysis of a few cases of interaction in the context of a Pepper robot, I will argue that robot gender becomes relevant initially through our language system, namely referencing. Participants treat gender as knowable and (therefore) an accountable issue. I will show that gender attribution in interaction is a collaborative activity, not an individual choice and thus conclude that gender ambiguous design shifts the burden of gender to users and their social system. Hence, technologies like robots inevitably "bump into" the language system and interactional order in the real world.

→ break (~25 min.) ←

15.50 Theater play – Lomans & De Roy

That's Not What I Meant! Recognizing Bias and Setting Boundaries in Scientific Spaces.

Social interactions play a crucial role in our daily work lives, from a casual coffee catch-up to a Q&A session after a presentation. Feeling comfortable, confident and being clearly understood in these interactions is essential. However, expressing ourselves effectively in professional environments can sometimes be challenging. While professional skills seminars often focus on improving communication efficiency, there is a lack of emphasis on dealing with inappropriate comments and biased perspectives. How aware are we of the importance of communicating the personal boundaries and establishing what is acceptable? It is time to bring kind, respectful and equitable social interactions to the stage.

Lomans & de Roy's tailor-made theater play will present relatable situations that have to do with crossing and setting boundaries at the TU/e. With humor and respect, the actors create awareness and open up the discussion on how to have a conversation around boundaries. In this interactive play, you don't have to be on stage, but you are invited to interact. And from the safety of your own chair, you can direct the actors and see how your instructions work in practice.

17.30 Dinner & Drinks

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