

# Language and Gender

Benjamin Fagard  
Ana Margarida Abrantes  
[eds.]



# **Language and Gender**

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# Introduction

Benjamin Fagard<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

Since the end of the 70s, the issue of language and gender has fostered an abundant literature in various domains: linguistics, psychology, sociology, literature (see for instance Boel, 1976; Moulton et al., 1978; MacKay & Fulkerson, 1979). There has been a steep increase in interest for these issues in recent years, possibly in relation to the *me too* movement and, more generally, the increased attention devoted to social inequalities, generating a large and increasing body of research (see for instance very recently e.g. Schmitz et al., 2023; Storme & Delaloye Saillen, 2024).

The body of literature on gender clearly points to the existence of an imbalance between genders. This imbalance is common in languages of the world, albeit with strong disparities across languages (Corbett, 2013). In some languages, gender is explicitly marked morphologically, typically on nouns, adjectives and pronouns, sometimes on verbs; in others, it is marked only on pronouns, or lexically, i.e. barely marked at all. Such systems are far from balanced, or symmetrical: like all linguistic paradigms, they contain exceptions. One important source of asymmetry is the so-called *generic use of the masculine*, another one the existence of semantic asymmetries.<sup>2</sup> One question in

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This edited volume is the product of a collaboration between Benjamin Fagard and Ana Margarida Abrantes, during the 2020-2021 academic year, when Benjamin Fagard was a Visiting Researcher at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Lisbon, hosted by Ana Margarida Abrantes at the Research Center for Communication and Culture (CECC).

<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon is obvious if one considers for instance masculine-feminine word pairs in which the feminine only has pejorative or degrading connotations, e.g. English *master* vs. *mistress* or *dog* vs. *bitch*, or French *gars* “boy” vs. *garce* “prostitute,” *courtisan* “courtier” / *courtisane* “prostitute,” etc. (see e.g. Yaguello, 1978).

point is whether the imbalance in linguistic gender systems is purely the result of the **natural evolution** of language, or whether it results at least partly from **human intervention**, as has been suggested, for instance, for French (Viennot, 2014).

Another issue is whether gender asymmetry may be a source of **discrimination**. Is it a minor issue with little importance for society – are there, as has been said over and over again, other, more important issues to deal with, such as equal pay (Le Draoulec & Péry-Woodley, 2000)? Or is it an important issue, having consequences for the cognitive build-up of future generations? This has been a key question in psycholinguistic studies on gender, and experiments have shown repeatedly that gender asymmetry, and specifically the generic masculine, do have an impact on our cognitive representations, in English, German, French, and probably whatever the language (Trömel-Plötz, 1978; Braun et al., 1998; Gygax et al., 2021; Körner et al., 2022). Like algorithms (Bolukbasi et al., 2016; Savoldi et al., 2021; Piergentili et al., 2023), humans seem to be sensitive to the discriminations induced by gender asymmetries.

Another crucial question is whether this asymmetry is unavoidable, or whether there are ways to strive toward a greater balance between genders. For instance, much has been said and written about the neutral Swedish pronoun *hen* (Sendén et al., 2015, 2021; Vergoossen et al., 2020), but neutral pronouns have appeared in other languages, e.g. English *they* or, with a more limited audience thus far, French *iel* or *al* (Alpheratz, 2022). Scholars who study the various ways of achieving gender equality in language (e.g. in German or French, cf. respectively Steinhauer & Diewald, 2017 and Dister & Moreau, 2020) do not necessarily agree on how we should go about this. Is it possible to come up with a toolkit for inclusive language?

The present volume builds on the scientific exchanges which took place at the Symposium “Between Feminine and Masculine – Language(s) and society,” which was held on December 9 and 10, 2021, online and on-site in Lisbon, Portugal. The originality of this volume lies in the diversity of approaches it contains. It brings together colleagues from Linguistics and Psycholinguistics, with empirical and descriptive approaches; some studies bear strictly on the linguistic issues at stake, while other address the complex issue of the language and culture interface. It is meant as a stepping-stone for further research on language and gender. The aim of the Symposium, and of the present volume, is to provide scientific data as a sound basis to further reflect on and evaluate

the possibility of gender-inclusive language and possible evolutions towards gender-neutral language – an ongoing process in much of the Western world, albeit not without debate. One main issue is the question of *how research into language and gender can help find ways to use inclusive language*: (a) what has been done in Romance and Germanic languages to be linguistically inclusive? (b) what has worked best? what are the pros and cons of various methods?

The layout of this volume is as follows. It is divided into three sections, which address different aspects of the issue, and are detailed in § 2 below. The first section, “Language, Gender and Society: How Language Issues Reflect Societal Ones,” contains four chapters showing more clearly the intricate inter-relatedness of linguistic and social issues. These chapters bear respectively on the complex history of Portuguese Sign Language and unexpected gender differences directly resulting from it; the coverage of women as political figures; political issues at stake in the legal treatment of inclusive language in Brazil; and the evolution of gender representation in foreign language textbooks. The second section, “Changing Norms: System and Evolution in Modern European Languages,” contains four chapters on new paradigms of gender-fair language in various languages. These chapters bear respectively on gender-fair options in German; on gender-fair options in French and German, in a contrastive perspective; on gender-fair options in Dutch, in a press corpus; and on a recent change in German, viz. the use of the asterisk to refer to non-binary persons – along with the challenges it entails.

The third Section, “Empirical Approaches to Gender & Language,” contains four chapters illustrating the recent trend of empirical studies on gender in Linguistics. These chapters present the results of studies respectively on the use of generic masculine and gender typicality of occupational nouns in German; on the morphological derivation of feminine occupational nouns in French; on semantic gender agreement in French; and on the perception of inclusive language by French speakers.

## 2. Presentation of the chapters

### 2.1. Language, Gender and Society: How Language Issues Reflect Societal Ones

In her chapter “Gender in Portuguese Sign Language: the cultural implications of its construction and the linguistic effects of segregation in the Portuguese Deaf community,” Cristina Gil (School of Education – Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal & Research Centre for Communication and Culture) recounts the history of Portuguese Sign Language (*Lingua Gestual Portuguesa*, or LGP) with a focus on gender issues. Quite expectedly, gender is present in LGP: lexically, through the contrast between opposed members of gendered sign pairs, e.g. the signs for *cow* vs. *bull* or *mother* vs. *father*; or morphologically, through the addition of a gender prefix to assign feminine gender – the prefix *woman* in the sign *granddaughter*, for instance. A more unexpected and quite fascinating manifestation of gender in this language is linked to the history of LGP: the existence of different signs for a given concept, used respectively by men and women – competing male and female signs. The author offers an account of the teaching of LGP in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, explaining the formation and loss of female signs.

In her chapter “Most voted women – representations of gender in the Portuguese media coverage of the 2021 Presidential elections,” Rita Faria (CECC – UCP) examines the media representation of women politicians in the Portuguese press with a view to better understand how media discourse represents gender. This groundbreaking study attempts to offer a snapshot of how women politicians are seen and represented in public discourse, in order to gauge their participation in the public sphere. One of the aims of this chapter is to address the issue of gendered reporting, as earlier research has shown evidence of both differential media treatment and limited or conflicting evidence of gender bias in the media (see e.g. Kahn, 1994; D’Heer et al., 2019; Van Der Pas & Aaldering, 2020). By combining qualitative and quantitative analyses, the author shows that there is evidence of gender bias, which plays out in complex ways.

In her chapter “Gender-neutral language in Brazilian’s Federal Draft Laws,” Raquel Meister Ko Freitag (Federal University of Sergipe, Brazil) describes the intricacies of gender morphology in Brazilian Portuguese. She then presents an overview of gender and language issues in the Brazilian landscape, highlighting the importance of politics and perception in this matter. By analyzing the details

of gender-neutral language draft laws, she shows the linguistic ideologies and demonstrates how part of the political landscape of Brazil has been focusing on inclusive language, going on to propose drastic legislative changes in order to prohibit the use of anything that it sees as not warranted by the standard Portuguese grammar.

In their chapter “The evolution of gender representation in two editions of a Spanish as a Foreign Language textbook,” Antonio Chenoll & Grauben Navas (CECC & Universidade Católica Portuguesa) take a closer look at textbooks as a measure of gender representation. They show the importance of textbooks in the transmission and construction of the image of women with respect to men, highlighting the fact that their representation in textbooks may reflect unconscious prototypical visions of gender. In order to evaluate differences in representation, the authors present a qualitative and quantitative analysis of text and images contained in two editions of a complete textbook (Corpas et al., 2013, 2020) with a data analysis program. Their study highlights both the possibility and the importance of proposing balanced language textbooks which are representative of the target culture.

## **2.2. Changing Norms: System and Evolution in Modern European Languages**

In her chapter “Gender-fair language in German – current tendencies and problems,” Gabriele Diewald (University of Hannover) reports on the recent public debate on gender-fair language in Germany. She assesses the flexibility offered by German in terms of creating new, more gender fair means of expression, and then focuses on the conditions of their practical implementation. This leads her to present a survey of the ways German can express person reference without discrimination in terms of gender, with a range of possibilities at the lexical, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic levels to attain person reference that adequately represents the intended referents. She also discusses the suggestion that English should be taken as a blueprint, showing that the options found in that language would be unsuitable for German. She also takes up the question of neographies, and reaches the conclusion that these new forms should be carefully evaluated before they are implemented.

In his chapter “Marquage et généricité : morphologie prescriptive, descriptive et créative en français et en allemand,” Daniel Elmiger (University of Geneva) compares gender marking in French and German occupational nouns.

He focuses on two phenomena which may be used to create such nouns, inflection and derivation. In both languages, patterns of noun formation partly overlap with those of adjectives. In German, the difference between inflection and derivation is generally easily established. In some cases, there is an asymmetry in the formation of masculine vs. feminine nouns (cf. *der Arbeit-er* / *die Arbeit-er-in* “the work-er-ø (masculine) / the work-er-f (feminine)”: this has led to the formation of new paradigms (e.g. the neoformation of a masculine with a gender morpheme, *der Arbeiteris* “the work-er-m (masculine)”). In French, the distinction between inflection and derivation is less apparent, with in some cases a plethora of forms (e.g. *designer*, *designneur* “designer.m,” *designer*, *désigné*, *designneuse* “designer.f,” neoformation *designnaire* “designer.m|f”). The chapter presents a survey of recent literature on the subject, exploring and making sense of this fluid creation of new forms in both languages.

In her chapter “How gender-fair are gender-neutralizing and feminization strategies? Grammatical gender choices in Netherlandic vs. Belgian Dutch sports press on women’s football,” Machteld Meulleman (Université de Reims) investigates the use of gender in descriptions of female soccer players in a contemporary press corpus, comparing Dutch and Belgian newspapers. Her study confirms that Dutch holds an intermediate position between German and English, resorting both to feminization (like German) and gender-neutral strategies (like English) to achieve gender-fairness in language use. Based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study also indicates a contrast between Flemish (i.e. Southern Dutch) and Northern Dutch. For instance, in Northern Dutch, the use of masculine generic nouns is quite frequent (e.g. *speler* ‘player.m’). In contrast, Flemish makes wider use of epicenes or feminine forms (e.g. *ploegmaat* ‘teammate.m|f’, *voetbalster* “soccer player.f”), a difference which can be accounted for partly by its intense language contact with French.

In her chapter “The gender asterisk in German: the sensorial impact of linguistic change,” Ana Margarida Abrantes (CECC & UCP) describes the intriguing case of the German *Sternchen* (“asterisk, lit. *little star*”). The asterisk was introduced in German some fifteen years ago to refer to non-binary persons. For instance, the neologism *Student\*innen* refers to “students (male, female and/or non-binary),” whereas Standard German would have two variants, *Studentinnen* “students (female)” and *Studenten* “students (male, or male and female, in a generic masculine interpretation).” Ana Margarida Abrantes describes how

the asterisk has been implemented and its phonemic and phonological properties, and goes on to show that this change has met strong resistance by many language users. She then analyzes the challenges presented by such drastic changes in language structure.

### 2.3. Empirical Approaches to Gender and Language

In their chapter “Feminine grammatical forms as gender-fair language in German: A study of the social gender typicality of role and occupation nouns,” Christin Schütze & Olga Steriopo (University of Leibniz) present an experimental socio-psycholinguistic study of the interrelation between gender, language, and sexuality in German. In their study, generic profession nouns were rated according to their gender typicality, taking into account both so-called ‘generic masculine’ forms and grammatically feminine forms. The results show that feminine forms receive less male-biased responses, while the generic masculine forms increase typicality rates towards the concept ‘male’, despite variations linked to the typicality of particular professional roles. These results highlight the usefulness of feminine grammatical forms in *-kraft*, *-person* and *-hilfe*, such as *Lehrkraft* “teacher,” *Kontaktperson* “contact person” and *Rechtsanwaltshilfe* “legal assistant,” which better enhance female visibility than their grammatically masculine versions, and thus seem more appropriate in German gender-fair language.

In their chapter “*Autrice, auteure, auteur?* Between social norms, usage and morphological awareness,” H  l  ne Giraudo & Aur  lia Morel (CLLE, University of Toulouse & CNRS, France) report the results of a study on gender marking in French. The study addresses the question of morphological derivation in reportedly “unstable” cases, i.e. nouns for which the masculine counterpart is known but which present an array of possible feminine counterparts. In order to investigate the mental representation of these nouns in the long-term memory of native speakers, they devised a task of language production, assessing the importance of various factors: level of linguistic competence, instability of the feminine, sociological profile of the speaker. Their results indicate that respondents often avoided providing a feminine counterpart for masculine occupational nouns, and that interparticipant variation could not be accounted for by their social profiles.

In his chapter “Semantic gender agreement: French versus Germanic languages,” Thom Westveer (University of Amsterdam) reports on an experiment

investigating semantic gender agreement in French and comparing it to Germanic languages. While speakers of Dutch often prefer the pronoun to match the biological sex of its referent (e.g. *het meisje... zie* “the girl.n... she”), prescriptive grammars of French usually dictate the use of grammatical agreement (e.g. *une victime... elle* “a.f victim... she”). The chapter describes a study designed to test whether native speakers of French do indeed stick to grammatical agreement, or whether they would rather shift to semantic agreement. It draws on extensive literature on pronominal agreement in Germanic (from Audring, 2009 to de Vogelaer et al., 2020), and previous experiments on semantic agreement in French (Sleeman & Ihsane, 2016; Westveer, 2021). The results indicate that semantic agreement is in fact generally accepted in French, though several factors are at play, such as animacy.

In their chapter “Use and perception of inclusive language: A polarizing issue?,” Marine Delaborde<sup>i</sup>, Auph lie Ferreira<sup>ii</sup>, Loic Grobo<sup>iii</sup>, Olga Seminck<sup>ii</sup> & Benjamin Fagard<sup>ii,iv</sup> (University of Cergy; <sup>i</sup>Lattice, CNRS, ENS|PSL & Sorbonne Nouvelle; <sup>iii</sup>Nanterre; <sup>iv</sup>French & Italian Department, Indiana University) explore the issue of inclusive writing. They report the results of a survey which investigates the reception of inclusive writing in French and compares it to other (equally non-standard) linguistic phenomena. The survey bears mainly on inclusive language practices, asking participants about their awareness, use and perception of these constructions. The aim is to assess the degree of acceptability of inclusive writing, and observe the entrenchment (or lack thereof) of these new constructions in French. The results of this study indicate that the acceptability of inclusive writing is highly variable both across items and across respondents. They also show that sociological and political issues have a strong impact on the perception of inclusive writing, thus confirming previous research (Abbou, 2023; Sauteur et al., 2023).

## List of abbreviations

f	feminine
m	masculine
n	neuter

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# **1. Language, Gender and Society: How Language Issues Reflect Societal Ones**

# Gender in Portuguese Sign Language: the cultural implications of its construction and the linguistic effects of segregation in the Portuguese Deaf community.

Cristina Gil (she/her)\*

## Abstract<sup>3</sup>

Gendered constructions in Portuguese Sign Language (LGP) can be conveyed by different signs or through affixes. In LGP, gender is frequently irrelevant, therefore, there is no morphological mark. This reflection on LGP morphology is opening new perspectives on gender-inclusive language. I will also focus on the sociolinguistic implications of gender segregation that occurred in Portuguese Deaf education. The displacement of both Deaf girls and boys to different schools led to singular experiences and resulted in the emergence of distinct signs. Accounts show that some signs were exclusively used by women and other signs by men. It is our aim to promote a momentum for a deeper discussion of how gender power dynamics manifest in a multiplicity of layers that run on deeper levels than those of feminine/masculine morphological constructions.

**Keywords:** Deaf Culture; Deaf History; Sign Language; Gender; Sign Language Linguistics; Deaf Culture Studies.

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## **Introduction**

In the last fifty years, Sign Language Linguistics and the study of Deaf Culture has contributed to a better understanding of human languages and culture. However, we have yet to understand how gender manifests in several signed languages. During the last six decades, scholars in Sign Language Linguistics worldwide are breaking through and reaching a better understanding of their national or local sign language. Perhaps one day research teams can undertake a comparative study on differences and similarities that might occur in gender constructions in several signed languages.

In 2021, the BetFam conference in Lisbon was entitled “Between the Feminine and the Masculine – Language and Society” bringing together the dynamic of language and society, a topic which sparked so many interrogations about gender, LGP and the Portuguese Deaf Community. Gender construction in Portuguese Sign Language (henceforth LGP) is a topic yet to be thoroughly researched, but there are some exploratory sources to ground our discussion. So, how do gender constructions work in LGP? Many signers empirically state that the unmarked versions are masculine signs. However, can these signs account for a generic use of the masculine or are they neutral? This chapter aims to shed light on and contribute to the discussion of how gender construction operates in signed languages. By delving further into these issues, we can contemplate whether a gender-neutral language is a prerequisite for or facilitates a gender-inclusive society – or perhaps this is not the case at all.

Regarding the historical and cultural background of the Portuguese Deaf Community, a possible approach to further discuss this issue is to consider how did gender segregation in education impact LGP and the Portuguese Deaf Community? Firstly, let us begin by looking at how gender works in LGP.

## **Cultural implications of LGP gender construction**

The fields of Deaf Studies and Sign Language Linguistics in Portugal, in comparison with other countries, lags far behind, and as it can be seen by considering several indicators such as the scarcity (indeed, near inexistence) of

Deaf<sup>4</sup> academics and researchers, and the scarcity of universities and organizations that embrace these fields. Moreover, by looking at the research output in this field over the years, we can *undoubtedly* affirm that research on linguistics of LGP is still insufficient. This explains why finding research sources on such a specific topic as gender constructions in LGP is very hard. For this reason, I chose to take a step back and search for knowledge regarding other signed languages, and I was surprised to find that Sandler and Lillo-Martin (2006) in their seminal work *Sign Language and Linguistic Universals* do not have a section dedicated to gender constructions in signed languages, nor even a paragraph, only a footnote. In a section dedicated to morphology, the scholars state that: “There is no gender – or case-marking morphology on nouns, except for possessive pronouns” (Sandler and Lillo-Martin, 2006: 23). This oddity is confirmed by Correia (2016) in a paper discussing gender constructions in LGP, explaining that the absence of the topic of gender in signed languages in the work of Sandler and Lillo-Martin (2006) was an unusual discovery.

Marking a significant milestone in the documentation of LGP, *Gestuário* was a pioneer dictionary published in 1991. In the introductory notes, Maria Raquel Delgado Martins, one of the first linguists to conduct academic work on LGP, more specifically focused on the grammar, wrote that in LGP:

the sign has in its basic form neutral gender, except when animated (human and animal) in which it is equivalent to sex, and in general, the masculine form is performed by “male” and the feminine by “woman” preceding the sign that it intends to mark.<sup>5</sup> (Martins, 1992 [2001]:23) (This translation is my own.)

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<sup>4</sup> The capital “D” is commonly employed to denote individuals who identify with Deaf culture, community, and sign language, whereas the lowercase “d” typically refers to those who experience hearing loss but may not actively participate in Deaf culture or primarily use sign language. Although the usage is subject to questioning (Kusters, De Meulder, and O’Brien, 2017), it is utilized in this chapter to facilitate the conceptualization of identities from a perspective of strategic essentialism in articulation with Deafhood (Spivak, 1990; Ladd, 2003), much like other identity categories such as Black or LGBTQIA+, for instance. It is important to note that D/d designations are not monolithic and encompass the entire spectrum of D/d heterogeneity.

<sup>5</sup> “O gesto na sua forma de base tem género neutro, excepto quanto aos animados (humano e animal) em que é equivalente ao sexo, e, em geral, a forma de masculino é dada pelo gesto “homem” e o feminino “mulher” precedendo o gesto a marcar (This translation is my own.).

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While Martins follows up with examples and mentions the irregular morphological forms we will focus on next, the above definition is given as the first proposal as a main rule for gender marking.

Later, *Para uma Gramática da Língua Gestual Portuguesa* (Amaral et al., 1994) was a groundbreaking attempt to analyse the grammar of LGP. This enabled a discussion of how LGP and spoken Portuguese had a distinct grammar and this book became a pivotal instrument for all teachers of Deaf children and for LGP interpreters, to this day.

However, as was common practice at the time, i.e. during the 1980s and 1990s, *Para uma Gramática da Língua Gestual Portuguesa* (Amaral, et al., 1994) also operates as a lens to observe the limitations and contamination of linguistic research conducted on a signed language in comparison with an oral language, in this case, LGP in comparison with Portuguese. To this day, comparative studies and research conducted between signed languages, within Sign Language Linguistics, meaning, comparative approaches within the modality have not yet emerged in the Portuguese academia. The grammar by Amaral, Coutinho and Delgado was not the result of research conducted on a corpus of LGP but based on elicitation with native signers. However, it dedicates a small section to gender expression, albeit conveying an imprecise description by declaring that LGP and Portuguese share *some resemblance* in terms of gender constructions.<sup>6</sup> This statement would require further research on a LGP corpus and would be, yet again, a comparison between oral and signed languages, falling under what many signed languages linguistic academics now criticize as an outdated approach and paradigm. Signed languages have been scientifically recognized as full-fledged languages, and this remains consensual, despite occasional disputes regarding iconicity and arbitrariness in signed languages (Frishberg, 1975; Armstrong, 1983). This is not to say that signed and oral languages cannot or should not be analyzed side by side to find out more about human cognition, the brain, and languages – that has been a valid approach for over sixty years. However, by looking at oppressed languages

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<sup>6</sup> “No que diz respeito à Língua Gestual Portuguesa algo de paralelo se passa. Existem várias formas de expressar o masculino e o feminino com alguma semelhança com o que se passa na língua portuguesa falada. Assim, os substantivos que designam seres animados e inanimados não possuem qualquer marca nem de masculino nem de feminino; podem ser considerados não marcados.” (Amaral et al., 1994: 83).

from the lens of the hegemonic languages, one must agree it does very little for the sustainability of endangered languages such as signed languages.

From the onset of signed languages and Deaf Culture studies, the fields of Linguistics, Neurosciences, Cultural Studies, and others, have benefited from that scientific output. Many members of Deaf communities that were participants in these studies consider they and their community have not equally benefited from their participation, especially in contrast to the relevance of their contribution to knowledge production (Singleton et al., 2014; McKee et al., 2013; Kusters et al., 2017).

Returning to the grammar, another issue in Amaral et al.'s (1994) work is that it builds on a hypothesis to explain gender construction in LGP, by looking at Deaf people's writing performance, by observing their difficulties in corresponding the correct gender in both the noun and article in written Portuguese. However, these difficulties are commonly found in second language learners of Portuguese, and not exclusive to Deaf learners. It is true that research points out that second language learners find it hard and acquire last the features that are not found in their native language, however, this not conditioned by their auditory status but also entail more complex alterity and identity issues (Thomason, 2001; Brueggemann, 2006; Ferreira, 2011; Sousa, 2011). Even if research highlights the importance of issues concerning first language/second language dynamics, we should also question the quality of the linguistic input and the linguistic environments in these cases. Amaral and her team, observing the difficulties that Deaf students show in learning the correct gender of words and the corresponding gendered articles in written Portuguese, attributed the difficulties to the fact that in LGP most nouns are genderless signs, and articles are inexistent. Therefore, according to the authors, this distinction becomes visible and significant when learning a second language with such distinct features. Another statement in Amaral et al. (1994), verified in Correia (2016), is that it is only required to specify gender in the cases of feminine animated beings, when gender is relevant for the context. This can be the case when focusing on morphology, however, when focusing on syntax and pragmatics, several markings can disappear if they are considered redundant. However, this issue requires further exploration and research by LGP linguists.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Special acknowledgement to Paulo Vaz de Carvalho for pointing out this issue, among other thought-provoking comments.

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In Vaz de Carvalho's (2006) research on the SIGN-NAMES<sup>8</sup> of the Portuguese Deaf community in LPG, the feminine mark emerges on a female name/sign/SIGN-NAME if the same SIGN-NAME is also applied to a male. In these cases, the feminine affix is the distinctive trait. Vaz de Carvalho (2006) points out that there are feminine SIGN-NAMES that derive from feminine stereotypical accessories or traits, such as earrings, head ribbons, hair bands, braids, amongst others. This chapter will not engage with the pertinent discussion of gender fluidity, gender identities, and how to dismantle stereotypes, but this specific feature of LGP is thought-provoking. Considering that these signs are a way to specify the feminine, as they are traditionally attributed to females in our culture, to what extent could or would someone that identified themselves as a male have a ribbon as a SIGN-NAME?

The feminine marking rule can be flexible in the case of inanimate symbolic beings, such as in the signs for female dolls, avatars, and robots. In these cases, the feminine can be signed with WOMAN<sup>9</sup> prefix to indicate, in cases of contextual relevance, that the sign is referring to a female doll, a female avatar, and a female robot, respectively (see examples 1, 2 and 3).

(1) WOMAN + DOLL

(2) WOMAN + AVATAR

(3) WOMAN + ROBOT

To explain how this functions morphologically, Amaral et al. (1994) explain that the most recurrent construction of the feminine is the one with the affix followed by the noun. When used alone, these signs are nouns, and refer to WOMAN and MAN<sup>10</sup>, but they also function as part of another noun when attached to another sign performing as affixes in the formulation of a gendered noun. In a conversation, for example, when talking about animals, when there is a doubt on the animal's gender, MAN can be used before the noun, for

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<sup>8</sup> In Deaf communities, there is a common usage of SIGN-NAMES, these are part of Deaf Culture. They are individual names attributed in the Deaf community, usually based on body representation descriptions, or psychological attributes, or name initials and other features. They are created and attributed by Deaf people. Small caps indicate English glosses of concepts from Portuguese Sign Language.

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://media.spreadthesign.com/video/mp4/6/12892.mp4>.

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://media.spreadthesign.com/video/mp4/6/12900.mp4>.

example: MAN+DOG. In these specific cases MAN can also be considered a prefix. Correia (2016) also raises an important issue which needs to be further analyzed. Can we find a subtle change in the movement and facial expression execution of the sign WOMAN when working as a noun or an affix? Correia (2016) dives into an interesting observation, a typical hallmark of grammaticalization, which is the non-manual feature of the sign WOMAN – an expression done with the tongue pressed against the cheek, which is currently less observed in native signers when marking the feminine and by some still maintained in signing WOMAN as a noun. We can only wait for more research to be developed on this topic, to find out whether there is a change in the movement and facial expression execution only in the affix or if there is an overall change of facial expressions and shortening of movements that also affect the noun.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, in LGP, most sentences do not indicate any gender (see example 4).

(4)

LGP: BOOK\*POINT TABLE \*POINT CL-VERB

ENG: The book is on the table.<sup>12</sup>

Note that the Portuguese common noun for *book*, *livro*, is masculine. The Portuguese common noun for *table*, *mesa* is feminine. In LGP, both are objects and therefore neutral genderless signs. Amaral et al. (1994) lead us to see the masculine as a generalization by its absence since only the feminine is required to be marked. However, except the signs that are morphologically different as explained below, a LGP sign by itself is neutral, it can signify the universe of masculine, feminine, or genderless, and it does not forcefully refer to the generalized masculine. For example, if one says: “Look, there are ducks in the pond!” In this sentence, there is no need to specify and there are certainly both female and male ducks in the pond. In this respect an important difference is that in LGP, in these cases, there is simply no gender marking, while in Portuguese nouns and articles attribute a gender by default. Moreover, ducks are animated beings, but in this context their gender is irrelevant and remains therefore

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<sup>11</sup> Special acknowledgement to Isabel Correia for contributing with this reflection and other challenging feedback.

<sup>12</sup> LGP: livro \*apontar mesa \*apontar cl-verbo.

PT: O livro está sobre a mesa.

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unmentioned. When there is a contextual relevance attributed to gender, the two morphemes are together, functioning as a composed sign (see example 5).

(5) WOMAN+LAWYER<sup>13</sup>

For specialists investigating these issues, or those who reflect upon language issues, especially LGP teachers and interpreters, the emerging rules and irregularities also lead to another question, i.e. whether gender is marked by a prefix or a suffix. We can safely state that in most markings there is a feminine affix working as a prefix, it is empirically obvious that the prefix is more common than the suffix. But again, we agree with Correia (2016) stating that gender constructions in LGP have yet to be studied in a non-elicited free dialogue corpus that would allow us to establish the rules for each (prefix or suffix) constructions. The current research, including this chapter derived from it, has primarily focused on elicitation for studies and the development of language repositories and dictionaries. The example of WOMAN+LAWYER illustrates a purely morphological aspect, yet further inquiry is needed to grasp the underlying causality and contextual significance of such occurrences.

The question of when gender markings are used and when they are not, and why, remains pertinent. Considering the economic aspects of language, particularly significant in signed languages due to the necessary articulation effort<sup>14</sup>, it becomes evident that in certain contexts, gender may not hold relevance, leading to the *disappearance* or *inexistence* of such markings.

The second type of gendered construction is conveyed through lexical variation, meaning that the signs or signifiers are different for female and male (see examples 6, 7, 8 and 9).

(6) COW<sup>15</sup> /OX<sup>16</sup>

(7) FEMALE-GOAT /MALE-GOAT

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<sup>13</sup> See: <https://media.spreadthesign.com/video/mp4/6/455938.mp4>.

<sup>14</sup> A friendly reminder by Paulo Vaz de Carvalho.

<sup>15</sup> See: <https://media.spreadthesign.com/video/mp4/6/13317.mp4>.

<sup>16</sup> See: <https://media.spreadthesign.com/video/mp4/6/645366.mp4>.

(8) ROOSTER<sup>17</sup> /HEN<sup>18</sup>

(9) FEMALE-NURSE<sup>19</sup> /MALE-NURSE<sup>20</sup>

In these examples, there is a completely different sign for the female concept and the male concept. In the case of animals, we are attributing female and male to sex, given the biological bodies and roles of the animals (see examples 6, 7, and 8). Between COW and OX there is a different handshape considering the anatomical difference in the horns of the animals as well as a difference in location and movement. Between ROOSTER and HEN there is a subtle change of location mirroring the anatomical differences in crests in both animals. However, this is a binary biological understanding of the concepts, close to what linguists recognize as the natural gender. In example 9, the sign difference is believed to be related to the uniform of both female and male nurses. What these examples (6, 7, 8 and 9) also have in common is that they are a confirmation Deaf people's predisposition to attention to visual details, which is a feature of Signed Language Peoples and Deaf Culture (Batterbury, Ladd & Gulliver, 2007).

Although LGP is not genderless, as it possesses some gender marking, it presents less gender markings than Portuguese, for example. Can we say that gender constructions in signed languages provide a privileged standpoint to better understand whether gender-inclusive language or gender-neutral language is required for a gender-inclusive society? Although Deaf communities are frequently empirically described as more open to diversity, one can also find discriminatory experiences amongst Deaf people. Discriminatory phenomena within Deaf Communities are unfortunately not widely studied in several countries, however, there are some countries that have already started to develop their research and opening new fields for research. Racism within Deaf Communities, and specifically, racial segregation concerning Deaf black people has been studied in the United States of America, which led to the emergence of the field of Black Deaf Studies, that later in an intersection with Feminism created Black Deaf Feminism (Anderson & Bowe, 1972; Hairston & Smith, 1983;

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<sup>17</sup> See: <https://media.spreadthesign.com/video/mp4/6/41130.mp4>.

<sup>18</sup> See: <https://media.spreadthesign.com/video/mp4/6/13396.mp4>.

<sup>19</sup> See: <https://media.spreadthesign.com/video/mp4/6/18132.mp4>.

<sup>20</sup> See: <https://media.spreadthesign.com/video/mp4/6/120035.mp4>.

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Aramburo, 1989; McCaskill et al., 2011; Leigh & O'Brien, 2020; Whitmer, 2021). According to research in this field, within Deaf Communities there is also LGBTQ+ discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, although in moderation compared with hearing numbers (Zangas, 2005; Bienvenu, 2008; Leigh & O'Brien, 2020). Moreover, research also shows enrooted discrimination against women and patriarchy which is also studied in Deaf Women Studies (Kelly, 2008; Brueggemann & Burch, 2015; Leigh & O'Brien, 2020). On top of all these, amongst members of the Deaf community, there are also discriminatory practices with regards to having been hearing or being from a family of hearing or Deaf people, regarding signing skills, or regarding how well one writes or speaks, or regarding one's identity, which links with the concept of DEAF-ENOUGH (Humphries, 1975; Gertz, 2008; Gil, 2020). Why is this relevant? Although we stand against all discriminatory practices, they exist in society, regardless of Deaf/hearing status, regardless of what language we use (Portuguese or LGP, in this case). This prompts us to question the ongoing political and linguistic endeavor to modify written Portuguese to accommodate non-binary individuals. Can a morphological linguistic alteration aimed at enhancing visibility through morphemes effectively facilitate inclusivity and yield positive sociological impacts? This chapter hopes to contribute to this discussion as we wait for studies that have yet to be developed in Deaf Culture Studies to assess Sign Language Peoples' realities and how these studies can contribute to a broader understanding.

### **The linguistic effects of gender segregation in the Portuguese Deaf community**

Gender has also had an impact on Portuguese Sign Language. To explore and think about this impact, we must look at how gender segregation led to linguistic differences in Portuguese Deaf Community. First, it is important to explain that gender segregation practices are not uncommon phenomena in history in several countries and it is still in use in some institutions around the world. In the United States of America, the already mentioned above racial segregation also had linguistic implications, as it paved the way to what is nowadays called Black American Sign Language (McCaskill et al., 2011). This, in addition to the example provided below, elucidates why, even when Deaf individuals are

divided or segregated for various reasons, their signed languages, being living and dynamic, persist in evolving and generating diverse signs and structures. There are several historical accounts of the usage of signs in the education of deaf children, many have mentioned Juan Pablo Bonet in Spain, in 1613, or the abbot L'Épée, in France, in 1760, who founded the first public school for deaf children, using what he called *signes méthodiques* that consisted of the use of signs specifically created to teach how to speak and write in French, including what we now call *fingerspelling* (Lane, 1984b; De L'Épée, 1776).

In 1823, the Swedish professor and expert Per Aron Borg came to Portugal by request of King D. João VI of Portugal to pave the way for Deaf education in Lisbon. According to Paulo Vaz de Carvalho (2006; 2019b), Borg applied a mixed method based on signed communication, fingerspelling, and writing. During Borg's stay, the intellectual and religious curriculum was the same for female and for male students and differences occurred only in vocational training.<sup>21</sup> Due to several political upheavals and political and social instability, the institute closed in 1860. A few years later, according to Vaz de Carvalho (2006), the catholic priest Father Pedro Maria de Aguiar won a sponsorship from the Porto municipality in 1877 to open the first Institute for the Deaf in town. Aguiar founded a school for the deaf in Guimarães and later, he also founded a municipal institute for the deaf in Porto. Fusillier (1893)<sup>22</sup> mentions that in the beginning of Father Pedro Maria de Aguiar's intervention there were 16 students (13 boys and three girls). In historical sources (Costa, 1874; Fusillier, 1893), there is no mention of gender segregation, but there is direct reference to the fact that Aguiar used signs, particularly, signs he learned from Deaf children, and that he started his approach with visual learning techniques and written language learning:

When a new student arrived at the school, (...) the master approached him and would question him with a loving gaze, was eager to understand his signs and please him. The child, seeing that he was being understood, would instantly

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<sup>21</sup> According to information provided by Paulo Vaz de Carvalho there is an unpublished document by José Crispim da Cunha from 1835 that testifies that he taught the same curricula to the female students. The same happened in the Colégio de Guimarães, where Father Aguiar's niece, D. Joana Barbosa do Lago, taught the female students.

<sup>22</sup> My gratitude to Paulo Vaz de Carvalho for providing me access to this historical document from his personal archive.

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calm down. The next day, the priest would repeat the signs from the day before to the young student, and he would be amazed to see another person using the same language as himself and would be joyful and immediately get along with such a pleasant man (Fusillier, 1893: 24).<sup>23</sup>

(This translation is my own.)

Father Aguilar prepared a certain number of white paper squares and on each he wrote the name of an object present in the classroom; he would later mix them and put them in a cap or a box; a designated student would take out a random card, and showed the object that the text represented. The others watched the exercise with curiosity, preparing for when their turn would come, and rectifying mistakes.

At other times, the master would choose an object and the student had to look for the name in papers. An excellent exercise for children to remember and expand acquired vocabulary. (Fusillier, 1893: 25)<sup>24</sup>

(This translation is my own.)

Father Aguilar's methodologies are to us, informed readers on Deaf education policies, surprising, since they are not only in tune with the latest scientific developments in Deaf Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but also a goal that is still unattained in many schools for the deaf worldwide. Let it be reminded that the scientific recognition of signed languages started with the research of American Sign Language by William Stokoe that happened only in 1960. The legal recognition of signed languages only started in 1992 in Panama and is a still ongoing process for many countries (WFD, 2022).

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<sup>23</sup> "Chegava um novo alumno ao collegio (...) o mestre aproximava-se d'elle e interrogava o com um olhar carinhoso diligenciado perceber os seus signaes e fazer-lhe a vontade. A creança, vendo que a entendiam, abrandava-se rapidamente. No dia seguinte o padre repetia ao joven alumno os próprios signaes de que se tinha servido na véspera e este, maravilhado por ver outra pessoa usar da mesma linguagem que elle, ficava cheia de alegria e sympathisava logo com um homem tão agradável."

<sup>24</sup> "O rev. Aguilar preparava um certo numero de quadrados de papel branco, e sobre cada um escrevia o nome d'um objecto presente na aula; misturava-os depois e punha-os n'um bonet ou n'uma caixa; um alumno designado tirava um cartão, ao acaso, e mostrava o objecto que a escripta representava. Os outros assistiam com interesse ao exercício, preparando-se para quando chegasse a sua vez e rectificando os erros commettidos. Inversamente o mestre designava um objecto e um alumno devia procurar nos papeis aquelle de que se tinha tirado o nome. Excellente exercício para as creanças não esquecerem o vocabulário adquirido e amplial o rapidamente."

Father Aguilar's methodologies are known today mainly due to fact that António da Costa visited the school and wrote his testimony published in 1874. Aguilar guided da Costa on a tour, showing a first-year class taught by his niece Joanna Innocencia Pereira Barbosa do Lago and a second-year class taught by his nephew Elyseu Pereira de Aguilar. Da Costa explains that Aguilar's methodology is different from the French methodic signs, since the educators use signs that they learned from Deaf children:

The use of signing the alphabet with the fingers, system still widespread today in Europe, was never imposed. It is not the teacher who imposes the mimic language, but the deaf themselves have established the signs following their own reasoning. They introduced their language, natural, spontaneous, and the professors received it, disregarding the methodic signs theory, which has little rationale to it. The deaf and dumb who are entering the school are forced to accept the official language. However, it is funny that if those already inside find the new proposed signs more representative, they replace and accept them... (Costa, 1874: 47)<sup>25</sup> (This translation is my own.)

In his work entitled *No Minho*, António da Costa (1874) stresses several times the successes of Aguilar's methodologies and how happy the students were in the institution. As Vaz de Carvalho (2019b) states, Aguilar's method outperformed by far the methodic signs approach. In the writings of both Costa (1874) and Fusillier (1893), there are no indications of gender segregation in Aguilar's approach. Unfortunately, this legacy was soon to be lost.

Father Aguilar passed away in 1879, leaving the management of the institution to his nephew Elyseu de Aguilar. Later, Elyseu de Aguilar became a professor at the Instituto Municipal de Surdos-Mudos in Porto, which would be closed because he would later leave when invited to run the Instituto Municipal de Surdos-Mudos de Lisboa (Vaz de Carvalho, Paulo, 2019). In 1893, the Instituto

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<sup>25</sup> Nunca lhes foram impostos signaes do alphabelo pelos dedos, systema ainda hoje na Europa geralmente usado. Não é o professor que decreta a linguagem mimica, mas os próprios mudos é que estabeleceram os signaes da conversação, conforme a própria rasão lhos indicava. Instituiram a sua linguagem, natural, espontânea, e os mestres foram-na recebendo, desprezando as theorias dos signaes methodicos, pouco racionaes. Os mudos, que vão entrando para o collegio, são obrigados a aceitar a linguagem official. Mas o que tem graça é que, se os de dentro encontram na linguagem dos recém-chegados alguns signaes que lhes pareçam mais significativos, substituem os seus por esses, para logo os acceitam liberalmente...

de Surdos-Mudos Araújo Porto<sup>26</sup> (ISMAP) was founded, taking the name of the main benefactor for its foundation, José Rodrigues d'Araújo Porto, who passed away in 1887, leaving his fortune to Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto (Ribeiro, 2018). The Institute was inaugurated on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1893, in the aftermath of the Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf, more commonly known as the Milan Congress<sup>27</sup>. Elyseu de Aguiar would intriguingly refuse to work in the institute in 1893 due to other commitments (Ribeiro, 2018). Meanwhile, the director of this institute, Miranda de Barros, who would soon pass away, thought that signs were obsolete as a methodology and wanted to follow the modern trend of the pure oral method (Ribeiro, 2018: 196-197; 279).

At that time, the ISMAP wanted to bring someone from Paris to work in Porto, but without success. So, they sent Luís António Rodrigues Lobo and Nicolau Pereira Pavão de Sousa from Porto to Paris, to learn the latest methods and trends used at the Institution Nationale des Sourds-Muets, in Paris, which had already shifted to oralism at the time, using the pure oral method (Ribeiro, 2018; Vaz de Carvalho, Paulo, 2019b). After twelve years in the ISMAP, Nicolau Pavão de Sousa was hired by Casa Pia de Lisboa in 1906 to reorganize the Deaf education section (Vaz de Carvalho, Paulo, 2019).

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an interesting historical turn occurred in Deaf education in Portugal, with important sociolinguistic implications. Circa 1915 there were two sections for Deaf education, the female section in Santa Isabel and the male in Belém. Between 1928 and 1930, the female section was demolished, and the students were transferred to Algés. In 1922, the male section became the Instituto Jacob Rodrigues Pereira (IJRP) (Vaz de Carvalho, Paulo, 2019). However, the IJRP was too small for all the Deaf male students and therefore they were distributed in two schools: Colégio de Pina Manique and Colégio D. Maria Pia, which were all under the administration of the Casa Pia de Lisboa (Vaz de Carvalho, Paulo, 2006). Ignoring the sign methodologies

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<sup>26</sup> This translates as Institute for the Deaf and Dumb Araújo Porto, a name no longer acceptable as deaf and dumb is considered derogatory, but for historical reasons here mentioned as it was called during that period.

<sup>27</sup> The Second International Congress on Education of the Deaf was held in the presence of 256 educators of the Deaf, of which 167 had voting rights. Only six people voted against what was being proposed and one Deaf educator was allowed to vote. The numbers vary according to the available sources, but the resolutions of this congress led to a profound shift from the sign language method to a pure oral method in class in several countries and jeopardized signed languages and Deaf Culture (Lane, 1984a; Encrevé, 2013; Gil, 2020).

common at the time in Portugal, according to Ribeiro (2018) the ISMAP followed the methodology recommended by the Milan Congress, which was grounded on the German school, that stood by the pure oral method founded by Samuel Heinicke in 1778 (Vaz de Carvalho, Paulo, Paulo 2019b). It is safe to assume that during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, some schools and professionals used the pure oral method, and others used sign methodologies and others mixed methodologies. However, the pure oral method was now widespread and had already taken over the Paris institute, as mentioned above. A visual depiction illustrating the evolution of Deaf education methods employed in Portugal helps us understand what common practice was from 1823 to 2006 (see Table1).

Table 1: Adapted from Vaz de Carvalho, Paulo, Paulo, 2006.

In Portugal – Deaf Education Methods					
First period – 1823-1905		Second period – 1906-1991			Third period – – 1992-2006
Sign methodologies		Oral methodologies			Bilingual Education
Per Aron Borg & José Crispim da Cunha (Lisbon, 1823)	Father Pedro Maria Aguilar, Elyseu Aguilar & D. Joanna Innocencia Pereira Barbosa do Lago (Guimarães, 1872)	Natural method <sup>28</sup>	Verbo-tonal SUVAG Method <sup>29</sup> (Guberina, 1963)	Maternal reflective method/Oral Reflective Method <sup>30</sup> (Van Uden, 1977)	Special Needs Education (Mainstreaming, Inclusion...)

The historical documents held at ISMAP, explored by Ribeiro (2018), show that the pure oral method was hard to apply and found many difficulties to improve or even reach results at ISMAP. Nevertheless, in many institutions where the pure oral method was applied, Deaf children used their signs in their own

<sup>28</sup> This method main goal is to train speech and rely on auditory gains and lipreading.

<sup>29</sup> This method supports that language is expressed through sound and therefore focuses on amplified auditory speech input, oral articulation, and memorization of sentences. This was, until now, the most oppressive and phonocentric period in Deaf education.

<sup>30</sup> This method focuses on oral mother language input allowed by the established professor/student relationship, as the professor guides the student to reflect upon their own language.

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free time. In ISMAP it is mentioned that the students used signs between them, which was allowed for their relation building, for closeness, secretiveness, and safety (Ribeiro, 2018: 304). About the pure oral method, Ribeiro states that by 1898/99 the students hardly read lips, graphically reproduced read sentences, would only obey simple orders with due safety, understood restrict vocabulary, could perform the four basic arithmetic operations, and had a grasp of numbers (Ribeiro, 2018: 299). According to historical documents in the ISMAP archives, Ribeiro mentions that the pure oral method was described as “almost violent” since it demanded so much effort from the professors, as well as the students, to attain oral skills. This was so extreme that the professors started to denounce the method as unsuccessful (Ribeiro, 2018: 300). In ISMAP, from 35 children, eight were women and they were kept in different quarters (Ribeiro, 2018). The only period when both boys and girls would be together was at the catholic mass, since it was a religious institute. The pupils had to pray, confess, and they had to attend mass regularly. There are no other records to explain what they did in their own free time, if they had any. The female and male curricula display not only clear segregational logic but also sexist judgement concerning what girls and boys could or should do (see Table 2). This relevant distinction is also highlighted in chapter 7 (Elmiger, Daniel, this volume: 115-130).

Table 2: Data retrieved from Ribeiro, 2018.

Girls (1897/98)	Boys (1895/96)
Language articulation	Language articulation
Embroidery crafts	Language learning
Gymnastics	Gymnastics
Calligraphy	Drawing and calligraphy
Figure replica drawing	–
All the intern girls had to work in the cleaning and maintenance of the school as part of their teaching. <sup>31</sup>	–

<sup>31</sup> “Trabalhar no que à Regente e mestra parecer, ensinando-lhes a fazer tudo o que pertence a uma perfeita mulher [...] no serviço da casa, fazendo-as ensinar também a varrer, espanar, cozinhar, amassar e o que mais pertence a uma mulher que se educa para viver no seculo, sem certeza do seu futuro estado”. (Ferreira, n.d.: 152-154). “To work on what the Head teacher and Head mistress wishes, by teaching them to do all that a perfect woman should do [...] in serving the

The age range changed with different internal regulations: first deaf and dumb boys and girls could be fed and educated from six to 18 years old, either in external or intern regime, but later the rules changed to accept children only from six to ten years old. The age limit to leave the institute started at 16, and later changed to a range from seven to 14 years old. These regulation changes were motivated by several issues in behavior that were reported, namely conflicts and riots that resulted in students being transferred, abandoned, and even dying. Also, according to the historical reports, more often than not, the institution did not have the required sensitivity to accommodate the needs of deaf female students who were several times misunderstood and neglected (Ribeiro, 2018: 269-270). Women’s education focused on embroidery and sewing, playing the piano, reciting poetry, and perhaps some of them could go as far as tailoring. This is also a portrait of what was the classic Portuguese woman model at the time (Ribeiro, 2018: 269-270).

Before exploring the gender-segregation linguistic outcome, it is important to remember we are only considering a very small group of students. ISMAP Principal, Joaquim José da Trindade, indicated that, at the time, in Portugal there were reportedly 3,400 deaf people (Ribeiro, 2018: 334) and in the 1900 census we can see it points out to a total of 3,020 D/deaf people (see Figure 1). Although not all were children, it still leads us to wonder where were the remaining, and if there were any educational opportunities for them.

**Censo de 1900**

Surdos-mudos					Idiotas					Altenados				
Total	De nascença		Por doença adquirida		Total	De nascença		Por doença adquirida		Total	De nascença		Por doença adquirida	
	Varões	Fêmeas	Varões	Fêmeas		Varões	Fêmeas	Varões	Fêmeas		Varões	Fêmeas	Varões	Fêmeas
	3.020	1.622	1.013	206		179	3.732	1.364	945		862	561	2.868	697

Figure 1: Retrieved from Direcção Geral da Estatística e dos Proprios Nacionaes. 1905. Censo da População do Reino de Portugal no 1.º de Dezembro de 1900. Quarto Recenseamento Geral da População (General directorate for Statistics and own nationals. 1905. Census of the population of the Kingdom of Portugal on December 1, 1900. Fourth General Population Census) (This translation is my own.)

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household, having them also teaching how to sweep, dust, cook, knead and everything else that a woman should know as someone who educates herself to live in this century, with the uncertainty of her future state." (Ferreira, n.d.: 152-154). (This translation is my own.)

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In 1942, the Casa Pia de Lisboa suffered organizational changes, and the 22 girls that were in the IJRP female section in Algés were sent to an institute managed by the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception located in Largo do Rato, in Lisbon (Vaz de Carvalho, Paulo, 2006). However, in 1947, they were transferred to the ISMAP, and the 29 boys that were in Porto there had to come to Lisbon, to the IJRP.

Therefore, the distribution led to a significant geographical division, with 59 deaf girls in Porto and a higher number of deaf boys in Lisbon, thus explaining the emergence of different signs (Vaz de Carvalho, Paulo, 2006, 2019b; Santos, 2015). Despite these confusing and relentless location changes, gender-segregation led to the development of signs that were exclusively used by women and other signs, for the same meanings, exclusively used by men. Santos (2015) researched the specific cases of WEEKDAYS, NUMBERS/SIGN-NAMES, and COLORS, but there are more signs reported. Santos and Correia (2015) elicited signs for colors, focusing on how native signers expressed color signs at school, for RED, BLUE, YELLOW, WHITE, and BLACK (see Figure 2).

Above we mentioned NUMBERS/SIGN-NAMES, which are in this case intertwined. There is a very peculiar phenomenon that occurred with both girls and boys, even though they had no communication amongst them. In these boarding schools, it was common practice to associate bed numbers with a specific student's SIGN-NAME. When that student left and a new student came, he or she respectively in each school would be attributed that bed number and therefore the prior person's SIGN-NAME. This created a lineage of inherited SIGN-NAME, but also transformed the way in which students signed numbers. Since this was a completely independent phenomenon in the two schools, the signs are not related. There are still Deaf people in the Portuguese Deaf community who attended these schools and still remember many of the signs.<sup>32</sup> This gender-based segregation gave place to this phenomenon which resembles, even if in a smaller scale, what happened with racial segregation in the United States of America and led to the emergence of a different variant of American Sign Language, now designated as Black

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<sup>32</sup> Permission was kindly given by Clara Campos and Paulo Jorge Sousa to show this incredible video at the BetFam Conference in Lisbon and include it here. In this video (<https://www.facebook.com/1629163134/videos/1302557750174529/>), both Clara and Paulo Jorge are simultaneously signing the different SIGN-NAMES / NUMBERS.

American Sign Language. In the Portuguese case, research never mentions that a different sign language emerged, or a different language strand emerging from cultural conditioning.



Figure 2: Image retrieved from part of a poster by Santos and Correia (2015) with different signs for colors in LGP.

What happened was that after they left school, many of them got together, in their hometowns, in Deaf clubs, in Deaf events, many of them formed couples and married. Over time, female signs were abandoned, while male signs

remained frequently used<sup>33</sup>. This is also the result of male dominance over female, also commonly known as patriarchy. Deaf women married Deaf men frequently, as they usually do in the Portuguese Deaf community (Pereira, 2013). And given the Portuguese cultural frameworks until 1974, with a very conservative fascist dictatorship, Deaf women had less opportunities and freedom to have a social life and gather with their Deaf friends. Thus, in an environment of searching for language and cultural validation from what they were told was the right way to sign, they would adopt the Deaf male signs and therefore, over time, Deaf male signs were privileged over the Deaf female signs, which slowly disappeared. This example of gender segregation, as well as the example in the United States of America with racial segregation, testifies to what happens to human languages when we create artificial boundaries, somewhat similar to the effect of distance before the revolution in human communications. Nowadays, an event such as this would be diluted with social media, with the visibility that signed languages have gained in mainstream media and with all the tools we have that connect us and bring us face to face to sign.

Nowadays, most female signs are considered lost, as the masculine signs prevailed due to patriarchal notions of cultural superiority and the dominant Deaf masculine leadership representation (Gil, 2010).

## Conclusion

In summary, while LGP grammar is the most extensively researched aspect of Deaf Studies in Portugal, there are numerous unexplored areas within the field. There is so much more to be studied and understood, especially if we consider an interdisciplinary approach gathering valuable crossover insights of linguistic and cultural analysis. This chapter looks at gender expression in LGP and how gender segregation also had an impact on LGP itself from a

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<sup>33</sup> When they reached adulthood, they went to their home village or town. In that period, women did not go about the streets on their own, only if they were with their father, boyfriend, or husband. It was daring for a woman to walk the streets on her own. They only communicated in sign language when they could in school. The male reality was different, they did not have such issues, as they held power over women. They had public visibility, their own communication, their language, culture, and identity, they were a very strong influence to expand their language to the Deaf community in the north of Portugal, especially amongst women. Therefore, the sign language used by women begun to disappear (Santos, 2015: 40-41). (This translation is my own.)

cultural-linguistic perspective. The intention is to further, broaden and intensify the much-required debate about LGP grammar. In this specific case we focused on how gender functions in LGP, its morphological rules and the adaptations in different syntactical structures. What are the exceptions to the rules and how does usage and context modulate and impact sign morphology? Corpus-based sign language linguistics on LGP research is necessary.

Moreover, studying LGP thoroughly and comparing LGP with other signed languages is also a powerful and valuable contribute for the field of linguistics. We can learn so much about human languages and cultures by studying signed languages and Deaf Culture. The increased development in these fields, by universities and academia, will provide us valuable results and insights. For example, in this specific case, knowing that LGP is a language in which gender marking is not as predominant as it is in Portuguese, it can help us better understand the impact of gender-neutral language in a community. So, does gender neutrality or a higher degree of gender neutrality offer a positive social impact? Is the gender-neutral language, namely LGP, used in the Portuguese Deaf community leading to lower levels of gender discriminatory practices? Can we find societies where genderless languages are used and will they be societies without gender discriminatory practices? Can language change and then mentalities and social practices also adjust to encompass human diversity? Can gender-neutral pronouns reduce oppressive practices on non-binary people?

In this regard, the thought-provoking findings presented in Chapter 13 entitled “Use and Perception of Inclusive Language: A Polarizing Issue?” (DeLaborde et al., this volume: pages 239-261) suggest that individuals who do not exclusively identify with binary male/female categories are more inclined to accept and employ inclusive writing compared to women, while women show higher acceptance rates than men.

What would Deaf people have to say about inclusive language and how neutral gender manifests in signed languages when the gender markings are required? Are Deaf people discussing these issues and adapting the way they sign? For example, when referring to a woman or a man, do they remain operating within the binary, or do they try to keep it neutral? Given the importance of the visual in Deaf epistemologies and signed languages, how does one mention gender nonconforming people in signed languages, when gender markings are required? The analysis of gender markings in oral languages, both in

the same language families as well as looking at different language families (Roman, Germanic, among others), has already started, however, undoubtedly signed languages also have an important contribution to help us rethink gender-neutral language by deepening the knowledge of human languages.

A clear mapping of the current debate not only through the lens of linguistics but also with a socio-cultural framework has already been put forward in Fagard and Le Tallec (2022). As the authors explain, language «*fémínisation*» is not a recent phenomenon, there are many gender-neutral terms that we have understood as masculine due to articles and other syntactic structures. Moreover, the ongoing debate should not exclude signed languages since they offer a different and enriching perspective to further understand these issues.

Understanding human identities that are part of human diversity is also done through oral, signed and, tactile language modalities. Broadening the scope of the debate can further the debate and help us determine linguistic, educational, and social and political practices that support of human diversity.

### List of abbreviations

LGP – Língua Gestual Portuguesa/Portuguese Sign Language

ISMAP – Instituto de Surdos-Mudos Araújo Porto

IJRP – Instituto Jacob Rodrigues Pereira

WFD – World Federation of the Deaf

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# “Most voted women” – Representations of gender in the Portuguese media coverage of the 2021 Presidential elections

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## Abstract

This study examines how media discourse represented the two women candidates in the coverage of the 2021 Presidential elections in Portugal. Resorting to Van Leeuwen’s Social Actor Network model (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 1996), the methodology is of a qualitative nature, incorporating elements of corpus linguistics. The main findings are that gender was not the main motivation for the representation of the different candidates but it was a central facet in the media coverage of the elections. The fact that women tended to be more functionalised than men and that the male far-right candidate was more appraised than others point to a need to further explore how gender intersects with other factors (ideology, class) in the discourse of public affairs.

**Keywords:** Gender; media discourse; social actors; representation.

## Introduction

This study examines the media representation of women politicians in the Portuguese press with a view to understand whether there are differing linguistic practices in how media discourse represents gender. The focus of this research is the 2021 campaign for presidential elections in Portugal, in which five men candidates, including the incumbent President, faced two women candidates of opposing political fields, Ana Gomes and Marisa Matias. The study analyses the coverage of the presidential campaign in the run-up to the

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election by extracting reports from a number of print media outlets (for the sake of comparability and viability, the media selected were traditional, print media – Van der Pas & Aaldering, 2020 – namely the established Portuguese broadsheets *Público* and *Diário de Notícias*).

By conducting an examination of media discourse focusing on women Presidential candidates, this study attempts to offer a snapshot of how women politicians are seen and represented in public discourse so as to gauge their participation in the public sphere. The key research questions the study attempts to answer are thus: how were women politicians discursively represented in the Portuguese press during the presidential campaign? Secondly, did the press cover men and women politicians differently during the campaign?

In order to gauge the representation of women politicians in the Portuguese media, a corpus of 288 articles on the presidential campaign has been constituted, comprising 243,158 words and 285,928 tokens. Drawing on Van Leeuwen's Social Actor Network model (Van Leeuwen, 2008, 1996), the methodology combines a qualitative analysis with a relative quantitative dimension afforded by corpus linguistics (Baker, 2012), using the concordance and Word Sketch affordances on Sketch Engine, and annotation on MaxQDA.

The following section is a review of the most relevant scholarship supporting our research, whereas section 2 presents the methodology and the data collected. Section 3 proceeds to analyse and discuss the ensuing results and is followed by concluding remarks.

## 1. Literature Review

Examining media coverage focusing on women is relevant because “print and television news texts illuminate the relationships that women have to socioeconomic power” (Vavrus, 2002: 26). Media discourses about women are thus a good indication of the extent to which women participate in the public sphere and public power – in representing women politicians and making the necessary linguistic choices to do so, the media construct and disseminate their own vision of women and their role in the public sphere. As Van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) highlights in his examination of sociosemantic and ideological representations of social actors and their respective linguistic realisations, the

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media is instrumental in creating social meanings despite “the careful stance of neutrality” (Van Leeuwen, 1996: 69) they often put forward.

In this sense, the media discourses about women politicians conjure up and disseminate particular ideological meanings concerning the identity, the role and the policies pursued by these women, mostly due to the “signifying power” of media discourse – the “power to influence knowledge, beliefs, values (...)” (Fairclough, 1995: 2) which plays a “central metadiscursive role in mediating between politicians and the public” (Walsh, 1998: 199).

As Fairclough (1995) further elaborates, the language of the media is imbued with power because it is also imbued with a presupposed authority extending to the media’s own representation of the world and what to include (to foreground) and exclude (to background) from that representation. Media discourse therefore draws on representations of the world shared by its target audience and adds to these representations, operating on a truly dialogical platform in the Bakhtinian sense:

... any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances – his own and others’ – with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another (...).  
(Bakhtin, 1986: 69)

Language is dialogical in the sense it is relational and interactive – the voice of the media not only responds to previous media representations of social actors and of the world but it also puts forward particular representational meanings “tied to specific linguistic or rhetorical realisations” (Van Leeuwen, 1996: 34). In the particular case of this study, to examine how women politicians have been portrayed by the press during Presidential elections is also to obtain an idea of how media discourse envisages women’s role in politics. Due to the authoritative voice of the press, its readership is construed as one which will align with the particular representation of the world put forward by media discourses (see Martin & White, 2005 for an analysis of evaluative language and the dialogical resources of alignment or misalignment employed by the media in the linguistic representation of events and social actors) – hence the relevance of examining the discursive representation of women in the media.

Although this study does not focus on gender bias specifically, it must pinpoint potential discursive differences and determine whether such differences were motivated by gender.

As early as 1979, Tuchman et al. noted the pervasive stereotypical roles attributed to women by the media (wife, mother), accompanied by the derision of so-called 'career' women, an observation later reinforced by Fowler (1991), who explained how the lexicalisation of terms used to describe women ("lady-doctor") signalled "society's prejudicial sense of the irregularity of the idea of a woman practising a profession" (Fowler, 1991: 94). Kahn (1994) offered a seminal contribution by demonstrating that the press did cover male and female candidates running for public office differently, with bias in favour of men, who not only gathered more coverage but were also the subject of more positive coverage, which in Kahn's opinion hindered women's chances of winning elective offices. Walsh (1998) offered similar findings, leaving a cautionary note against systematic "masculinist" media bias effectively working against women candidates.

More recent studies have shown variegated results, perhaps because the identification of media bias motivated by gender is in itself a sensitive and potentially contentious issue. As Van Der Pas & Aaldering (2020: 7) explain, "[i]n order to distinguish journalistic bias from mere differences in reporting that are not due to gender, the political actors under scrutiny need to be comparable on everything but gender," which is notoriously difficult to demonstrate; Walsh (1998: 200) herself had already acknowledged as much when she stated that it "is not always easy to isolate the influence of gender as a separate variable on press coverage." Furthermore, recognition of intersectionality and how the category of gender intersects with other factors (race, age, nationality, etc.) can influence discursive representations of women, thus highlighting that "different aspects of identities are foregrounded or backgrounded to navigate shifts in salience in sometimes conflicting identity/ies" (Hunt & Jaworska, 2019: 1). If individuals cannot be categorised "in terms of one identity component" but rather in terms of an intersection of several categories, then attributing particular linguistic realisations to sole sociosemantic categories such as "gender" is challenging.

This difficulty may explain why so much of the literature available is permeated by mixed results, despite the fact that evidence for gender bias has become more diluted since Kahn's and Walsh's studies. The useful meta-analysis

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of gender in political media coverage conducted by Van Der Pas & Aaldering (2020) highlight “not unequivocal” results, which nevertheless point to men being more often directly quoted than women, whose private lives tend to also attract more coverage than their male counterparts’. Rohrbach et al. (2020) find little evidence of gender bias and aver that the underrepresentation of women in the media “might disappear if more women ran for office” (Rohrbach et al., 2020: 14). Whilst this warrants an examination of the barriers women still face in public office, it does not constitute a case of gender bias in the media. Reinforcing reasons for a (very slight) optimism is D’Heer et al. (2019), who study the representation of women in online publications and not only do they not find evidence of bias against women, they also draw the conclusion that women are represented in more positive terms than previous research had shown.

Whether or not gender bias permeate media discourse, the representation of women in the media at large seems to be more driven by inequality than not, although again with mixed results. Baker (2014: 103) notices this trend of slight ameliorating after analysing male bias in the COHA corpus and noting “a move towards equalization” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, somewhat countering “an overwhelming male bias in American English” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 2010, however, Caldas-Coulthard & Moon, who focused on collocates of the terms “man,” “woman,” “boy” and “girl,” concluded that men were evaluated based on their “functionalisation,” that is, their jobs and their behaviour, whereas women were consistently evaluated on the basis of their appearance and sexuality.

When examining how politicians are perceived based on their verbal aggression, Nau & Stewart (2014) found that gender played little to no role – politicians resorting to verbal aggression were perceived as less competent than their counterparts who did not, regardless of their gender. However, although gender imbalances in the representation of women and men have become less clear cut, they are still firmly present. Santaemilia & Maruenda (2014) and Bou-Franch (2013) account for the representation of violence against women in media discourse, with Santaemilia & Maruenda (2014: 270) focusing on the Spanish context and pointing to “a certain objectification and institutionalization of victims” and Bou-Franch (2013) noting a “naturalisation” of violence against women. Also focusing on the Spanish context, Fernández-García (2016) establishes that gender is not the only variable accounting for different media coverage on men and women, but that the press does cover men and women politician differently, with (again) more emphasis placed on women’s private

lives. Marling's (2010) findings are notoriously more pessimistic and unveil anti-feminist bias in the Estonian media discourse due to persistent negative connotations of the notion of "feminism," and a similar point is made by Barát (2007) about the Hungarian press, which enacts "exclusionary" linguistic practices against the terms "feminist" and "feminism." Finally, an important examination of the Portuguese context, which is of particular interest to this study, comes from Baptista et al. (2016), who examine political representation and media visibility strategies of Portuguese female Members of Parliament. Their results point to an underrepresentation of women parliamentarians in the media which stems, at least in part, from a gender imbalance in prominent political roles which is then mirrored in media discourse:

The holding of important political positions within party structures, more often attributed to men, is a crucial news value as well as the agonistic and controversial relevance of political issues, usually assigned to men (...). This contributes to a differentiated horizon of expectations among journalists that do not contribute to enhance women visibility and equality in the press. (Baptista et al., 2016: 181)

The overall result is a "masculinisation of political debate" in the Portuguese public sphere. This is in line with the conclusion that Isabel Barreno had already drawn in her pivotal study of women representations in the Portuguese press as early as 1976 – that in a country such as Portugal, at the time emerging from dictatorship, women's representation and discourses were ideologically controlled by men.

In view of this backdrop, this study hopes to offer a contribution adding to the existent body of research by gathering a small corpus of media discursive representations of women politicians in Portugal and sketch out how media discourse constitutes certain subject positions for women in the Portuguese public sphere, embodied in particular linguistic realisations.

## **2. Data and Methodology**

### **2.1. The constitution of the corpus**

This study collected 288 articles covering the 2021 Presidential elections from the online versions of two broadsheets – *Diário de Notícias (DN)* and

*Público*. As mentioned before, and for the sake of comparability, the media outlets selected were mainstream broadsheets comprising traditional, print versions and correspondent online versions. This resulted in a corpus comprising 243,158 words and 285,928 tokens. When considering words and tokens, we follow the definitions offered by Sketch Engine, the software used for corpus analysis – whilst a token is the smallest unit of a corpus, and can consist of a word form but also punctuation, digits, etc., a word is a type of token beginning with a letter of the alphabet. Albeit not very extensive, this corpus is a first step for a better delineation of how women, in particular politicians, are represented in the media.

The steps leading to the collection of the articles were simple and consisted of using keywords (the candidates' names) in the search engine on each of the online broadsheets, with particular attention to the sections devoted specifically to the Presidential elections of 2021.

Because this is an individual study, its scope had to be realistically manageable and we therefore restricted our search (and consequently, our analysis) to the top four most voted candidates: Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, the incumbent president who was re-elected with 60,7% of the votes; Ana Gomes, who ran as independent and gathered 12,97% of the votes; André Ventura, supported by the far-right party *Chega*, with 11,9%; and finally Marisa Matias, running for the left-wing party *Bloco de Esquerda*, who ended the race with 3.95%.<sup>34</sup> This allowed for a much welcomed symmetry in the corpus, where the representation of two men was compared with the representation of the sole two women candidates.

The corpus was then annotated and compiled using the affordances of two corpus software programmes, SketchEngine and MaxQDA, as explained in the following section.

### 2.2. Framework of analysis and methodological steps

The framework of analysis for this study is drawn from Van Leeuwen's (1996, 2008) Social Actor Network model, which studies how social actors (henceforth SAs) and social practices are represented in discourse. It provides a framework to underpin the evaluative language used to represent the functions that participants (Social Actors) play in texts, thus lending itself to an accurate analysis

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<sup>34</sup> Source: <https://www.eleicoes.mai.gov.pt/presidenciais2021/resultados/globais>

of discursive representations of women in the media. It is therefore what Van Leeuwen (1996: 32) calls a “sociosemantic inventory of the ways in which social actors can be represented” which puts forward “representational choices” or categories subjected to specific linguistic realisations in texts.

Firstly, SAs can be excluded or included in discourse; when included, there is a number of discursive categories to represent their specificities – the ones of relevance to this study are summarised in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Social Actor Network model categorization scheme (Van Leeuwen, 1996).

<p><b>ROLE ALLOCATION:</b> the roles that social actors play in representations – who is represented as endowed with agency, who is represented at the receiving end of an activity.</p>	<p><b>ACTIVATION:</b> social actors are foregrounded and represented as the ‘do-ers’, “the active, dynamic forces in an activity.”</p> <p><b>PASSIVATION:</b> social actors are backgrounded and represented as the “receiving end” of the activity.</p>	<p><b>Participation:</b> the grammatical participant role is active (Social Actor is represented as active agent).</p> <p><b>Circumstantialisation:</b> use of prepositional circumstantials with by or from.</p> <p><b>Possessivation:</b> the use of a possessive pronoun to foreground an activity (“e.g. ‘our intake’”).</p> <p><b>Subjection:</b> “Subjected social actors are treated as objects in the representation,” subjected to an activity.</p> <p><b>Beneficialisation:</b> social actors are represented as a third party which benefits from a certain activity.</p>
<p><b>NOMINATION</b> represents social actors by means of unique identity traits, such as their names – proper nouns and titles, for example.</p>	<p><b>FORMALISATION</b></p> <p><b>SEMI-FORMALISATION</b></p> <p><b>INFORMALISATION</b></p> <p><b>TITULATION</b></p>	<p>(optional honorific) + Surname</p> <p>proper noun + Surname</p> <p>given name only</p> <p><b>Honorification:</b> honorifics, standard titles, ranks.</p> <p><b>Affiliation:</b> personal, kinship, relation term.</p>

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<p><b>CATEGORISATION:</b> Actors' representation is based on identity traits they share with others.</p>	<p><b>FUNCTIONALISATION:</b> Social Actors are represented based on what they do.</p> <p><b>IDENTIFICATION:</b> Social Actors are represented based on who they are.</p> <p><b>APPRAISEMENT:</b></p>	<p>occupation, role, function</p> <p><b>Classification:</b> age, gender, nationality, provenance, ethnicity, class, religion, etc.</p> <p><b>Relational identification:</b> personal kinship, work or personal relationships of Social Actors.</p> <p><b>Physical identification:</b> physical characteristics of Social Actors.</p> <p>Social Actors are represented by means of evaluative and affective language, that is, they "are appraised when they are referred to in terms which evaluate them, as good or bad, loved or hated, admired or pitied."</p>
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After the constitution of the framework, the next methodological step was to devise a way to detect these categories in the corpus, which explains why the study incorporates elements of corpus linguistics by resorting to Sketch Engine and MAXQDA. Following Baker (2012: 248), the advantage of using corpus linguistics whilst maintaining a qualitative analysis is that the former allows us to "identify salient linguistic patterns in a corpus of texts," which can then be "interrogated in a more qualitative way via close reading of individual texts or concordance lines in the next stage." This encapsulates our main methodology – using the affordances of corpus linguistics to detect concordance patterns, which was conducted using the "concordance" feature on Sketch Engine, followed by the Word Sketch affordance, which allows for the comparison of collocations of more than one word. These concordance lines were then coded on MAXQDA, which displays a line-by-line coding system, and then analysed qualitatively following the categories displayed on Figure 1.

Concordance patterns detect collocations, a notion based on how many times words appear together (Baker, 2014). Thus, by analysing concordances

lines, we can then access the discursive environment, or the stretches of discourse, containing the linguistic realisations of the representation of SAs, that is, which collocates were used to represent Ana Gomes, Marisa Matias, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and André Ventura. Our approach to data was therefore as Baker (2012: 248) defines it – “naïve,” to the extent that “we hoped that the identification of frequent and salient linguistic patterns in the corpus would provide a ‘way in’ to the data.”

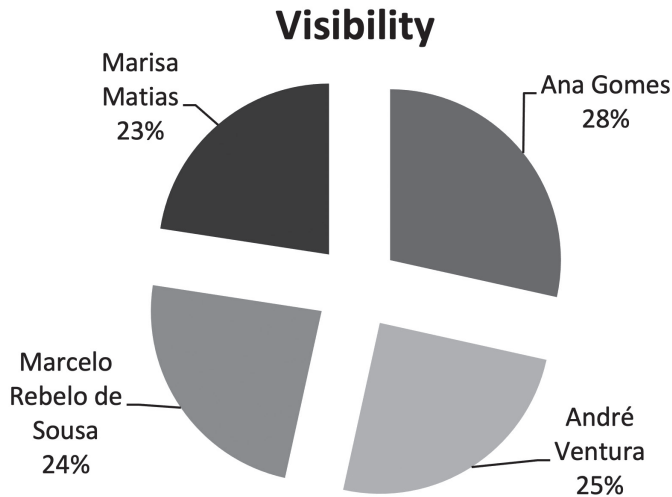
In summary, our methodology follows these steps: firstly, search for concordance patterns on Sketch Engine; secondly, analyse and code concordance lines (based on sentence) one by one using MAXQDA in order to detect the qualitative nuances involved in the categories of Nomination and Categorisation (Figure 1). This qualitative perusal is conducted at a micro-level and consists of a lexical analysis allowing us to examine not only how each SA is categorised but relational patterns too (how one candidate is categorised in relation to another, occurring in the same stretch of discourse). Further, what SAs are represented as doing and in which role is also examined (following the category of Role Allocation – Figure 1).

The last step is to detect how the voice of the candidate is incorporated in media discourse and how the latter engages with what candidates actually say – that is, whether media discourse uses either direct or indirect speech. This stems from the premise that media discourse is a “Bakhtinian double-voiced discourse” (Walsh 1998: 205) comprising primary discourse (media discourse) and secondary discourse (the discourse of the source). However, and as Fairclough (2010: 73) elucidates, meanings do not simply circulate – “as meanings move from text to text, they are open to transformation,” which is what happens when discourse from any speaker is incorporated into media discourse. The dialogic positioning taken by the reporter can be more or less engaged with the source but is usually seen “as a regime of strategic impersonalisation by which the author’s subjective role is backgrounded” (Martin & White 2005: 183). By resorting to quoting the source directly (direct speech), the stance adopted by the reporter voice is indeed one of neutral engagement with the subject being reported on – the authorial responsibility for the utterances lies with the one who has actually uttered them and endorsement of the source is kept to a minimum. The representation of the SA is therefore less committed when direct speech is used, hence the relevance of direct – indirect/reported speech to our analysis, the results of which are discussed in the following section.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The first aspect to note about the corpus is visibility, that is, the percentage of coverage that each SA obtained, displayed in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Visibility of Social Actors.



An important proviso when it comes to the visibility of SAs has to do with the individual nature of this research, which was necessarily limited in scope and quantity. Whilst a more extensive corpus could perhaps warrant different visibility patterns, the results in Figure 2 are nevertheless an interesting depiction of a slice of the media coverage applied to the four Presidential candidates.

The first aspect that stands out is how balanced the representation of SAs is, with all four candidates situated in the region of a quarter of the totality. The second aspect is the visibility of André Ventura, a relative newcomer in politics (the party he leads, *Chega*, was founded in 2019) and a first-time runner to the Presidential elections. The fact that he is the most covered after an established politician such as Ana Gomes, a well-known figure not only because of her political activity but also due to her career as a diplomat, can probably be attributed to the news value of “novelty” (Bell, 1991). Ventura’s rhetorical style is to some extent novel in Portuguese politics and thus possibly considered more newsworthy than Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, whose victory was seen as practically guaranteed, and than Marisa Matias, a second-time runner.

Role allocation is a relevant category insofar as it reinforces the framing of Marisa Matias as a passivated subjected participant. When analysing concordance patterns using Word Sketch on Sketch Engine, it becomes clear that Marisa Matias is more often passivated than the other candidates (in particular, more often “questioned” about a certain issue, or more often “faced” by an issue or an interlocutor’s utterance). Figure 3 displays the collocation patterns extracted from Word Sketch, with examples, showing the strongest and weakest collocations of passivated subjects applied to Marisa Matias and the three other candidates, with each circle representing how frequent the collocation is:

Figure 3: Collocation patterns of passivated subjects from Word Sketch (Sketch Engine).

Marisa Matias and Ana Gomes:



Example:

*Marisa Matias foi questionada sobre o voto contra do partido no Orçamento do Estado para 2021.*

Marisa Matias was asked about the party’s vote against the 2021 State Budget. (Collocations with Ana Gomes as passivated subject do not occur).

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André Ventura and Marisa Matias:



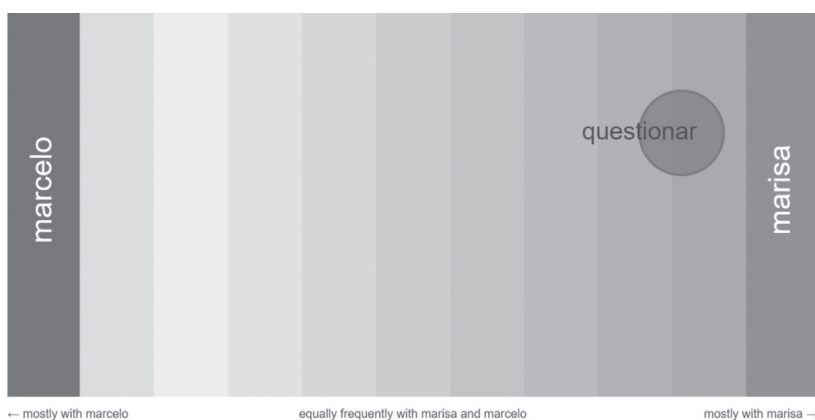
Example:

*Marisa Matias foi questionada sobre as novas medidas de confinamento.*

Marisa Matias was asked about the new lockdown measures.

(Collocations with André Ventura as passivated subject do not occur).

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and Marisa Matias:



Example:

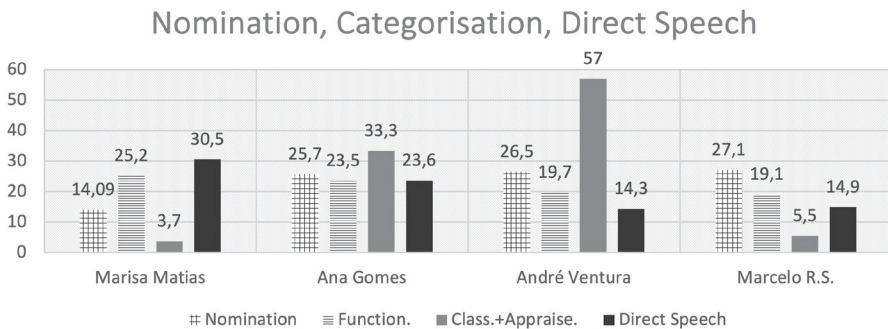
*Marisa Matias foi questionada sobre o que fará em relação ao resto da sua corrida eleitoral a Belém.*

Marisa Matias was asked about what she will do concerning the rest of her Belém electoral race.

These results are noteworthy from a qualitative perspective – passive constructions which background the agent are not of quantitative import in the corpus, but they are certainly significant when underpinning the qualitative nuances that make up the representation of each SA, hence the importance of highlighting the subjection noted in the representation of Marisa Matias. She is more often passivated in relation to all other candidates, but specially against André Ventura’s more active role. That this is not entirely gender-based is clear when noting that Ana Gomes is more often activated than Marisa Matias.

The core of SA’s representations fell on the categories of Nomination and Categorisation (namely Functionalisation) and how often SAs were quoted directly, which Figure 4 illustrates:

Figure 4: Nomination, Categorisation and Direct Speech distributed by SAs.



The reason why classification and appraisal are grouped together is because they often co-occur, thus making it more relevant to display their respective percentages together – for example, Ana Gomes is described as an “honest, courageous woman,” which not only classifies her on the basis of gender but also positively evaluates her behaviour and character.

The most significant aspects that Figure 4 illustrates are, firstly, the functionalisation of women candidates (more than the other candidates), which points to a need of over-determination to define the occupation of both women, represented as participants in related yet different social practices – Marisa Matias is a “candidate” in addition to being represented as a “leader of the Left-Wing Block” [Bloco de Esquerda, the party to which she belongs], a “blockist” (“bloquista,” an allusion to her party), an MEP, an “MEP supported by the Left-Wing Block,” a “re-candidate” (“recandidata”) in the Presidential elections, a

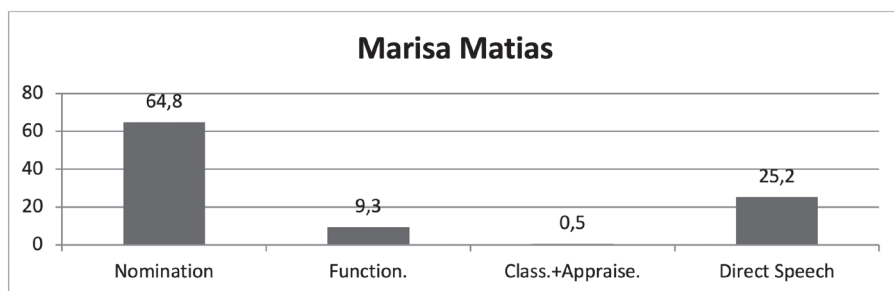
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“Presidential candidate.” Ana Gomes is repeatedly described as “a diplomat,” an “ex-MEP,” a “socialist,” a “former socialist MEP” or “former MEP,” a “candidate for the Presidency,” etc.

Secondly, a relevant aspect displayed in Figure 4 is an over-determination in the classification and appraisal of André Ventura, which will be examined at a later stage in this study.

To explore the full relevance of these results, we will now focus on each SA and examine how discursive choices of representation were deployed in order to linguistically represent them individually, starting with Marisa Matias (Figure 5):

Figure 5: Representation of Marisa Matias.



Not surprisingly, Marisa Matias is often nominated, with the most relevant aspect being the recurrence of informalisation, with the media opting for first name only. For example:

(1) *Foi esse o discurso que Marisa repetiu no último dia.*

That was the speech that Marisa repeated on the last day.

Informalisation is also used to represent Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, but does not occur with the remaining candidates, Ana Gomes and André Ventura, and it is therefore not an entirely gender-based strategy. If on the one hand the informalisation of “Marcelo” in media discourse is probably a testament to the candidate’s popularity, that is not the case with Marisa Matias, whose first name is used probably because she is a relatively young candidate, well-known by the media, who has not yet amassed the clout of her fellow woman candidate Ana Gomes.

Regarding relational representation (how Marisa Matias is represented when in relation to another SA), nomination strategies remain important, as example (2) illustrates:

(2) *Pingue-pongue de acusações entre Marisa e Ventura.*

Accusations fly between Marisa and Ventura.

Example (2) reveals the interesting choice of representing André Ventura by means of semi-informalisation, whereas Marisa Matias is informalised, a strategy akin to the functionalisation of André Ventura (“leader”) while Marisa Matias remains informalised (“Marisa”):

(3) *O líder do Chega e candidato a Belém devolveu a acusação de “vigarista” a Marisa.*

Chega’s leader and Belém candidate returned the “con artist” accusation to Marisa.

The only instance of affiliation in the corpus occurs to represent Marisa Matias and Ana Gomes, described as “friends”:

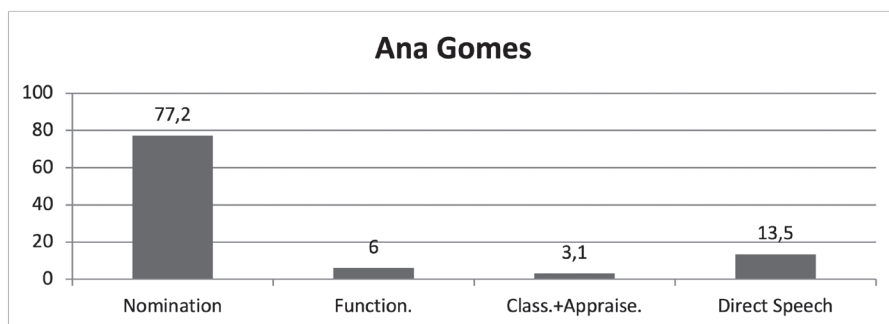
(4) *Marisa Matias (...) terá de avançar com argumentos de peso (...) com a dificuldade de ter uma “amiga” de esquerda a disputar o mesmo campo político, no caso Ana Gomes.*

Marisa Matias (...) will have to posit strong arguments (...) with the difficulty of having a left-wing “friend” competing in the same political field, in this case Ana Gomes.

Importantly, Figure 5 also shows that Marisa Matias is often quoted directly, which means that the audience is given direct access to her views, whilst also signifying that the media feel no need to frame her discourse or to modulate it by providing context mediated by a reporter voice.

The most important discursive choices in the representation of Ana Gomes are summarised in Figure 6:

Figure 6: Representation of Ana Gomes.



Nomination stands out as the most significant categorisation of Ana Gomes and, unlike Marisa Matias, she is semi-formalised at all times: “Ana Gomes.” As mentioned before, this signals the different standings held by the two women candidates, with Ana Gomes being the most experienced, more established one. As we shall see, the same nomination strategy happens with Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. The older, more established and experienced candidates are more nominated, less functionalised and less classified and appraised simply because there is no need to explain to the public who they are, what they do and how well (or how badly) they do it. Nevertheless, it should be noted that when Ana Gomes is appraised, it is almost always positively, as in the aforementioned example of “Ana Gomes, an honest, courageous woman.”

The most interesting cases of Ana Gomes’s appraisal, however, are to be found in the framing of the election results, in which she came second. The choice was whether to highlight her second place, ahead of all other candidates except the President-elect (examples 5.a and 5.b), or to highlight her defeat (example 5.c):

(5) a. *A diplomata Ana Gomes foi a mulher mais votada de sempre numas eleições presidenciais em Portugal (...) e a primeira a conseguir um segundo lugar.*

The diplomat Ana Gomes was the most voted woman ever in a presidential election in Portugal (...) and the first to win a second place.

b. *Ana Gomes atingiu o seu propósito, ficar em segundo lugar, ainda que apenas com 12,97%, e apenas com uma diferença de um ponto percentual à frente de André Ventura.*

Ana Gomes achieved her goal, coming second, albeit with only 12.97%, and only one percentage point ahead of André Ventura.

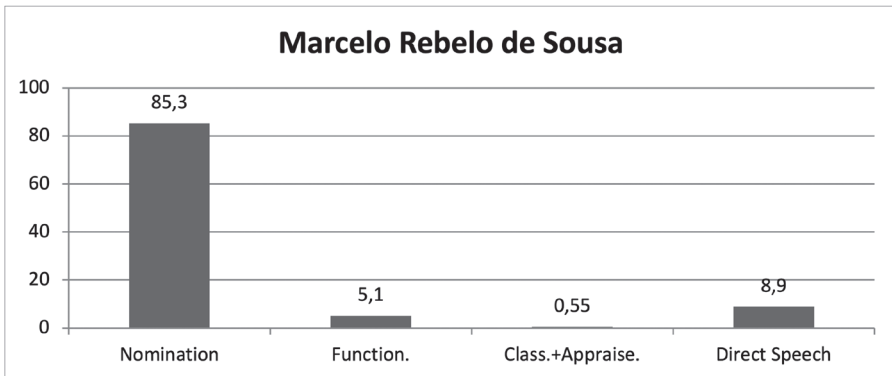
c. *Venceu Ventura por pouco e falhou por muito o objetivo da segunda volta.*

She narrowly beat Ventura and broadly missed her goal for a second-round.

Whilst also highlighting her gender, examples a. and b. prefer to frame Ana Gomes's second place as an actual victory and achievement, resorting to superlative adjectives ("the most voted woman ever") and numeral adjectives ("the first to win..."). Example 5.c frames the result as a defeat and is the almost parallel opposite of b., echoing the lexical choice of "goal" which is described as broadly missed.

Figure 7 displays the discursive categorisation of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa:

Figure 7: Representation of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa.



As mentioned before, Nomination is the most important category of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa's representation, signalling his popularity and his very likely chance of winning the elections. His recurring informalisation (example 6) demonstrates the extent to which he is a well-known figure of the public and media alike:

(6) *Apesar da queda, Marcelo regressa à casa dos 60% em que passou a maior parte do tempo nos últimos barómetros.*

Despite the fall, Marcelo is back to the 60% where he has spent most of the time in the last few barometers.

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Interestingly enough, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa is the second-least represented candidate in the corpus (24%). This apparent lack of interest from the media is probably to do with the fact that he was the incumbent President, was the best positioned candidate to win the elections and a very well-known figure in the Portuguese public sphere, rendering his over-representation futile. At 25%, André Ventura, first-time runner and newcomer to politics, was more represented than the President, probably connected to the aforementioned “novelty” effect. A summary of Ventura’s discursive representation is to be found in Figure 8:

Figure 8: Representation of André Ventura.

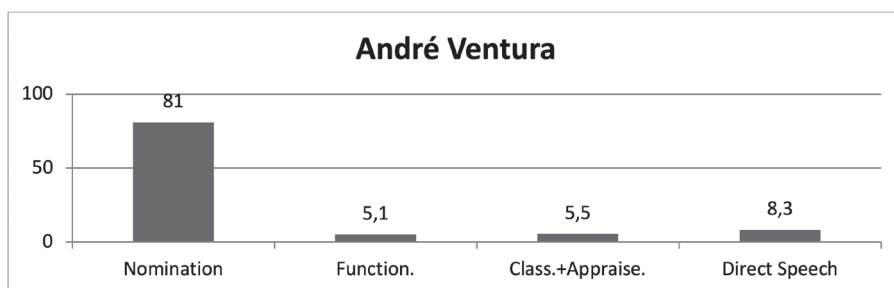


Figure 8 must be examined in articulation with Figure 4, which displays the discursive categories applied to all candidates, thus providing a general picture of their representation in the corpus. Through Figure 4, we can better contextualize the results for classification and appraisal, and direct speech – André Ventura is more specifically appraised than the other candidates, and less directly quoted.

Concerning direct speech, and the fact that both Ana Gomes and Marisa Matias are quoted more often than André Ventura, the overall result is that the public has a less direct access to Ventura’s unfiltered voice due to the media’s need to frame his discourse. This is reflected in the choice of reporting verbs as shown in example 7 (our emphasis):

(7) André Ventura **vitimizou-se** nesta quarta-feira por os elementos do partido serem apresentados como “bandidos” (...).

André Ventura **victimised himself** on Wednesday, claiming the party members were presented as “thugs.”

The lack of direct speech in the representation of André Ventura could be seen as a sort of *cordon sanitaire* to protect the public sphere from a far-right candidate running for President. However, the appraisal of André Ventura does not fully support this view.

Appraisal is noticeable in the use of nouns, adjectives and idioms from the semantic field of masculinity and belligerency: *vencedor* (winner), *alvo* (target), *inimigo* (enemy), *narcisista* (narcissist), *domínio da testosterona* (the dominance of testosterone). Whilst some evaluative language points to a clear negative appraisal such as “narcissist” or “virus” (*o vírus Ventura* – “the Ventura virus”), the case of metaphors of attack (example 8.a) and metonymy (examples 8.b, 8.c and 8.d, the latter also a case of possessivation foregrounding Ventura) produce a more ambiguous evaluative effect (our emphasis):

(8) a. *André Ventura não demorou cinco minutos a **disparar a primeira bala que levava engatilhada** (...).*

It didn't take André Ventura five minutes **to fire the first bullet he had loaded**.

b. ***O terramoto Ventura** anuncia a reconfiguração da direita.*

**The Ventura earthquake** heralds the reconfiguration of the right.

c. *André Ventura sabe o caminho que quer percorrer (...) com um **discurso demolidor**.*

André Ventura knows the path he wants to tread (...) with **a demolishing speech**.

d. *Apesar de estar a começar, **a máquina de Ventura** já se mostra oleada.*

Although he/it is just starting, **Ventura's machine** is already well-oiled.

Are these examples descriptions of a belligerent candidate whose rhetorical style is unusually abrasive in Portuguese politics or an acknowledgement of an energetic, masculine style not to be discounted? Our analysis of the corpus tells us it can be both.

What can be safely asserted, however, is that there is a preoccupation in media discourse with qualifying and evaluating André Ventura which is absent from the representation of other candidates, Marisa Matias and Ana Gomes included.

## Conclusion

Our first research question asked how women politicians were discursively represented in the Portuguese press during the 2021 presidential campaign. Our findings are that women are slightly more functionalised than men, with greater concern from the media to describe their different social practices in the public sphere, but that the main difference lies in status – the fact that Ana Gomes is more established than Marisa Matias explains the deployment of different informalisation and semi-informalisation strategies.

Our second research question was whether the press covered men and women politicians differently during the campaign, which posited a tight nexus with the issue of possible gender bias. The press did cover candidates differently – Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa was under-represented possibly because he was seen as a guaranteed winner from the start, of whom nothing too novel could be said and Ana Gomes was nominated and functionalised according to her acknowledged standing in the public sphere (a diplomat, an experienced politician, “the most voted woman”). Marisa Matias was more functionalised and more passivated than other candidates whilst André Ventura was more appraised; these discursive choices might reflect their lower standing in politics (at 23%, Marisa Matias was the least visible SA – Figure 2), in addition to the “novelty” effect in the case of Ventura. Demonstrably, these categorisation choices were not entirely gender-based.

Our micro-analysis (candidate by candidate), however, has shown that there are significant differences in the relational representation of Marisa Matias and André Ventura, with the latter more often semi-informalised or functionalised, and with Marisa Matias more backgrounded in a passivated role when represented against André Ventura (Figure 3). Furthermore, the appraisal of André Ventura by means of metaphors of attack and belligerence seems to have a partial gendered motivation.

On the one hand, our examination of the discursive representation of women candidates in the 2021 Presidential campaign ends on the optimistic (yet cautious) note that no significant evidence of gender bias was found. On the other hand, these findings undoubtedly warrant further analysis. They show that the consideration and investigation of gender in the political field and public affairs in general, coupled with the other categories with which gender intersects (for example, political ideology in the case of André Ventura, social class

and status in the case of Marisa Matias and Ana Gomes), opens new and much needed avenues of research.

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# Gender-neutral language in Brazilian's Federal Draft Laws

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## Abstract

Brazilian Portuguese is undergoing a time of lesser stability, with the rule of one hegemony, the supposedly neutral masculine, being threatened by another rule, the gender neutralization rule. The analysis of federal draft laws highlights that although the social profiles associated with the new gender labels are minorities and the use of non-binary gender marks is still largely associated with the movements driving the changes, the effects in society are amplified with a strong negative and prescriptive backlash against emerging forms of gender-neutral language.

**Keywords:** Gender-neutral language; gender-inclusive language; laws; Brazilian Portuguese.

## Introduction

Identity movements have led to changes in Brazilian society that also take place at the linguistic level, such as movements for plain language, which aim to democratize access to information for citizenship (Batista & Freitag, 2023). Additionally, movements for gender-inclusive and gender-neutral language aim for gender equality, inclusion, diversity, and respect identity while promoting the visibility of minorities and marginalized groups.

In Brazilian Portuguese, linguistic features that are a reflection of the gender identity movements have found increasing regularity and systematicity, especially in gender agreement and in the pronoun domain: the emergence of

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features with morphemic behavior to express the non-binary gender, like the @, x, and e (Mader & Severo, 2016; Santos, 2019; Schwindt, 2020), as well as the emergence of third-person pronouns, like *êlu* and *êla* (Carvalho, 2022), and also the prevalence of gender marking through determiner inflection, asymmetrical with the nucleus, like *a Pablllo* vs. *o Pablllo* (Pereira & Silva, 2023).

The emergence of new forms in a language system and the change in its rules have been the subject of sociolinguistic studies in a broad sense, in a descriptive approach that focuses on 1) production, whose results have revealed the groups that drive this linguistic change as well as the regularization movements in the system, and 2) perception, whose results have revealed the position of the speakers of the language about these new marks in the system, following the seminal approach of Labov (1972). There is also the possibility of a societal approach or *language regard* (Preston, 2017), considering the way people perceive linguistic change. There are several indirect clues to how non-linguists perceive how new linguistic markers have emerged in a language, such as simple comments and statements, or institutional planning about these markers. Observation of these clues can reveal the linguistic ideology underlying the emergence and use of non-binary gender marks. This chapter adopts this approach.

In the following section, grammatical gender rules in Brazilian Portuguese are presented from a descriptive perspective, considering the grammatical tradition and sociolinguistic studies of production. Then, the background of the societal approach is explained, with the aim of identifying the ideologies underlying the federal draft laws about gender-neutral language. The justifications for proposing federal draft laws are examined. Although the social profiles associated with non-binary gender markers are minorities in Brazil, the effects of the use of these markers are amplified in a negative way and have led to the emergence of gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language. These results reflect the clash between the identitarian agenda and the ultra-conservative wave that has prevailed in Brazilian society; at the same time, they point to the need for awareness-raising and language education actions in Brazilian society.

## 1. Grammatical gender rules in Brazilian Portuguese

Portuguese is a language with morphologically marked gender in noun phrases, where the masculine is the unmarked gender, so it can encode situations of generic gender. Nonconformity to gender definitions aligned to a binary standard is the origin of non-binary movements ranging from LGBT to LGTB-QIA+ (Bear Bergman & Barker, 2017). And this nonconformism also touches upon the domain of linguistic representation: what is the grammatical gender form for referring to non-binary people?

Noun words in Brazilian Portuguese have grammatical gender. It is a grammatical feature that comes from Latin. The grammatical gender of Portuguese is binary, with either a masculine or feminine gender but without the Latin neuter gender. While in some languages, entities such as the moon or the sun have no grammatical gender or neuter gender, in Brazilian Portuguese, they must have a binary gender because it is a grammatical requirement for agreement. There is no reason in the world why *lua* “moon” should be of the feminine grammatical gender and *sol* “sun” should be of the masculine grammatical gender, but there is a reason in the grammar that requires a feature, and this feature is binary: masculine or feminine. Without this feature, other levels of language organization are affected.

In noun level, grammatical gender is mandatory in Brazilian Portuguese grammar. It should be in nouns by inflectional morphemes {-o} for masculine and {-a} for feminine; moreover, it exists in personal pronouns in the 3rd person, with *ele* “he” for the masculine and *ela* “she” for the feminine. Nouns and personal pronouns agree with social gender, revealing how people project their gender role identity. This rule is described in normative grammars (Cunha & Cintra, 1985; Bechara, 2012).

Singular agreement with social gender assumes a binary realization, in which a man says *obrigado* “thanks” and a woman says *obrigada* “thanks.” But, in plural agreement, the sexism of society emerges in the grammatical code. In the same group, the plural follows the same gender pattern as the singular: *os meninos* “the boys” and *as meninas* “the girls.” In a mixed group, even if the majority is of the feminine gender, the reference form is the masculine gender. This fact has been explained as meaning that the masculine gender is the unmarked gender from a grammatical point of view (Camara Jr., 1970). As a result, the masculine gender is a kind of generic gender.

Thus, as for example in German and French (see Diewald, Elmiger, Abrantes, this volume), language sexism in Brazilian Portuguese goes beyond the dominance of a binary system in nouns: {-o} is assumed as an unmarked form, the unmarked gender, overgeneralized as a generic gender.<sup>35</sup> As a grammar requirement, gendered bodies must have grammatical gender. In Brazilian Portuguese, the possibilities of grammatical gender are limited to the binary masculine and feminine. Besides gender dominance with the generic masculine, another problem is the absence of a specific morpheme for gendered bodies that do not identify with the binary or a gender-neutral equivalent. It is in this context that a morpheme to express non-binary gender emerges, the {-e}, as in *menine* “boy/girl/kid.”

In response to linguistic sexism, two new rules for grammatical gender expression to refer to gendered bodies emerge: gender-inclusive and gender-neutral (Freitag, 2024). Gender-inclusive language refers to a set of actions to take the focus off the generic masculine, not only in Brazilian Portuguese but in several other languages. Expressions are used to make generic references without using the grammatical gender feature that directs the generic masculine. Instead of assuming the generic masculine in agreement with groups, both genders are included (Fischer, 2020).

The neutral-gender language movement claims ways of expressing non-binarism or gender neutrality. New linguistic strategies are tested to encode gender non-identification information in the morpheme system. Besides this being an incoming change with limited data and in restricted contexts, sociolinguistic approaches have described two usage patterns (Freitag, 2022a, b). For one pattern, these morphemes are a form of non-binary gender expression. In another pattern, these morphemes are a gender-neutral form of gender. As gender-neutral, a group of *meninos* “boys” and *meninas* “girls” is referred to as *menines* “kids” without discriminating against each one. In an inclusive-gender approach, the same group is referred to as *meninos*, *meninas* and *menines* or simply *crianças* “kids,” without referring to any individual gender.

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<sup>35</sup> As it was said in the introduction to this chapter, beyond the noun level, there are other features for non-binary representation in emergence, like third-person pronouns, like *êlu* and *êla* (Carvalho, 2022), and the prevalence of gender marking through determiner inflection, asymmetric with the nucleus, like *a Pabllô* vs. *o Pabllô* (Pereira, Silva, 2023).

## 2. Language change, social evaluation and the laws

Language changes happen above or below the level of consciousness. When society becomes aware of a linguistic change, especially when it is associated with the identity and representation of minority groups, hegemonic groups react. And the reaction to this linguistic change has been strong and recent, materializing in the form of federal draft laws that criminalize gender-neutral language, forbid its use, and even establish punishments for those who use it.

A societal approach was used to map ideological biases in laws that reflect what society thinks about this concern, based on Garrett's (2007, 2010) approach to measuring language attitudes in terms of language ideologies. This approach is in line with the field of processing linguistic variation, which tries to understand why we perceive some linguistic variations but not others. This field of study does not describe the rule (how people use gender-neutral language), but how people understand that rule.

Language ideology is "a community's consensus on what value to apply to each of the language varieties that make up its repertoire. Put simply, language ideology is not unlike language policy with the policy-maker left out, what people think should be done." (Spolsky, 2002: 320). Following this conception, policymakers' attitudes expressed in laws can reflect the attitudes of the community.

Language is a frequent matter in Brazilian politics. In the Federal Constitution (1988), art. 6 says "Portuguese is the country's official language." On the federal level, several draft laws concerning language have been discussed by politicians. Brazilian draft laws about language are around inclusion and prohibition. Accessibility for deaf and blind people is part of a ground-breaking draft law project looking at inclusion, as well as the plain language movement in public management and gender-inclusive language.

The process of creating a law in Brazil follows four stages: initiative, discussion, voting, and sanction or veto, and can be carried out at the federal, state, and municipal levels. Politicians and the people can propose laws; the proposition of draft laws is even a measure of a politician's efficiency. However, the journey between the initiative and the sanction, that is, transforming the draft into a law, is long, and on this path many proposals are dismissed or are put on the stand, waiting to be discussed. There is no prior technical criterion for

the presentation of a legislative proposal. Because of this, many proposals for laws that would overlap with others that already exist are either unfeasible or are merely speculative and mediatic or a “clickbait.”

A Brazilian federal draft law consists of a title, an abstract, and the articles of the law. It must also include a statement of reasons for the law's proposition in order to pass through the deliberative committees. It is specifically this part of the language-neutral draft laws that will be analyzed in the following section, seeking clues to the linguistic ideology behind the proposition. In the statement of reasons, one can find superstitions and stereotypes, correct and incorrect judgments about language, revealing the linguistic awareness of the community in terms of folk linguistics (Preston, 2017).

The draft laws can be accessed through an online public search on the Câmara Federal's website.<sup>36</sup> The search with the keyword *linguagem neutra* “gender-neutral language” returned 14 draft laws, spanning the period from 2020 to 2022. And four draft laws for *linguagem inclusiva* “gender-inclusive language,” spanning the period from 2001 to 2015. The following section describes the ideologies that motivate people to do it.

### 3. Gender in language, gender in Brazilian laws

The fight for equality in gender representation has been on the Brazilian legislative agenda for at least twenty years. Draft Law PL 4610/2001 “provides for inclusive language in legislation and official documents, establishing the use of words of the masculine gender only to refer to men, and requiring that all reference to women should be made expressly using the feminine gender.”<sup>37</sup>, has already gone through all the procedures and is ready to enter the session in plenary, waiting until today.

Almost ten years later, another Draft Law PL 6653/2009 determines in its article 6: “The State shall adopt the use of gender-inclusive language for women in the wording of its internal rules, its internal and external communication

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<sup>36</sup> See <https://www.camara.leg.br/buscaProposicoesWeb/pesquisaSimplificada>.

<sup>37</sup> In the original: “dispõe sobre a linguagem inclusiva na legislação e documentos oficiais, estabelecendo a utilização de vocábulos do gênero masculino apenas para referir-se ao homem; exigindo que toda referência à mulher deverá ser feita expressamente utilizando-se o gênero feminino.”

texts, as well as in public tender notices.”<sup>38</sup> This draft law was joined to another, Draft Law PL 4857/2009, with similar propositions. The most recent proposition regarding gender-inclusive language is Draft Law PL 3756/2015, which provides for the use of gender-inclusive language within the federal public administration, and it is still moving through the committees.

Thus, in Brazil, there are some draft laws in the way of a gender-inclusive or gender-fair language that aim to reduce gender bias in language and in society through changes in people’s linguistic habits. These draft laws concern language policy formation and the regulation of gender-inclusive language in society. The set of laws for gender-neutral language is composed of, besides the 14 draft laws concerning gender-neutral, two petitions and two supplementary draft laws. The supplementary draft laws concern the prohibition decreed by Ordinance 604/2021, from the Brazilian Special Secretary of Culture. This ordinance prohibits the use of financial resources from federal funding for audiovisual productions that contain “the use directly or indirectly, besides apology, of what is conventionally called neutral language.”<sup>39</sup> The petitions concern the acknowledgment of co-authorship of a draft laws (1610/2021) and a motion of repudiation to the Portuguese Language Museum (1658/2021), for “using non-binary language, in contravention to the consolidated grammatical rules.”<sup>40</sup> The last one was dismissed without effect.

The ground zero for gender-neutral language is Draft Law PL 5198/2020, which expressly forbids educational institutions and examination boards of selection and public assessments from using new forms of gender and number inflection of words in the Portuguese language, contrary to the consolidated grammatical rules. A single paragraph of this draft law said: “In formal teaching and educational institutions, it is forbidden to use language that, by corrupting the grammatical rules, intends to refer to a gender-neutral, non-existent gender in the Portuguese language.”<sup>41</sup> This proposition follows an

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<sup>38</sup> In the original: “O Estado adotará o emprego de linguagem inclusiva do gênero feminino na redação de suas normas internas, de seus textos de comunicação interna e externa, bem como nos editais de concursos públicos.”

<sup>39</sup> In the original: “o uso e/ou a utilização, direta ou indiretamente, além da apologia, do que se convencionou chamar de linguagem neutra.”

<sup>40</sup> In the original “utilização de linguagem não binária, em contrariedade às regras gramaticais consolidadas.”

<sup>41</sup> In the original: “Nos ambientes formais de ensino e educação, é vedado o emprego de

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ordinary proceeding and is subject to conclusive examination by the committees. However, another 13 draft laws have joined this one because they are similar propositions: 5248/2020, 5385/2020, 5422/2020, 2114/2021, 3679/2021, 211/2021, 764/2022, 173/2021, 2650/2021, 2759/2021, 2866/2021, 3310/2021, 566/2022. All of them reinforce the original draft law, with some additions, like the establishment of punishments for those who use gender-neutral language.

A first remark is the productivity of draft laws by the Brazilian legislative body and the time period in which they were submitted. Between 2020 and 2022, the world experienced an unprecedented health crisis with the pandemic of COVID-19. Particularly in Brazil, this period saw almost 700,000 deaths officially attributed to COVID-19 (and underreporting can raise this number threefold). While most politicians in the rest of the world were engaged in draft laws to protect people from this disease and take care of the effects of social distancing on the economy and education, Brazilian politicians spent time and taxpayer money proposing laws on... gender-neutral language!

These draft laws are not naïve actions nor sincerely concerned with young people's education (as some of the draft laws claim). They are, indeed, the consequence of an ultra-conservative wave that has been sweeping through the government since the deposition of Dilma Rousseff in 2016 (the first and only woman president of Brazil, twice), and which took on more dramatic proportions with the denial of the result of the 2022 presidential election, in which Lula became president of Brazil for the third time.

The ultra-conservative wave is very biased and discriminates against groups that had been reaching inclusion through public policies promoted by governments until the deposition of Dilma Rousseff: the identitarian agendas of women, LGBTQI+, blacks, indigenous, Northeasterners and other minorities have been targets of government actions that lead to invisibility and the loss of earned spaces. One of the frontiers is language, which is the target of all these draft laws.

Ultra-conservatives are not a minority in Brazil today (they obtained 49.8% of the valid votes in the presidential election of 2022), nor are they uneducated or without social insertion; on the contrary, there is a significant contingent of

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linguagem que, corrompendo as regras gramaticais, pretendam se referir a gênero neutro, inexistente na língua portuguesa.”

digital influencers that propagate hate speech. This is why the societal treatment of gender-neutral language is important. It was possible to access the language ideology behind the behaviors by examining the justifications for the draft laws (all put forth by politicians with an ultra-conservative profile). In other words, how do ordinary people, not linguists, think about gender-neutral language?

The arguments given as justification are driven by two beliefs, the grammatical tradition and the purity of the language, and with two purposes: to stop identitarian agendas and to promote quality in education.

### 3.1 Grammatical tradition

The grammatical tradition is a powerful argument to be explored in the justifications because it provides empirical evidence and authoritative speech. It is legislation, grammars, and grammarians that endorse the opinion against gender-neutral language. For example, draft law 2866/2021 quotes a grammatical prescription: “According to the New Grammar of Contemporary Portuguese, by Celso Cunha and Lindley Cintra, ‘1. There are two genders in Portuguese: masculine and feminine. The masculine is the unmarked term; the feminine is the marked term’.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, this is the orientation about gender in Celso Cunha and Lindley Cintra’s grammar, published in 1985. But, as the grammarians themselves say, the grammar is a “guide of spoken and written expression that, for the present moment of the evolution of the language, could be considered correct” (Cunha, Cintra, 1985: xiii).<sup>43</sup> The “present moment” mentioned by Cunha and Cintra was 1985, and they recognize that language is in evolution. But the authority of grammars is used to support another generalization: “These are the general rules regarding gender in the Portuguese language. A binary structure, as it could not be otherwise.”<sup>44</sup> As can be seen, grammatical reasoning is being abused to support the naturalization of binary gender.

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<sup>42</sup> In the original: “De acordo com a Nova Gramática do Português Contemporâneo, de Celso Cunha e Lindley Cintra, ‘1. Há dois gêneros em português: o masculino e o feminino. O masculino é o termo não marcado; o feminino o termo marcado’”.

<sup>43</sup> In the original: “guia orientador de uma expressão oral e escrita que, para o presente momento da evolução da língua, se pudesse considerar correta”.

<sup>44</sup> In the original: “São essas as regras gerais quanto ao gênero na língua portuguesa. Uma estrutura binária, como não poderia deixar de ser.”

In the same direction, draft law 2650/2021 quotes *Nomenclatura Gramatical Brasileira* “Brazilian Grammatical Terminology,” a decision that established terminology for grammars to avoid disadvantages for students in national assessments by providing homogeneity in the curricula. Explicitly mentioning a document with the value of law can confer authority on the proposition of a prohibition: “In 1958, the *Nomenclatura Gramatical Brasileira* (NGB) was published and established by Ordinance No. 36 of January 28, 1959.”<sup>45</sup> Similar to Cunha and Cintra’s grammar argument, NGB is a suggestive instruction for curriculum terminology, but nothing in NGB is said about the relationship between biological gender and grammatical gender to support this statement: “It is part of the richness and exactitude of our language that gender inflection is structured in this way, perfectly expressing both biological genders.”<sup>46</sup>

A statement about language evolution is also present in draft law 173/2021, but the argument is supported by a Real Academia Española speech about gender-neutral language in Spanish taken out of context.

These arguments are based on authority speech in the original, but in the context of the draft laws, they are used to support a claim of the naturalness of binarism, a conclusion that is not supported by the original arguments.

### 3.2 Purity of language

Attributes like “richness,” “exactitude” and “perfectly” endorse an ideal of pure language. What is not pure, rich, and perfect is considered a vice of language. This argument is put forward in draft law 566/2022: “Deviations from language, such as the so-called gender-neutral language and the language of social networks and internet games, are seen as vices of language [linguistic defects]. In practice, these language vices are contrary to the grammatical rules consolidated in the country.”<sup>47</sup>

Gender-neutral language was included in the “neologisms” combination in draft law 764/2022: “It is observed that, frequently, neologisms based on

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<sup>45</sup> In the original: “Em 1958, foi publicada a *Nomenclatura Gramatical Brasileira* (NGB), instituída por meio da Portaria nº 36, de 28 de janeiro de 1959”.

<sup>46</sup> In the original: “Faz parte da riqueza e exatidão de nossa língua que a flexão de gênero se estruture dessa forma, expressando perfeitamente os dois gêneros biológicos”.

<sup>47</sup> In the original: “Desvios da língua como a denominada linguagem neutra, a língua das redes sociais e dos jogos via internet são vistos como vícios de linguagem e da norma padrão. Na prática, esses vícios de linguagem são contrários às regras gramaticais consolidadas no país.”

variations not formally recognized in the current norms of the Portuguese language appear in our society and are used with some frequency in colloquial language, especially in social networks. Examples include abbreviations, incorrect verb tenses, pronoun variations, and more recently, the so-called ‘gender-neutral language’.<sup>48</sup>

Neologism, in linguistics, refers to new words in a certain language (by borrowing from another language or by having a new meaning or a new formation). But in justification from draft law 764/2022, a neologism is anything that threatens the idea of the immutability of language, including linguistic variation. Ignorance of how language works encourages this kind of idea, and this is nothing new.

Language purism was also the ideology espoused in another language-related draft law 20 years ago, draft law 1676/1999. Just like gender-neutral, foreignisms were a threat to the purity of the Portuguese language. Just as now, there is a concern for learning and quality education, as well as a concern to curb the supposed deformation of the language that foreignisms promote. This issue mobilized the academic community to take a stand and raised the alarm about the need for a wider discussion with society (Faraco, 2011). Seeing the same arguments return in draft laws in 2020 reinforces the idea that a more active language education is latent.

### **3.3. Identitarian agenda**

Linguists know that there is no owner of the language who can impose changes. But this idea is widespread in common sense, even among non-linguists.

Gender issues in language stem from movements of minority groups or groups not represented by the status quo. These movements, which are, as said, minorities, do not have the power to impose a rule, nor do they have that purpose. The emergence of the use of gender-inclusive or gender-neutral forms in the language derives from their insertion in the agenda, which gains adherence or not from society. Examining the situation shows how little credibility

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<sup>48</sup> In the original: “Observa-se que, frequentemente, surgem em nossa sociedade neologismos baseados em variações não reconhecidas formalmente nas normas vigentes da língua portuguesa, que são utilizados com certa frequência na linguagem coloquial, principalmente em redes de sociais. Como exemplo citam-se abreviações, tempos verbais incorretos, variações de pronomes e mais recentemente a chamada “linguagem neutra’.”

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there is to the argument that minority movements want to impose changes in the language. However, this is the most prevalent justification in the draft laws.

“It is a recent invention of people who think they have the right and the ability to change our grammar. They suggest the use of non-existent endings and pronouns, complicating what is simple: the use of the feminine and masculine genders, which every Portuguese speaker dominates.”<sup>49</sup> (draft law 2759/2021). “The ‘gender-neutral language’, the ‘non-binary dialect’ is, in fact, a forced attempt to modify the use of the cultured norm of the Portuguese Language and its set of linguistic standards, in order to be written or pronounced with the premise advocated by extremist groups to ‘nullify the differences’ of masculine and feminine treatment pronouns, based on infinite non-existent gender possibilities.”<sup>50</sup> (draft law 3310/2021).

“More and more often we are faced with attempts at artificial innovations in the Portuguese language of Brazil. These are based on an ideological view of gender issues and a prescriptive view of the world that seeks to define what is ‘politically correct’, even in the use of language.”<sup>51</sup> (draft law 176/2021).

“Neutral language aims to adapt Portuguese to the use of neutral expressions so that non-binary people (who do not identify with either the masculine or the feminine gender) or intersex feel represented.”<sup>52</sup> (draft law 764/2022).

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<sup>49</sup> In the original: “Trata-se de uma invenção recente de pessoas que julgam ter o direito e a capacidade de alterar nossa gramática. Sugerem o uso de terminações e pronomes inexistentes, complicando aquilo que é simples: o uso do gênero feminino e masculino, que todo falante de português domina.”

<sup>50</sup> In the original: “A ‘linguagem neutra’, do ‘dialeto não binário’ trata-se, em verdade, de uma tentativa forçada de modificação do uso da norma culta da Língua Portuguesa e seu conjunto de padrões linguísticos, de modo a serem escritos ou pronunciados com a premissa defendida pelos grupos extremistas de ‘anular as diferenças’ de pronomes de tratamento masculinos e femininos, baseando-se em infinitas possibilidades de gênero não existentes.”

<sup>51</sup> In the original: “Cada vez mais frequentemente nos deparamos com tentativas de inovações artificiais na língua portuguesa do Brasil. Estas têm por base uma visão ideológica a respeito das questões de gênero e uma visão prescritiva do mundo que pretende definir o que é ‘politicamente correto,’ mesmo no uso da linguagem.”

<sup>52</sup> In the original: “A linguagem neutra tem como objetivo adaptar o português para o uso de expressões neutras a fim de que as pessoas não binárias (que não se identificam nem com o gênero masculino nem com o feminino) ou intersexo se sintam representadas.”

The criminalization of minorities in the school environment has been organized around an ultra-conservative movement named *Escola Sem Partido* “School without Party,” whose focus is to ban not only issues regarding gender expression and identity (in the body and in the language) at school, but any political manifestation that is not in keeping with the ultra-conservative values of current Brazilian society (Miguel, 2016; Macedo, 2017).

“The so-called ‘gender-neutral language’, intellectual by-product and reckless practical application of the so-called ‘gender theory’ in the field of human communication, is not only totally incompatible with the nature of our language (averse to the ‘gender-neutral’ used in other languages), but by submitting to ideological criteria standards that precede intellectual discussions of any kind, exhibits a mistaken and purely instrumental conception of language and seriously threatens the effectiveness of the Portuguese language itself as a vehicle for intellectual training and the acquisition of culture.”<sup>53</sup> (draft law 211/2021).

Although this relationship is never explicitly stated, the draft law 211/2021’s justification for banning gender-neutral language from schools is not one of concern for education, but rather one of “intellectual cleansing” to expel those with ideological differences, making it clear that the gender-neutral draft laws are a manifestation of *Escola sem Partido*’s actions.

### 3.4 Quality in education

Results from national and international assessments about reading and math have systematically shown that Brazil fails with students in public education. If, before pandemics, this background already merits special attention, then, during and after pandemics, concerns and actions about this matter should be a priority in public policies. After all, besides these widely known prior problems, Brazil was one of the countries whose students stayed out of

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<sup>53</sup> In the original: “A chamada ‘linguagem neutra,’ subproduto intelectual e aplicação prática temerária da dita ‘teoria de gênero’ no âmbito da comunicação humana, não apenas verifica-se totalmente incompatível com a índole de nosso idioma (avesso ao ‘gênero neutro’ utilizado em outras línguas), como, ao submeter a critérios ideológicos normas que antecedem discussões intelectuais de qualquer espécie, exhibe uma equivocada concepção puramente instrumental da linguagem e ameaça gravemente a eficácia da própria língua portuguesa como veículo para a formação intelectual e a aquisição da cultura”.

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school the longest during the pandemic. Thus, actions aimed at improving the quality of education should be a priority strategy.

Politicians have shown sensitivity to this problem and use this motivation to support not only actions to improve education but also to ban gender-neutral language from schools. Arguments for a gender-neutral prohibition are claimed in these draft laws on the basis of learning difficulties in general, early reading learning, and even concern for people with disabilities:

“In a country where most students have very low levels of proficiency in reading, the deliberate promotion of error is an affront to the students’ right to education. In addition to hindering the learning of the correct language, the artificially imposed language alteration creates difficulties for deaf and dyslexic children, increasing inequalities and school exclusions.”<sup>54</sup>

“What about the confusion that would be created with respect to children in the early literacy stage?”<sup>55</sup> (draft law 211/2021)

There is, however, no scientific evidence to back it up. Besides the lack of scientific background, the arguments presented by politicians in their draft laws are in conflict with official Brazilian education documents, such as the Base Nacional Curricular Comum “Common National Curriculum Basis” (BNCC), which advocates linguistic diversity for social inclusion and citizenship:

“Understand languages as a (geo)political, historical, cultural, social, variable, heterogeneous and sensitive phenomenon to the contexts of use, recognizing their varieties and experiencing them as forms of identity expressions, personal and collective, as well as acting to confront prejudice of any kind.”<sup>56</sup> (BNCC, 2017: 494)

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<sup>54</sup> In the original: “Num País onde a maior parte dos estudantes tem níveis baixíssimos de proficiência em leitura, a promoção deliberada do erro é uma afronta ao direito dos estudantes à educação. Além de dificultar o aprendizado da norma culta, a alteração da língua artificialmente imposta cria dificuldades para crianças surdas e disléxicas, aumentando as desigualdades e exclusões escolares.”

<sup>55</sup> In the original: “e a confusão que se criaria no que diz respeito aos infantes em fase de alfabetização?”

<sup>56</sup> In the original: “Compreender as línguas como fenômeno (geo)político, histórico, cultural, social, variável, heterogêneo e sensível aos contextos de uso, reconhecendo suas variedades e vivenciando-as como formas de expressões identitárias, pessoais e coletivas, bem como agindo no enfrentamento de preconceitos de qualquer natureza.”

Real concerns about the quality of education should take into account the existing official documents; draft laws that ignore by ignorance or intentionality and lead to a distorted understanding of teaching that masks prejudices and serves an ideological movement, such as *Escola Sem Partido*.

## Conclusion

Politicians represent groups in a society. Thus, examining the linguistic ideologies underlying gender-neutral language draft laws reveals the language ideologies of groups in society. Ideas about the purity of language and the quality of education are explicitly supported by distortions about official documents and grammars. And implicitly, the ideas reflect identity agendas, such as the actions of an ultraconservative movement, the *Escola Sem Partido*.

Draft laws that try to prohibit changes in language claiming impacts on the quality of education are not something new in Brazil. The purism of the language to ban foreignisms, 20 years ago, in draft law 1676/1999, also manifested itself with concerns about the quality of education. Just as then, the scientific community has spoken out, producing scientific evidence (Barbosa Filho & Othero, 2022). However, the return of purist ideas about language and the threat to the quality of education in Brazilian gender-neutral draft laws show that academia has failed to cross the barriers with society for a full and active language education free of prejudices (Freitag, 2024). The participation of the scientific community in providing arguments for this discussion needs to go beyond the academy and reach the social movements and groups that politicians represent. After all, “linguistic preconceptions and power relations may constitute a potential barrier to effective deliberation on language” (Erdocia, 2022: 445). The strong negative and prescriptive backlash against emerging forms, such as the gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language observed in Brazilian society, illustrates the lack of language education in society and reinforces the importance of linguistic activism and critical sociolinguistic research for effective changes in society.

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# The Evolution of Gender Representation in Two Editions of a Spanish as a Foreign Language Textbook

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## Abstract

Textbooks play a crucial role in the foreign language learning and teaching process: they support teachers when preparing, organizing and evaluating the foreign language acquisition process. Additionally, they have a considerable bearing in the representation of culture and of gender roles (Fernández Darraz, 2010). A textbook should transmit the values associated with the language students are learning and it should moreover encourage critical work on these values in general. Commercial, political, or pedagogical considerations (Morales & Cassany, 2020) cannot justify an aseptic presentation of reality that does not consider the presence of women in egalitarian roles, or the questioning of the depiction of classical roles as opposed to a more diverse representation that would enable the promotion of equality in general terms (Fernández Darraz, 2010). On many occasions, this equity in representation is made explicit in the images selected (particularly in larger publishers, where particular care is taken regarding this aspect), since visual representations are more evident. But there are other aspects and components of a textbook that also account for these cultural features, such as texts, audios, and videos. Notwithstanding the importance of this representation, there seems to be a lack of significant studies that examine textbooks used in Spanish as a Foreign Language from a comprehensive social and gender perspective. Therefore, we present a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the text and images contained in two editions

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of a complete textbook (*Aula Internacional 1 Nueva Edición* (2013) and *Aula Internacional Plus 1* (2020)) using the qualitative data analysis programme Atlas.ti. Based on this analysis, we highlight the social dimension of Spanish as a Foreign Language Teaching and focus on the relationship between language usage and texts and images contained in the textbook. We examine several variables such as gender representation, roles, age, and ethnicity using an inductive-deductive methodology. Through an in-depth analysis of the construction of gender equality in the book, we assess the use of inclusive language and the visual representations of gender in each textbook. Through the diachronic comparison of the two editions of the textbook, it will also be possible to assess whether there have been some accurate and precise changes in terms of gender representation or not. The analysis is guided by Critical Discourse Analysis, based on frequency and order of appearance. This analysis could be a valuable aid for teachers interested in encouraging a conscious transmission and questioning of the values associated with the culture under study through critical work on these values and themes in class.

**Keywords:** Culture; Spanish as a Foreign Language; Foreign Language Manuals; Gender Perspective; Representations of Women.

## Introduction

Teaching materials, whether textbooks, teacher-prepared guides, blogs, and official content from legitimate institutions or from internet influencers are invariably products of their time. They are not decontextualized, neutral products, but are precisely imbued with the context in which they arise. Therefore, for teachers in general, and foreign language teachers in particular, it is extremely important to approach teaching materials from a critical perspective, given that textbooks serve as tools to organise and guide an object of study as complex as a foreign language, where the content that is taught is the very vehicle around which knowledge is built. As such, the what, how and when of the teaching process, and namely what contents are not taught or are ignored or referred to tangentially or partially carry a profound impact on the way in which language and culture are acquired.

Among the development of cultural skills, one of the aspects that is very present in the current state of the art is that which relates to gender equality,

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and in particular the representation of gender and the treatment of gender roles in everyday life.

The present contribution first examines foreign language textbooks as a window to the language and culture of the target society (Spanish-speaking societies). In the current socio-political climate (of wars, pandemics and environmental threats, among others) it becomes increasingly important to integrate the social dimension of language into the teaching process. It is not enough to simply guide the student towards the development of a linguistic code with which to communicate; it is increasingly necessary to deepen the critical dimension of the teaching of Spanish, understood here as students' awareness of their own reality as opposed to that of the target society they are being made aware of through language teaching. This issue is particularly important, because of the wide reach of the Spanish language around the world, both geographically and culturally. The cultural perspective and even the dialectal variant are truly different in Spain and, for example, Venezuela. Therefore, we henceforth refer to "target cultures" as an effort to highlight the diversity of language users included in the term "target culture(s)" in the specific case of Spanish. All this so that students may not only develop skills in terms of content, but may also become agents of change and cultural production (Freire, 1967, 1970; Lacorte & Atienza, 2019: 138). There are several key notions where the critical dimension may come into play, for example, the promotion of critical thinking, critical literacy and critical cultural awareness, all of which are aspects connected with the development of intercultural and linguistic skills.

An area that has always been susceptible to critical analysis in the teaching of foreign languages is the so-called cultural component. There is long-standing work on the relationship between language and culture (in this regard see, for example, the special Issue of *Colección Forma 4. Interculturalidad* edited by Gómez Asencio, 2002). These studies share the assumption that language (as a system) and culture are intimately connected or, in other words, that all that is language is equally culture (González Casado, 2002: 63). However, beginning with Byram's (1995) coinage of the concept of the intercultural speaker and since the publication of the CEFR (2001) and its Companion Volume (2020), the comprehensive consideration of critical awareness of the sociolinguistic, communicative and intercultural dimension has become increasingly relevant and central (in this regard, see the section *Saberes y comportamientos socio-culturales* in the *Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes*).

Therefore, in order to thoroughly examine the current context of teaching and learning Spanish as a foreign language, an in-depth analysis of two editions of a Spanish as a foreign language textbook is proposed, highlighting the close relationship between the acquisition of the language and the social dimension of the different cultures (Spanish, Venezuelan, Argentinian, Mexican cultures) of the target language.

If textbooks are to be considered not only as an instrument of mediation between the teacher, the content and the student, but also as windows to the language and culture of the target language, it becomes important to note the fact that in many Spanish-speaking societies, and also in Brazil (Freitag, this volume), a global social dialogue is taking place at the most diverse levels (public and private debates, in academia, on social networks, in politics, etc.) around gender representativeness (Bolívar, 2019). By gender we mean a concept taken from grammar, with which reference is made today to the sociocultural construction of the masculine and the feminine. This sociocultural construction, moreover, is useful to distinguish gender from the concept of sex in the biological sense.<sup>57</sup> Given that one of the main objectives of a foreign language textbook is to guide, organize and monitor the learning, practice, expression and reflection on the target language, we appreciate that textbooks, as a product of their time and permeated by their context, are also bearers of gender representations that should be reviewed if the purpose is not only to teach the code itself, but also to promote the critical development of the values and perspectives of the target cultures.

It is important to do so in some depth and from a multimodal perspective, since currently textbooks, when viewed comprehensively, are a complex, hybrid product. Not only are they composed of texts and images, but there is increasingly an imbrication of audio, video, images and various digital resources which are all susceptible to contain a gender component. Finally, a diachronic study is proposed, namely, to compare two relatively recent editions of the same textbook, because it is relevant to compare the extent to which teaching manuals actually represent the desire for parity that characterizes their corresponding target societies and to observe whether there is an omission of these issues in these textbooks.

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<sup>57</sup> To understand the evolution of the term, see Angouri (2021).

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This is not a new line of inquiry. Depending on the tradition in which they may be inserted, Porreca (1984) and Rifkin (1998) should be mentioned, as well as a broad and prolific line of inquiry and of approaches that are more focused on culture in terms of the relationship between so-called everyday culture and legitimized culture and the intersection of the cultural with various variables such as ethnicity, socioeconomic level, disability, inclusion/exclusion (González Casado, 2002) and, lately, gaining increased relevance, the intersection with sexuality and traditional gender roles.<sup>58</sup> What is new about the present study is the comprehensive analysis of the evolution of a textbook not only in relation to its component parts (dialogues, written texts, images and drawings), but the fact that it seeks to integrate it as a multimodal text in which the representativeness of various cultural features such as hierarchies and gender representativeness, among others, are analyzed.

Thus, what is of interest in this teaching manual is to observe the evolution of gender representation in depth, and for this purpose two editions were compared, taking into account the different modes of delivery in relation to other relevant social variables. The importance of a micro-diachronic study derives from the fact that by contrasting two relatively recent editions published ten years apart, we are able to analyze whether significant changes can be observed, in line with changing perspectives on these aspects in the target cultures.

### **Gender and Representativeness in Educational Texts. State of the Art.**

Textbooks are invaluable tools in foreign language teaching, as they support and guide teachers in the preparation, organization and evaluation of the teaching and learning process of the target language. These materials have considerable influence on the representation of culture, in general, and of gender in different roles, in particular (Fernández Darraz, 2010). Ideally, a textbook should convey the culture and values associated with the language students are learning and, in addition, should encourage critical work on these values in general. However, it is well known that teaching materials are not the neutral product of the academic and/or pedagogical work of the institution that designed them.

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<sup>58</sup> A good summary can be found in Parra and Serafini (2021).

They are, instead, the products of their time and context of creation and reception. As such, they are influenced by their surrounding environment, which has a positive, but also a potentially negative, side. An example of this is the recent controversy in the United States, more precisely in Florida, surrounding a considerable number of textbooks for different disciplines which supposedly use biased contents and examples in their explanations and exercises (Luscombe, 2022). The reverse situation is not uncommon: textbooks or teaching materials in the most diverse disciplines that seem to promote a kind of aseptic version of reality (Morales and Cassany, 2020). That is, textbooks where the very absence of several topics is somewhat surprising. Certain educational systems have been caught up in controversies regarding the prohibition of inclusive language, particularly the use of *desdoblamiento*, or lexical split by gender (i.e. the use of both masculine and feminine forms), in primary education teaching materials (Bolívar & Adrián, 2022; Furtado, 2023; Santacruz, 2023).

Whatever may be the case, at the present moment where, from the United Nations to the most diverse levels of government, a consensus is palpable on the need to establish, in the interest of sustainable development, quality education, gender equality as well as a reduction of inequality in general,<sup>59</sup> it is therefore clearly necessary, on the educational side, to promote critical awareness among students as established, for example, in official documents of the European Parliament.<sup>60</sup>

In foreign language teaching, the situation is doubly complex because what is taught is also the vehicle through which critical awareness must be fostered. The language is both the medium and the object of learning. Guiding learners in the acquisition of contents but also in how to critically relate to these, while being mindful of their environment (Freire, 1970), is a deeply complex and demanding task that combines not only classroom work, evaluation and activities, but also teaching materials in particular.

Currently, and particularly in Spanish-speaking societies, the issue of gender is latent. We find ourselves immersed in a dynamic of constant acceleration and contraction of the issue, of massification and, not infrequently, of silence around it, depending on the society in question. As such, a deeper and more attentive study of the pedagogical reality of foreign language teaching materials

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<sup>59</sup> See: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/objetivos-de-desarrollo-sostenible/>

<sup>60</sup> See: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/es/sheet/142/la-politica-linguistica>

cannot escape the multimodality of the resources used. This is a particularly powerful and compelling line of inquiry not only in Spanish but also in other linguistic areas: Morales-Vidal & Cassany (2020) for Spanish; Porreca (1984), for English; Rifkin (1998) for Russian, and other important texts for English as a foreign language: Auerbach (1985); Lee (2014); Benlaghrissi (2022). Many of these studies, however, tend to focus on a specific aspect rather than the totality of formats included in a textbook. Therefore, it is appropriate to pursue a comprehensive analysis of teaching materials that includes both the linguistic element and the visual and auditory elements, since gender roles are not limited to representation in the linguistic element, but are present in other aspects, such as visual representativeness, the hierarchical order of appearance, control of the conversation or the attribution of more or less active roles, among others. Thus, in order to achieve a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding on the use of linguistic and non-linguistic forms in teaching manuals of Spanish as a foreign language as regards gender representation/roles, it is advisable to also include the images, audios and additional elements cited in the analysis, to achieve a more complete and holistic view of this representation.

The focus should be not only on the transmission or construction of the image of women with respect to men on more obvious issues such as the images and photographs of a textbook, or the professions or incidence of appearance of the characters, but also on the discourse itself, contents and ordering in the texts and audios, which might reflect stereotyped or negative attitudes or microaggressions<sup>61</sup> contained in the book. We understand microaggressions as “(...) attitudes of ‘soft’ domination or ‘very small intensity,’ latent and denied forms and modes of abuse and imposition in everyday life (...) that men permanently execute.” (Bonino, 2004: 1)

For the purposes of the preparation of this study, we start from the assumption that these are not intentional representations, and that they might well have gone unnoticed during decision-making processes; but that, in any case, they reflect the socio-cultural context in which decision makers (editors, writers or pedagogical advisers) are immersed.

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<sup>61</sup> Translator's Note: within the scope of the present work, references to “microaggressions” should be understood as instances of “micro-machismo,” or subtler forms of machismo, as defined by psychologist Luis Bonino (2004), “Los micromachismos”. *La Cibeles*, 2: 1-6.

In this sense, the most up to date pedagogical approaches define the student of foreign languages and second languages, in general, as a social agent. This highlights the student's ability to interpret statements and to act appropriately in social practices. Thus, it is indispensable to work on developing a critical attitude in foreign language/L2 classes. Twenty years ago, with the publication of the CEFR, the action-oriented approach and the description according to levels of communicative and sociolinguistic competence gained centrality. In 2020, with the Companion Volume, this approach became more clearly shaped, with the inclusion of clear descriptors of multicultural, multilingual and mediation skills. All of the above aspects shape the didactic and pedagogical setting where the textbooks under study can be inserted. This is a context conducive to analyses that go beyond the linguistic aspect, as particular attention is paid to the fact that multilingual and multicultural skills can speed up, to some extent, further learning in the linguistic and cultural fields (section 2.3). On the other hand, this is part of a context in which notions of gender, particularly in sociolinguistic terms, have acquired significant relevance in the most diverse areas. It is worth noting, among these, the fight against discrimination based on the sociocultural construction of gender. Given the above, it is necessary for teachers to develop an observant attitude, and to regard teaching materials with a critical approach to discourse (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; 2005).

Accordingly, a careful analysis of teaching materials used in the Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) classroom is invaluable. It is clear that in order to enhance the critical attitude necessary to act as a social agent, activities and materials geared towards attentive and conscious social interactions, and supported by reflection and awareness on the part of the learner, not to mention the teacher, are necessary (Lacorte & Atienza, 2019: 145). Along the same lines, didactic materials must be viewed as documents which certainly guide teaching from a curricular point of view but, crucially, they should also be understood as cultural artefacts (Lacorte & Atienza, 2019: 141; Angouri, 2021: 1), products of their time that present the language and culture in a selective way, since they materialize decision-making and choices that are the product of their interaction with the environment in which they were produced.

Consequently, it is important to take stock and to attempt to observe diachronically what outlook on reality is built into SFL teaching manuals, particularly with regard to the link between linguistic markers of gender as a grammatical category, but also as a sociolinguistic and cultural phenomenon.

## Methodology

We present the analysis of two editions of a textbook understood as a cultural product permeated by its situational anchoring. From an exhaustive analysis, specific areas in need of attention can be identified and forms of action can be devised that offer guidance and responses to phenomena, environments and social dynamics present inside and outside the classroom (Gutiérrez, Soler and Klee, 2021: 105). Muñoz-Basols and Hernández Muñoz propose reflective work in our area that is polycentric, polyphonic and polyhedral in its approach (Muñoz-Basols and Hernández Muñoz, 2019: 81). To this end, this work seeks to contribute to the study of gender from the contrasting and micro-diachronic points of view of two editions of an SFL textbook. Despite the importance of this representation, there seems to be a lack of studies focusing on the analysis of textbooks employed in teaching Spanish as a foreign language, from a comprehensive social and gender perspective. Therefore, we present a quantitative analysis of text, audio and images in two editions of a complete textbook (*Aula Internacional 1 Nueva Edición* (2013) and *Aula Internacional Plus 1* (2020)) conducted with the qualitative data analysis programme *Atlas.ti*.

The aim is to deepen this sociolinguistic dimension of the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language, with a particular focus on the relationship between the use of language, texts and images contained in the textbook. To this end, the critical dimension of teaching is examined. The focus is on the way in which meanings are being construed in these particular teaching materials, as the ultimate goal is to build the skills necessary to interact with others, to receive and produce texts and to be a mediator (Council of Europe, 2020).

Different variables such as gender representation (from various perspectives), gender roles, age and origin (cultural ethnicity/ethnicity) were observed, using an inductive methodology. In this case, we will focus on the representation relative to gender. The general goal is to propose an analytic model for didactic materials that considers gender when carrying out a transversal and holistic analysis. Subsequently, through the micro-diachronic comparison of two editions of the same textbook, it will also be possible to evaluate whether concrete and clearly visible changes have occurred in terms of gender representation.

This is based on a critical approach to discourse according to the frequency, quality of representation and order of appearance of relevant aspects. The

underlying assumption is that the selected corpus is ideological and *gendered*, that is, the product of a specific context and, therefore, susceptible to be analysed critically at various levels and with a focus on the multiplicity of formats, etc., from a gender perspective. The comprehensive analysis of the corpus is completed with the micro-diachronicity of the proposed approach, which is justified by the speed of the changes referred to above and the permeability of power structures when it comes to this aspect.

The starting point was to consider the textbooks as windows to the language, culture and society under examination. From this, the main or initial question was formulated: Is there gender symmetry in both textbooks? If the Spanish speaking countries have evolved in the past seven years regarding these issues, has the textbook similarly evolved in its new edition? On the basis of these questions, several research objectives were defined:

- To research whether the quality of the representativeness of women is comparable to that of men.
- To identify if there are microaggressions in the representativeness of women in the textbook.
- To critically observe if there is any diversity in the various perspectives (race, age, countries, sexuality, etc.).
- To observe the potential evolution by comparing two editions of the same textbook published ten years apart.

To achieve these aims, the textbooks mentioned above will form the corpus of the research. The goal is to build a corpus in order to carry out a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the contents, focusing on the way in which gender representativeness is expressed. To this end, the texts, audios and images of the textbooks have been analyzed and tagged inductively: in general, through an initial reading with an inductive approach. That is, an initial revision of the textbooks was conducted (in the text, the use of pronouns, and adjectives; in the images, who is shown, how they are presented, and the order in which they are presented; in drawings, how the characters look and behave, etc.). This general review was followed by a classification of the findings through the creation of tags that, in the third part of the analysis, were reorganized into categories according to variables such as male/female, order of appearance, race, age, economic status, position of power, etc.). This analysis made it possible to

deconstruct and to attempt to understand the way in which representativeness is built in the textbook under study.

This analysis enables us to infer the process of creation (whether more or less explicit) of contextualizing cultural stereotypes, linguistic usage and socio-cultural values provided to the learner, as well as the erasure of more controversial aspects of the Spanish-speaking social reality.

### The Corpus

As mentioned above, the corpus consists of the textbook *Aula Internacional 1. Nueva Edición* published in 2013 and its counterpart, *Aula Internacional Plus 1*, dated 2020. Although the name of the textbooks differs in the Plus label, the main difference is that the contents have been updated and the texts and grammar sections have been extended, with a more prominent role given to the lexical component. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this comparison, we will focus on those contents that are comparable with the 2013 edition in order to draw more reliable conclusions from the subject at hand. In addition, one of the advantages of both textbooks is that they include a section with more practical exercises, as well as a further practice grammar section at the end, which makes it more adequate to the research perspective and from a practical point of view to use this corpus composed of only two texts.

Furthermore, on the one hand, the written texts, including audios, have been analysed, as well as the images, whether photographs or drawings, taking into account the issue, especially, of gender. The data were collected both from a quantitative (tagging of elements and numerical comparison) and a qualitative (analysis of the significant and representative elements of each edition) perspective.

## Results and analysis

### Quantitative Analysis

For the quantitative analysis, it was deemed appropriate to use a tool normally intended for qualitative analysis, namely *Atlas.ti*. This software enables

the tagging or encoding of multimedia elements, leading, in turn, to an automatic analysis of the tagging carried out.

Analytical and bottom-up tagging was conducted. This form of tagging is particularly useful when the aim is to carry out a sweeping analysis of an element that can then be grouped into a larger category without losing important data about the original element. For example, when analysing the role of a woman in a conversation, it is possible to classify that conversation with the tags *woman* and *first*. Later, it is possible to simply create the tag *woman first*. That is, the more detailed the tagging process, the simpler it becomes to subsequently design a more in-depth analysis. Similarly, the tagging was carried out on various parameters such as ethnicity, explicit gender, interculturality, and age representation, among others. The goal was to create an analytic model for textbooks that can be implemented in other textbooks and for other parameters, so that the tagging work can be used for future analyses. Nevertheless, the present examination focused exclusively on issues of gender.

Figure 1: Example of tagging.



To this end, 537 tags or basic codes were created that were subsequently grouped into 30 code groups. For example, the code group *attitude* consists, in turn, of 30 codes such as *tedious*, *active*, *ambitious* or *chaotic*. Thus, it was possible to collect and analyze in a meaningful way the attitudes in which the different people present themselves when combining the tag *active* with the tag *woman*, for example. In these code groups, codes for format and textbook sections were also included in order to cross-reference the data relating to *woman* with *photography* or with *written text*. In this way, information can

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subsequently be cross-referenced to better understand whether representations of women were more numerous in photographs due to being a more explicit format where there is a conscious choice or if, on the contrary, they are less numerous in written texts due to being a more unrestricted formulation on the part of the authors.

With this coding model it is possible to create simple data cross-referencing as seen below, with the ability to group references to a particular Latin American country, and from there to compare it with references to Spain. This process shows that, as revealed in Figure 2, although the most recent textbook lends more emphasis to Latin America than its predecessor, Spain remains the most important cultural reference. Even though the difference is not statistically significant, considering the weight of native speakers in Latin America, it is still meaningful.

Figure 2: Example of cross-referencing of data from tags for Latin American countries-Spain.

	2013 2 1151	2020 Plus 2 1180	Totales
○ España 140	75 41,90 %	65 39,63 %	140 40,82 %
○ Países latinoamericanos 203	104 58,10 %	99 60,37 %	203 59,18 %
<b>Totales</b>	<b>179</b> 100 %	<b>164</b> 100 %	<b>343</b> 100 %

With these tools, a comparison was established from various perspectives. Firstly, the overall man-to-woman representativeness was compared. That is, generally, and taking into account all the formats in the corpus (written text, images, drawings and audio), the percentage of global appearances was studied. The resulting data show that women are more present in the older edition (50.36%) while in the new edition this percentage decreases to 47.35%. As can be seen, these percentual differences are not significant.

When data on the presence of gender in different formats such as written texts, photographs and drawings are cross-referenced, the following results are obtained:

Chart 1: General Man-to-Woman representativeness.

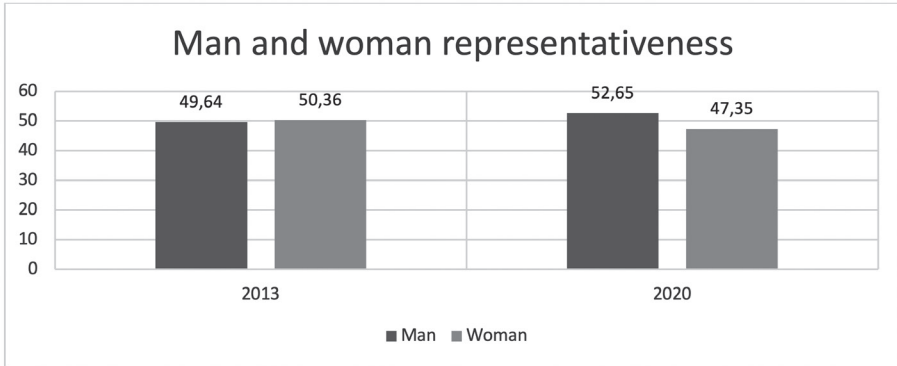


Chart 2: Representation by Gender and Format.

	EDITION	MAN (%)	WOMAN (%)	DIFF. WOMAN (%)
PHOTOGRAPHS	2013	45.00	55.00	10.00
	2020	38.29	61.71	23.43
WRITTEN TEXT	2013	50.72	49.28	-1.44
	2020	52.36	47.64	-4.71
DRAWINGS	2013	56.03	43.97	-12.07
	2020	54.20	45.80	-8.40

It can be observed with this indicator that appearances in photographs evolve positively for women (23.43% higher in the new edition). On the other hand, both in the written text and in the drawings, this percentage is less significant, maintaining its level of incidence. This element is particularly significant because it can be assumed that the choice of photographs is more conscious, in the sense that there is someone who makes this selection and, therefore, whether the representations are of women or of men. It can be observed that in the 2020 edition there is a clear tendency to further increase the level of female representativeness.

In this sense, it was also interesting to observe the differences from a group perspective. Namely, the proportion in which both genders were present in group representations. The underlying assumption here being that when a single gender is represented in a group or appears in greater numbers, it is being

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represented as being more powerful than the other. As such, the following results were obtained, as shown in Chart 3.

Chart 3: Gender by Group of People.

<b>GROUPS</b>	<b>2013 (%)</b>	<b>2020 (%)</b>	<b>DIFF. WOMAN (%)</b>
<b>MEN ONLY</b>	29.41	16.42	-12.99
<b>WOMEN ONLY</b>	50.00	26.87	-23.13
<b>EQUAL NUMBERS</b>	5.88	31.34	25.46
<b>MORE MEN</b>	8.82	10.45	1.62
<b>MORE WOMEN</b>	5.88	14.93	9.04

The decision-making in the most recent textbook is significantly increased in the preference for groups of people where both genders are equally represented. In this regard, there is a 25.46% increase in images in which the number of women and men is equivalent.

It can thus be seen how an apparently subtle aspect reveals itself to be of great importance to better understand the way in which gender representation is construed in the textbook. Following this reasoning, attention was also paid to the order of appearance in conversations that take place both in written texts and in images. The fact that a member of one gender begins the conversation implies that they assume an active and superior role in the communicative situation which, in principle, gives them more power. This indicator, as well as other indicators observed, do not imply an explicit decision on the granting of this role, but may reflect less conscious actions and beliefs. As we can see in Chart 4, the active role in the conversation is, in both textbooks, a lot more prevalent for men, with a difference of 11% and 9% fewer beginnings of the conversation for women.

Chart 4: Order in Which Speakers Take Part in a Conversation

	<b>MAN FIRST (%)</b>	<b>WOMAN FIRST (%)</b>	<b>WOMAN DIFF (%)</b>
<b>2013</b>	55.56	44.44	-11.11
<b>2020</b>	54.55	45.45	-9.09

In addition to the hierarchy in conversations, the use of explicit tools for equal representativeness and inclusive language such as lexical split by gender, neutral structures, choice of female words or inversion of traditional roles was equally analysed. A very important shift was observed in the 2020 textbook, in which the results are clearly favourable to this representativeness – a good indicator of the efforts to render the textbook more inclusive.

Chart 5: Explicit Inclusive Language Tools.

	2013	2020
<b>DOUBLE MENTION</b>	4	123
<b>FEMINIZED</b>	0	11
<b>NEUTRAL STRUCTURES</b>	0	22
<b>INVERTED ROLE</b>	0	14

In this regard, the 2020 textbook makes a clear commitment to the use of lexical split by gender structures such as *compañero/a* (colleague), *profesor/a* (professor, teacher) while in the 2013 manual only four such structures are observed. There is equally an attempt to select professions with female declinations such as *jueza* (judge), *cirujana* (surgeon) or *científica* (scientist) when mentioning these professions. The use of neutral structures (*alumnado* (student body) instead of *alumnus* (students), *las otras personas de la clase* (the other people in the class) instead of *compañeros* or the inversion of traditional roles such as *secretario* (secretary), *taxista* (taxi driver) or *comercial* (both represented in the text as women).

Finally, it is worth highlighting a rare but very significant presence. Only two same-sex relationships involving women appear in the 2020 textbook. Although in the 2013 manual no explicitly gay relationship appeared – this small addition representing an advance in the LGTQB+ representativeness in Spanish textbooks – it remains curious that these feature women only and are relatively hidden away in small exercises in the textbook. It should be highlighted that these explicit relationships are accompanied by photographs of a couple, in one case and, in another, of one of the partners in the couple.

## Qualitative Analysis

Turning now to a qualitative analysis, it is clear that, despite the fact that the 2020 manual is more inclusive in relation to gender, it has clearly opted for a much greater diversity not only in terms of gender but also from a multicultural, perspective.

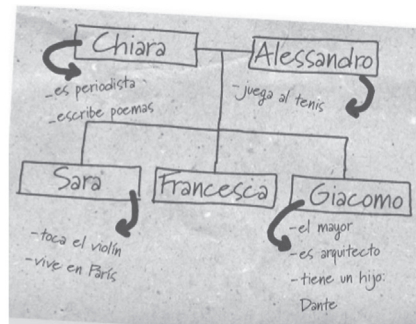
However, some elements continue to be featured which give men a superior position, such as the use, by default, of the generic form (from a linguistic point of view) which coincides with the masculine in the examples, as can be seen in the following image.

Figure 3: Preferential use of male forms in examples.

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
<b>1.ª persona</b>	yo	nosotros / nosotras
<b>2.ª persona</b>	tú, vos, usted*	vosotros / vosotras, ustedes*
<b>3.ª persona</b>	él / ella	ellos / ellas

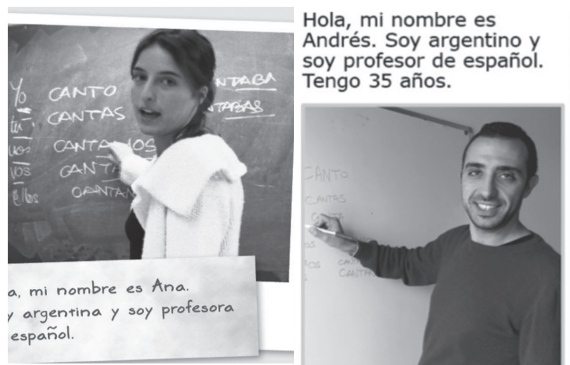
Similarly, it is possible to observe how, in some classical elements, men continue to occupy a predominant role in the situational structure by being placed graphically above and to the right on quite a few occasions. This preference position is well known as Gutenberg Diagram or Z pattern in the image preference studies field (Hernandez & Resnick, 2013). However, an awareness of this fact can be identified in the 2020 manual, with images such as the following, where the preferential placement is given to the woman.

Figure 4: Visually preferential location occupied by a woman.



On the other hand, when comparing both editions, it was observed that many of the activities with images have been kept, but that the images have been replaced to give more prominence to the female gender or to swap traditional roles (see Lacalle & Gómez, 2016 or De la Cruz, 2002) in Spain and Latin-America, as can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5: In the 2013 edition, the teacher is an Argentinian woman (left image). In the 2020 version the nationality has been kept, but the teacher is a man (right image).



Similarly, although there is a clear tendency to use inclusive language, particularly in the use of lexical split by gender with complete coherence, since formulas such as *compañeros/as* are used on many occasions as we can see in the chart 5 comparison.

Chart 6: Number of occurrences of words related to ‘compañero’ (Colleague/partner).

	2013	2020
<b>Compañera</b>	0	1
<b>Compañeras</b>	0	0
<b>Compañero</b>	67	3
<b>Compañeros</b>	50	5
<b>Compañeros/as</b>	0	43

Finally, the evolution of the 2020 textbook also shows a tendency to avoid gender or race stereotypes. As an example, the 2013 manual (p.109) included an exercise in which a woman was in love with two men and had to choose between them. One of the men was romantic and sensitive, while the other

was an engineer and formal. In the 2020 edition this exercise was changed and now the woman has to choose between roommates (p. 128). The selection between romantic or formal love perspective has changed and now she had to make a convenient decision to share the flat not from the stereotype romantic woman point of view, but from the objective decision. This change may be very significant from the perspective of correcting or improving stereotyped images in relation to certain issues or circumstances traditionally confined to women.

### Discussion of Results

Considering the quantitative data, it is possible to discuss the scope in matters of representativeness regarding the two textbooks. On the one hand, both textbooks seem to foreground gender equality and its representativeness as the picture case or implicit as the text cases. Nevertheless, the 2020 edition displays a clear shift, with formal editorial decisions regarding the inclusion of women, not only in terms of number of appearances, but also in terms of the quality of these appearances. In the 2020 edition, women are shown in more active roles, of more diverse origins and more diverse professions. On the other hand, in other aspects, such as non-binary relationships, representativeness is absent. In this edition women are represented as being completely equal to men not only from a legal perspective but also from an active and diverse role perspective in society. Women may hold the same positions and jobs as those traditionally held by men, such as judges or surgeons. In this sense, it is quite evident that the changes in this manual meet the social changes in Spain and Latin America.

Nevertheless, an egalitarian representative place for women in textbooks is still far from perfect. We observed that there is room for improvement in less explicit aspects, such as written texts, the inclusion of contexts in which women have a more active role in a position of power (not only with examples, but in the description of situations), and in apportioning an equitable role in the incidence of personal pronouns, such as beginning the verbal paradigm tables with 'she' instead of always beginning with 'he'.

In answer to the questions that were raised at the beginning of this text, we can say that the representation of women has led to a significant, comparable increase, particularly in some aspects, such as the number of appearances,

which has surpassed that of men. Similarly, some aspects observed can still be improved on in order to avoid some types of microaggression like the position, the order of appearance or even the role of power in a situation (even if these are implicit or unintentional). As such, we can deduce that at no point are they conscious and that those that exist are possibly the response to an unconscious cultural continuum on the part of the authors and editors of the manual. Thus, we were able to identify an editorial effort towards the inclusion and clear management of aspects related not only to gender, but also to ethnicity, multiculturalism and sexual diversity. As the *Editorial Difusión* representants wrote to the authors in a personal email communication “(...) it is undeniable that in recent years there has been more sensitivity to issues related to inclusive language and diversity. We have found that many people who use this collection wanted to see various realities represented and we have tried to do so.” (Murillo, N. & Berja, A., personal communication, November 16, 2022)

Given the above observations, it can be affirmed, based on the micro-diachronic progression of the textbook, that there is a clear intention to represent the evolution of Spanish-speaking societies regarding gender-based integration.

## Conclusions

After this analysis, in which aspects such as the role of a textbook in the representativeness of not only linguistic but also cultural elements of the societies it represents have been taken into consideration, we can state that, although there is still a long way to go for gender equality in societies to be comparable to legal equality, the example of this textbook shows that it is possible to create materials for the teaching and learning of languages in an way that is integrated and balanced with the society and culture of the language studied.

The role of publishing houses and, in this case, of *Editorial Difusión*, is fundamental to foster in learners a more enriched imagination, one in which women can be represented on an equal footing, thus contributing to create awareness that allows students in general to critically and consciously face the challenges that their society imposes on them. Thus, this manual offers a good basis to help teachers teach and transmit to foreign learners values of

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democracy and equality discussed daily in Spanish-speaking societies – the very societies these learners are seeking to become closer to through studying the language.

However, there are elements that require more risk-taking on the part of publishers, such as a more accentuated and prolific appearance of sexual diversity, of multi-cultural questioning and criticism, of widely prevalent and generally unfavourable conditions which are often silenced in language learning textbooks, such as poverty, unemployment or inequality in general. This is a common ailment of large publishing houses: the tendency to present the culture and society as one of high economic resources, fun, and free of any major complications or difficulties. It seems as if sometimes a kind of aseptic culture is presented, devoid of any serious problems among its many elements. However, hiding the problems or avoiding their questioning will not make them disappear or keep learners from facing them when they come into contact with the palpable reality of that culture. Therefore, providing students with the necessary skills to perform properly in real situations will help them to understand them better and to be able to react more adequately.

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## **2. Changing Norms: System and Evolution in Modern European Languages**

# Gender-fair language in German – current tendencies and problems

Gabriele Diewald\*

## Abstract

The paper outlines the linguistic system of German as a grammatical gender language in terms of its structural possibilities and restrictions on gender-fair language use. A survey of traditional means of attaining gender-fair language is presented, as well as controversial forms, in particular nominalised participles and neographies like the gender star. Normative and controversial issues, currently raised in public, are taken up, in particular the question whether German is comparable to English in terms of the preferred method of gender-fair language usage. It is argued that the so-called generic masculine in German (e.g. *der Lehrer*) is not a gender-neutral form, and that its simple equation with gender-neutral person names in English (e.g. *the teacher*) has to be refuted on linguistic grounds.

**Keywords:** Grammatical gender language, genus, current usage, conversion of participles, generic masculine, neographies, comparison of German and English.

## Introduction

In Germany, the public debate on gender-fair language and its function in establishing social justice has recently flared up again. Regarded from a linguistic point of view, i.e. a perspective that takes language as its primary focus, it seems important to assess the various structural (morphological, syntactic) and semantic (lexical) possibilities of German. This concerns their flexibility in terms

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of creating new, more gender-fair means of expression, the conditions of their practical implementation, and normative issues.

The paper provides a survey of the linguistic make-up of German in the field of person names, and the impact of grammatical gender and word formation on various options for achieving gender-fair person reference (sections 1 and 2). It reports on trends in current usage and on controversial issues (section 3), and puts forward arguments for the refutation of the suggestion to revive the so-called generic masculine as an allegedly gender-neutral form in German by drawing misleading analogies to English person names (section 4).<sup>62</sup>

### 1. Basic notions

When investigating gender and language as well as aspects of gender-fair language use, it is essential to keep in mind the following four layers (cf. Bußmann & Hellinger, 2003):

- Biological gender (sex, referential gender)
- Social gender (gender)
- Lexical gender (semantic gender)
- Grammatical gender (German *Genus*).

Biological gender is prototypically fixed with birth, and prototypically expressed as a binary opposition between female and male. However, as known and expectable in prototypical phenomena, both assertions do not always hold. This knowledge has become legally relevant in the case of the German language, since the German parliament (on December 14, 2018) decided to introduce a so-called “third option,” i.e. a third positive entry concerning sex in the birth register. This is the entry *divers* (‘diverse’), which now is available next to the entries *männlich* (‘male’), *weiblich* (‘female’) and *ohne Angaben* (‘without details’).

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<sup>62</sup> I use the term “gender-fair” as a cover term, while “gender-neutral” is reserved for those linguistic forms that do not carry semantic features of gender distinctions, i.e. form designating a person, independent of gender categories. For the complexities of terminological issues, which are not just terminological ones, up to 2017 see Wetschanow (2017). Presently (December 2022), lively discussions about those issues are conducted in various media.

This decision marks the abandonment of the unquestioned binary gender concept which prevailed in society as well as in legislation before, and it reflects the state and importance of the current debate on gender and its expression in human beings. Thus, this change can be regarded as a historic step away from the traditional order, which has rested on the contention that gender is strictly binary and that there is no space for concepts beyond the two gender categories male and female. However, it has to be called into question, whether this development likewise, and more or less automatically, promotes and supports another change, namely, the abandonment of the second traditional belief, the centerpiece of the patriarchic order. It is the belief that there is a “natural” hierarchy among the sexes, with the male being the more important or principal one, and the female being less important, secondary, even inferior.

This deeply entrenched belief, which has been dubbed “male as norm” (MAN) and which has fundamentally structured our lives and languages for a very long time, is not necessarily discarded by the introduction of a “third option.” On the contrary, as ongoing debates show, the complications arising from the new, non-binary gender order and the difficulties encountered in its linguistic expression can be used and are used as an argument to defend traditional concepts as well as traditional linguistic usages and habits (cf. section 3).

As far as the linguistic side of this issue, i.e. the naming of individuals falling into the category *divers*, is concerned, German does pose a problem indeed. There is a naming gap for the third option: *divers* is not a designation for persons, but an adjective with a fairly broad and general meaning. Nevertheless, it came out as the lowest common denominator in the discussion on how the new category should be named at all. There are no basic lexemes (simplex nouns) for the third option, in analogy to *Mann*, *Frau*, *Bruder*, *Schwester*, *Tante*, *Onkel* (‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘brother’, ‘sister’, ‘aunt’, ‘uncle’), etc. in the German language. Neither is there a process of word formation – derivation or composition – which could be used for that purpose in potential analogy to the feminine movation (*Femininmovierung*) by the derivative suffix *-in* as in *Lehrer* – *Lehrerin* (‘male teacher’ – ‘female teacher’) or to compounding as in *Feuerwehrmann* – *Feuerwehrfrau* (‘male firefighter’ – ‘female firefighter’). The demand for the designation of persons not falling into one of the binary gender categories does not seem to have been a matter of great importance in history. This has changed, and many attempts at solving this problem have

been made, the most successful and wide-spread one being the introduction of diacritic signs like the gender star (*Lehrer\*in*), the gender gap (*Lehrer\_in*) and others. Section 3 takes up these attempts. Here, it is enough to state that the German language so far has not provided an inventory of expressions for non-binary persons.

The second layer, social gender, is defined Bußmann & Hellinger (2003: 149) as follows:

“Social gender has to do with stereotypical assumptions about what are appropriate social roles for women and men, including expectations about who will be a typical member of the class of, say, ‘pilot’, or ‘nurse’.”

Biological gender and social gender are not the focus of this paper. To summarise, it may be stated that these two layers exist – in principle – prior to and independently of language. Phenomena on both layers exist in human society, no matter what linguistic means are available for their expression in a particular language.

The remaining two layers, lexical gender (= semantic gender) and grammatical gender (German *Genus*), are linguistic issues, and they are strictly dependent on the linguistic system in question. Lexical gender is defined by Bußmann & Hellinger (2003: 147) as relating “to the property of non-linguistic maleness or femaleness as encoded in a noun’s lexical meaning. Thus, terms may be lexically marked as female-specific or male-specific.” In the languages of the world, lexical gender is ubiquitous as every language provides lexical items encoding the opposition between female and male for the designation of human (and some other animate) referents.

The fourth layer, grammatical gender, is found only in a fraction of languages. In typological studies, languages are divided into three categories in terms of the way they make use of gender distinctions in their linguistic structure: (i) genderless languages, (ii) natural gender languages and (iii) grammatical gender languages. Following Corbett (2013) in Chapter 32 of the *World Atlas of Language Structure*, the three systems of gender assignment can be described as follows:<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. <https://wals.info/chapter/32> (accessed on December 18, 2022).

(i) Genderless languages (no gender system):

In genderless languages like Finnish or Turkish, gender is expressed lexically (e.g. in words such as *man*, *woman*) or by attributes such as *female*, *male*. There is no grammatically expressed obligatory marking of gender via morphological processes. The expression of gendered distinctions is accomplished on the lexical level by the choice of appropriate lexemes, or by syntactic and pragmatic means.

(ii) Natural gender languages (semantic assignment):

Languages like English and Danish are classified as natural gender languages. There is no grammatical (morphological) gender marking in nouns, but some pronominal categories obligatorily express gender. In English personal pronouns, for example, there is a tripartite semantic distinction of 'male', 'female', and 'neuter' in the singular (*he*, *she*, *it*), with gender neutrality in the plural (*they*). The choice of pronouns to refer to persons is made on the basis of biological and/or social gender.

(iii) Grammatical gender languages (semantic and formal assignment):

German, French, Spanish, Polish, and Russian are examples of grammatical gender languages. In these languages, nominal categories typically show obligatory morphological (and/or phonological) marking of grammatical gender oppositions. The German paradigm of grammatical gender distinguishes three categories. In nouns, the assignment to one of the three categories is lexically inherent, i.e. fixed. It is – in principle – independent of meaning, as illustrated in the following examples: MASCULINE ((*der*) *Löffel* '(the) spoon') / FEMININE ((*die*) *Gabel* '(the) fork') / NEUTER ((*das*) *Messer* '(the) knife'). In the plural, the grammatical gender opposition is neutralised: (*die*) *Löffel* ('(the) spoons'), (*die*) *Gabeln* ('(the) forks'), (*die*) *Messer* ('(the) knives').

In contrast to a widespread assumption, there is no causal connection between a language's membership in one of the three gender assignment types and the amount of gender consciousness and fairness in the societies speaking that language. Gender stereotypes arise independent of language type. However, (i) gender stereotypes are strengthened when supported by a corresponding language use, and (ii) genderless languages and semantic gender languages are easier to adapt to gender-fair usage than grammatical gender languages (cf. Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser, 2016).

## 2. Grammatical gender in German

Not only does German belong to the group of grammatical gender languages, it also has the property of expressing the grammatical gender category (*Genus*) consistently and prominently in nominal phrases in the singular. The following section gives a brief survey of the most important features of the grammatical gender system of German.

As mentioned above, German grammatical gender has a tripartite opposition in the singular between masculine, feminine, and neuter. In nouns, grammatical gender is lexically inherent, which means that each noun, irrespective of semantic specifications such as ‘abstract’ or ‘concrete’, ‘inanimate’ or ‘animate’, falls into one of the three gender categories. Most importantly, the three grammatical genders do not have independent referential meaning distinctions. The following table presents some examples illustrating the fact that all three genders are found in any of the broad semantic domains mentioned:

Table 1. Grammatical gender distribution in nouns of different semantic domains.

	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER
Inanimate & Concrete	<i>der Löffel</i>	<i>die Gabel</i>	<i>das Messer</i>
	‘the spoon’	‘the fork’	‘the knife’
Inanimate & Abstract	<i>der Glaube</i>	<i>die Liebe</i>	<i>das Glück</i>
	‘the belief’	‘the love’	‘the happiness’
Animate & Concrete	<i>der Käfer</i>	<i>die Schlange</i>	<i>das Kind</i>
	‘the beetle’	‘the snake’	‘the child’
Animate & Abstract/Collective	<i>der Klan</i>	<i>die Gesellschaft</i>	<i>das Volk</i>
	‘the clan’	‘the society’	‘the people’

All other nominal word classes expressing grammatical gender (pronouns, determiners and adjectives) do not have inherent gender, but differential gender. Gender assignment is steered by syntactic or semantic concord or by the non-linguistic, situational context (which might be called “referential concord”). The following examples show grammatical gender concord within the noun phrase (definite or indefinite article & attributive adjective & head noun) and in pronominal anaphoric uptake in the next sentence:

MASCULINE:

*Der silberne/Ein silberner Löffel liegt auf dem Tisch. Er glänzt frisch poliert.*

‘The/A silver spoon lies on the table. It gleams freshly polished.’

FEMININE:

*Die silberne/ Eine silberne Gabel liegt auf dem Tisch. Sie glänzt frisch poliert.*

‘The/A silver fork lies on the table. It gleams freshly polished.’

NEUTER:

*Das silberne/ Ein silbernes Messer liegt auf dem Tisch. Es glänzt frisch poliert.*

‘The/A silver knife lies on the table. It gleams freshly polished.’

As the lexemes in table 1 illustrate, the rules for gender assignment are more or less arbitrary, unsystematic, and independent of lexical meaning. Although this arbitrariness is the basic line of the German grammatical gender system, there are areas showing partial motivation of grammatical gender assignment. The factors steering it are found in phonology, syllable structure, derivative morphology, and in some specific semantic fields (Köpcke & Zubin, 1984, 1994, 2009). While these rules apply locally and with exceptions of various kinds, there is one semantic domain that shows an almost one hundred percent correlation between grammatical and lexical (biological) gender. These are person names (cf. Kotthoff & Nübling, 2018; Nübling, 2020). Here, the rule of semantic arbitrariness of grammatical gender assignment does not hold. Table 2 illustrates the strong correlation between grammatical gender and lexical gender in nominal items referring to persons (and some higher animals).

Table 2. Correlation of grammatical gender and lexical gender in person names.

	Person names
Masculine & Male	<i>der Mann</i> ('the man'), <i>der Sohn</i> ('the son'), <i>der Bruder</i> ('the brother'), <i>der Onkel</i> ('the uncle')
Feminine & Female	<i>die Frau</i> ('the woman'), <i>die Tochter</i> ('the daughter'), <i>die Schwester</i> ('the sister'), <i>die Tante</i> ('the aunt')

MASCULINE correlates with the semantic feature ‘male’ as in *der Mann* ('the man'), *der Sohn* ('the son'), *der Bruder* ('the brother'), *der Onkel* ('the uncle'). Feminine correlates with the semantic feature ‘female’ as in *die Frau* ('the

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woman'), *die Tochter* ('the daughter'), *die Schwester* ('the sister'), *die Tante* ('the aunt'). This principle is called the "Genus-Sexus-Prinzip" (Diewald & Nübling, 2022: 6) or the natural gender principle ("das natürliche Geschlechtsprinzip," in Köpcke & Zubin, 1984: 28).

Neuter is associated with inanimate entities, or immature members of animate beings. Therefore, neuter cannot be used to build expressions for a third option in social gender concepts. Taking up observations in Kotthoff & Nübling (2018: 15), Diewald & Steinhauer (2022: 58f.) state

"dass das Deutsche, obwohl es ja drei grammatische Genusklassen hat, bei den Personenbezeichnungen durch das grammatische Genussystem (und durch weitere sprachliche Regeln) eine binäre Geschlechterordnung in die Sprache eingeschrieben hat."

[‘that German, though equipped with three grammatical gender classes, in its grammatical gender system (and by further linguistic rules) encodes a binary gender order in person names.’]

**Hybrid nouns.** Exceptions to the correlation between grammatical and lexical gender are the so-called hybrid nouns. These are person names with an obvious mismatch of grammatical gender and lexical gender. This mismatch receives secondary motivation by expressing some type of additional meaning, usually with a subjective-evaluative stance (cf. "Genus-Sexus-Diskordanz" in Diewald & Nübling (2022: 6) and in Nübling (2020)). This is illustrated in table 3:

Table 3. Hybrid nouns.

Grammatical gender → Lexical gender ↓	MASCULINE	FEMININE	NEUTER
'Female'	<i>der Vamp</i> 'the vamp'		<i>das Weib</i> 'the woman' <i>das Mädchen</i> 'the girl'
'Male'		<i>die Memme</i> 'the sissy'	<i>das Männlein</i> the little man'

**Epicene nouns.** Although the binary gender concept is pervasive in German even in its mismatches, there are person names which are semantically neutral as to gender categories (epicene nouns). In such cases, there is no

lexical gender feature assigned. But of course, these nouns, as every noun in German, do carry inherent grammatical gender steering the concord rules. Epicene nouns are found in all three grammatical gender categories, as table 4 illustrates: Nouns like *der Mensch* ‘the human being’ combine the grammatical gender masculine with lexically gender-neutral meaning; nouns like *die Person* ‘the person’ have feminine grammatical gender and are lexically gender-neutral; and nouns like *das Kind* ‘child’ are grammatically neuter and lexically gender-neutral.

Table 4. Epicene nouns.

Grammatical gender	Lexical gender	Example
MASCULINE	∅	<i>der Mensch</i> ‘the human being’
FEMININE	∅	<i>die Person</i> ‘the person’
NEUTER	∅	<i>das Kind</i> ‘the child’

**Word formation.** Beyond the extensive marking of grammatical and lexical gender in basic lexemes, there are word formation rules allowing for the creation of an infinite number of gender-specific person names in German. The first one is the derivation by means of the feminine suffix *-in*, the second one is conversion, i.e. a change of word class without the addition of morphological indicators. Both need to be quickly sketched out here.

The word formation rule of feminine movation is highly productive in German. The derivational suffix *-in* is added to a grammatically masculine, lexically male person name to create a grammatically feminine, lexically female person name. This derivational rule is extremely versatile and applies to germanic as well as to loan words (cf. Doleschal, 1992). Examples are:

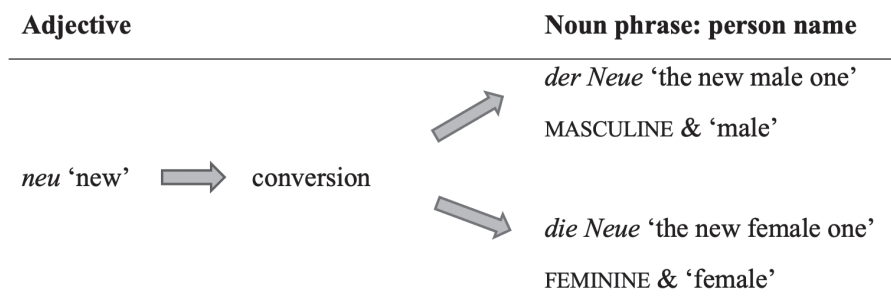
<i>Lehrer</i> – <i>Lehrerin</i>	‘male teacher’ – ‘female teacher’
<i>Student</i> – <i>Studentin</i>	‘male student’ – ‘female student’
<i>Autor</i> – <i>Autorin</i>	‘male author’ – ‘female author’

Not only is this derivational rule highly productive, it is – in contrast to analogous derivational options in other languages (e.g. Russian) – not obviously derogatory in meaning.

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The second highly productive means of word formation available for the creation of gender specific person names is the conversion of adjectives into nouns. An adjective like *neu* 'new' can be converted into a person name, whereby the masculine singular results in a semantically male person name, and the feminine singular in a semantically female person name; cf. figure 1.

Figure 1. Adjective conversion.



As adjectives have variable gender (differential gender), there is no inherent lexical (or grammatical) gender assignment in the derived nouns. Nouns, however, must have a grammatical gender feature assigned in the singular, which typically becomes visible via inflectional morphology in the determiner (and in some cases in the noun): *der Neue* 'the male new one' – *die Neue* 'the female new one', and, with indefinite article: *ein Neuer* 'a male new one' – *eine Neue* 'a female new one'.

The two options for converted person names constitute a strict paradigm, where one of the two paradigm members has to be chosen. Neither is there a third choice, nor is there the possibility of not choosing. The question then is, where does the decision for one member instead of the other come from? It comes either from the linguistic or from the non-linguistic, situational context (i.e. the gender of the referenced person). At this point in the grammar of German, biological gender is directly reflected in grammatical gender. As Bußmann & Hellinger (2003: 150) state: "German may use grammatical gender to make referential gender explicit or overt."

In the plural, of course, converted nouns, too, are gender-neutral in terms of grammatical and lexical gender.

The process of conversion from adjective to noun in order to create person names does not stop at original adjectives, but is also productive in erstwhile

participles (Elmiger, this volume, 114 f.). The following examples show person names from the participle I (present participle) and the participle II (past participle):

Participle I: *reisend* 'travelling' (from the verb *reisen* 'travel') > *der Reisende* 'the male traveller' – *die Reisende* 'the female traveller'

Participle II: *abgeordnet* 'delegated' (from the verb *abordnen* 'delegate') > *der Abgeordnete* 'the male delegate' – *die Abgeordnete* 'the female delegate'.

The conversion of adjectives and of the two participles is a regular process in line with the rules of German grammar. Due to recent efforts for gender-fair language, the conversion of participles has gained importance, and a large number of new person names have been created in addition to the ones that had been lexicalised before. This brings us to the next section.

### 3. Gender-fair language: inventory, current practice and normative issues

German has a broad array of means for expressing gender in person names. This section presents a list of the major techniques. Basically, all of them can be assigned to one of the three principles: specification – neutralisation – avoidance.

**Specification.** The most frequently used means of specification is the symmetrical juxtaposition of feminine and masculine forms (pair forms) as in *die Patientinnen und Patienten* ('the patientsf pl and the patientsm pl'). In addition, there are several kinds of abbreviations carrying the same meaning: These are, the forward slash (*die Patientin/-innen* 'the patientsm/f pl') and the bracket as in *die Patient(inn)en* ('the patientsm (f) pl'). As the use of brackets quickly acquired the connotation of being sexist because of adding the female form as a kind of afterthought, this method has mostly fallen out of use (cf. Diewald & Steinhauer, 2022: 126). Another type of abbreviation is the use of the capital *I* inside the person name, such as *die PatientInnen* ('the patientsf (m) pl'). Here, the feminine and masculine lexemes are merged. Some favour this form as an approximation to a potential "generic feminine," i.e. a gender-neutral form.

Another option of specification is the use of compounds ending in *-mann* or *-frau* as in *Feuerwehrfrau/-mann* ('female firefighter'/'male firefighter').

**Neutralisation.** Neutralisation is accomplished by gender-neutral compounds with *-person* ('person') such as *Ansprechperson* ('contact person'), or with *-kraft* ('force') as in *Fachkraft* ('specialist', 'specialised staff').

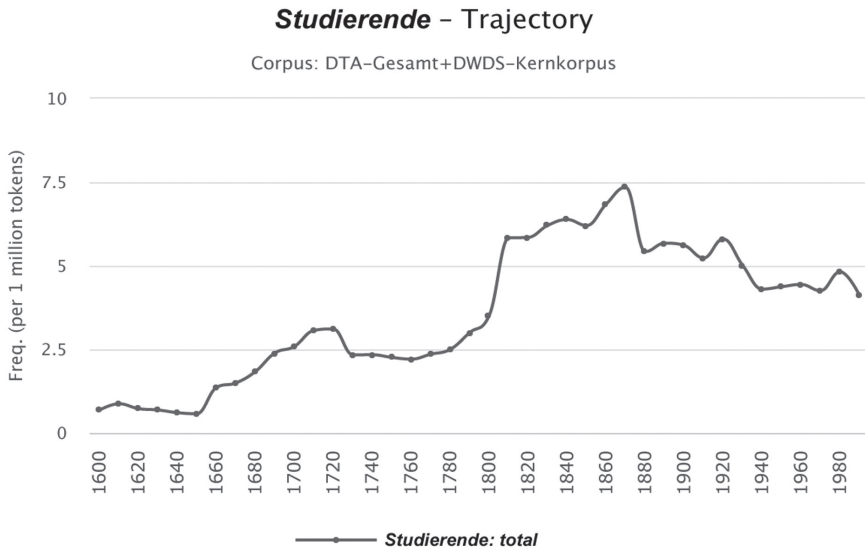
Gender-neutral nouns (epicene nouns) such as *der Mensch* ('the human being'), *die Person* ('the person'), *das Kind* ('the child') provide a further source for neutral person names (cf. Gabriel, Gyga & Kuhn, 2018). The same is true of collective nouns, like *das Paar* ('the couple'), *das Personal* ('the staff'), and compositions with *-leute* (plurale tantum), such as *Feuerwehrlaute* ('firepersons').

The most effective and productive technique for creating neutral person names is the conversion (nominalisation) of adjectives (*die Kranken*) and present and past participles (participle I *die Reisenden* and participle II *die Abgeordneten*) in their plural use (cf. section 2).

The Participle I, in particular, which has proved extremely productive for gender-neutral forms, has been criticised as grammatically and semantically wrong, and it has been claimed that participle forms as person names are new and erroneous word formations. This claim, however, is contradicted not only by a large number of lexicalised participle I-based person names in present-day German (*die Vorsitzenden* 'the chairpersons', *die Alleinerziehenden* 'the single parents', *die Arbeitssuchenden* 'the job seekers', etc.), but also by diachronic evidence. The person name *die Studierenden* ('the students'), which is converted from a participle I, for example, can be traced back to the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This is shown in figure 2, created from the DWDS diachronic corpus, displaying word frequencies between 1600 and 1999.

Figure 2 shows that the nominalised participle I, meaning 'person enrolled at a university', is documented as early as around 1600, had a peak in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and has remained in the language ever since. As Zimmer [forthc.] shows, the frequencies of *Studierende* and other nominalised present participles have been rising (steeply) during the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (also cf. Elmiger, 2011).

Figure 2. Word frequency of the nominalised participle I *Studierende* between 1600 and 1999, DWDS<sup>64</sup>.



The increasing use of present participles in the plural as a means of gender-neutral person reference is also documented in the corpus study undertaken by the *Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung* (Council for German Orthography), the institution supervising the development of orthography in German speaking countries.<sup>65</sup> It is a major political actor for the ratification of orthographic conventions in the educational and administrative systems of the member states. The corpus study is intended to provide empirical evidence for decisions concerning orthographic norms and covers various aspects of gender-fair language usage.<sup>66</sup>

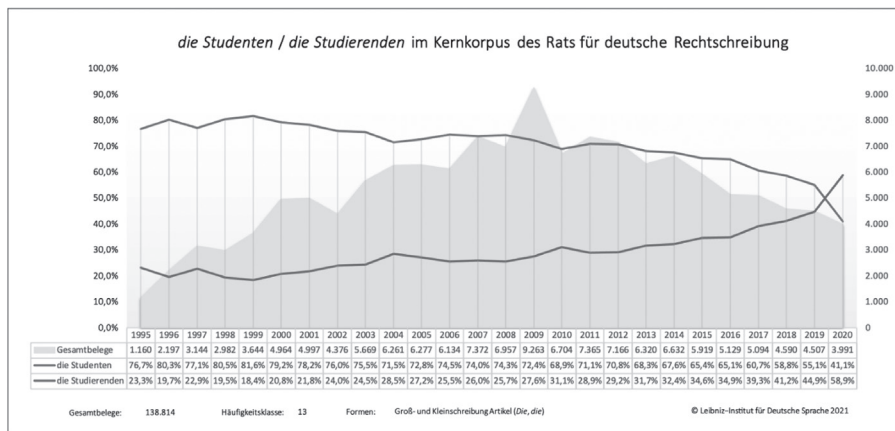
Figure 3 presents the result of the corpus study concerning the rise in frequency of the participle I *die Studierende* in competition with the so-called generic masculine (*die Studenten*).

<sup>64</sup> DWDS: word history curve for *Studierende* created by the Digital Dictionary of the German Language [Cf.: <https://www.dwds.de/r/plot/?view=3&corpus=dtg%2Bdwds&norm=date%2Bclass&s%2Bsmooth=spline&genres=0&grand=1&slice=10&prune=0&window=3&wbase=0&logavg=0&logscale=0&xrange=1600%3A1999&q1=Studierende> (accessed on August 3, 2023).]

<sup>65</sup> For details cf. <https://www.rechtschreibrat.com/> (accessed on December 18, 2022).

<sup>66</sup> The study is based on the *Ratskernkorpus* (core corpus of the council), which contains written texts from newspapers and journals.

Figure 3. Frequency of the items *die Studenten* and *die Studierenden* [by courtesy of the Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung, Leibniz Institut für deutsche Sprache]<sup>67</sup>.



The chart delineates the rise of the converted participle I (*die Studierenden*) in parallel to the decline of the so-called generic masculine, i.e. *die Studenten*. Only recently, between 2019 and 2020, the masculine form was outnumbered by the participle in terms of token frequency in that corpus.

**Pragmatic means of neutralisation.** On the pragmatic level, there is a further means of addressing persons in a gender-neutral way. It is the use of personal pronouns of the first and second person. All of them are gender-neutral, and second person pronouns easily substitute third person pronouns, which are not gender neutral, in a large number of formal written text types, e.g. announcements, instructions, etc. An example is: *Bitte unterschreiben Sie hier* ('Please sign here'). Using the direct address has the additional effect of introducing a more personal note into discourse (see Diwald & Steinhauer, 2022: 137).

**Avoidance.** There is also a number of techniques not directly bound to person names that can be used for gender-fair language. They may be summarised under the heading of avoidance (of the explicit mentioning of persons). This technique is more diffuse and difficult to describe as it rests on the capacity

<sup>67</sup> The original text in this figure could not be changed. Here is the translation of relevant text segments: *die Studenten / die Studierenden im Kernkorpus des Rats für deutsche Rechtschreibung*: 'die Studenten / die Studierenden in the core corpus of the Council for German Orthography'; *Gesamtbelege*: 'sum total of instances'; *Häufigkeitsklasse* 'frequency class'; *Formen*: *Groß- und Kleinschreibung Artikel (Die/die)*: 'forms: upper and lower case article (Die/die)'.

to (re-)formulate freely in order to produce statements that express what needs to be expressed without directly mentioning the involved human participants.

Avoidance can be achieved by rhetorical devices like metaphor or metonymy. Thus, metonymies such as *das Ministerium* ('the ministry'), *eine zuverlässige Quelle* ('a reliable source') can be used instead of person names.

Syntactic periphrasis is the most sophisticated means of avoidance. Very common are so-called modal infinitive constructions, like *Der Antrag ist schriftlich einzureichen* ('The application shall be submitted in writing'), and passive constructions, like *Der Gutschein kann jederzeit eingelöst werden* ('The voucher can be redeemed at any time').

All of the above methods are components of the known, traditional rules of German. The following ones are current attempts at broadening the range of gender-neutral person names by the introduction of diacritic signs. I call them neographies; they can be subsumed under the label of neutralisation.

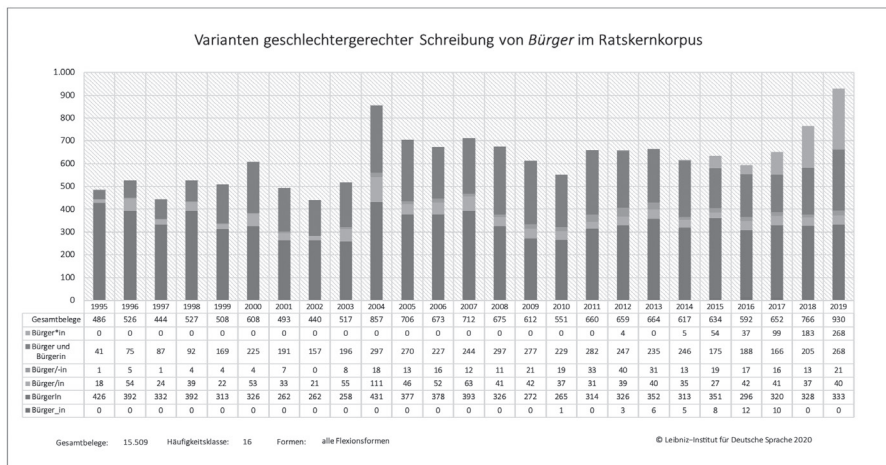
**Neutralisation by neographies.** Neographies are innovative linguistic forms that so far have not been part of the German inventory of lexemes and orthographic conventions. A number of suggestions have been made, of which the following ones have gained some ground: the gender gap (*Student\_innen*), the gender star (*Student\*innen*), and, more recently, the colon (*Student:innen*). All of them are intended to mean *students*, i.e. they represent neutral and/or non-binary gender concepts in the singular as well as in the plural. All of them are supposed to be pronounced with a glottal stop before the derivational affix. The gender star is the most frequent variant, and meanwhile has spread in academic writing as well as in public written language of institutions, administrations, political parties and business communication (cf. Ivanov, Lange & Tiemeyer, 2018).

With non-binary neographies gaining ground, there is much variation in general practical use along with a broad discussion of normative issues, especially concerning orthographic norms. Figure 4 shows the change in usage of neographic forms found in the corpus study of the *Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung*, published in 2021:<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> In: *Die Entwicklung und Bewertung des Themas „Geschlechtergerechte Schreibung“ in der Beobachtung des Schreibgebrauchs 2018-2020 vom Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung gebilligt am 26.03.2021*; available as PDF under <https://www.rechtschreibrat.com/geschlechtergerechte-schreibung-empfehlungen-vom-26-03-2021/> (accessed on December 18, 2022).

Figure 4. Variants of gender-fair forms of *Bürger* 'citizen', *Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung*, official statement March 26, 2021, p. 4.<sup>69</sup>



The forms investigated are the gender gap (*Bürger\_in*), the gender star (*Bürger\*in*), the medial capital *I* (*BürgerIn*), two variants with slant (*Bürger/in* and *Bürger/-in*) and the pair form (*Bürger und Bürgerin*).

As shown in figure 4, there has been an increase of pair forms since 1999, as well as a slight reduction of the medial *I*. Slanted forms have persisted on a low level. Since 2015, we observe a steep rise of the gender star, while the gender gap is not visible in the data.

Though in March 2021, parallel to the presentation of these data, the *Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung* proclaimed that neographies (gender star, -gap etc.) are not (yet) included into the official guidelines for orthography,<sup>70</sup> it is obvious that the issue has attracted heightened attention and is on the agenda for further discussion.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>69</sup> The original text in this figure could not be changed. Here is the translation of relevant text segments: *Varianten geschlechtergerechter Schreibung von Bürger im Ratskernkorpus*: 'Variants of gender-fair spelling of *Bürger* 'citizen' in the core corpus of the council'; *Gesamtbelege*: 'sum total of instances'; *Häufigkeitsklasse* 'frequency class'; *Formen: alle Flexionsformen*: 'forms: all inflectional forms'.

<sup>70</sup> The press release can be found as PDF under <https://www.rechtschreibrat.com/geschlechtergerechte-schreibung-empfehlungen-vom-26-03-2021/> (accessed on December 18, 2022)

<sup>71</sup> The recent decision of the council, dated July 14, 2023, classifies the gender diacritics as a subtype of special characters which are not considered to be part of the core inventory of German orthography. It is stated that several question and problems of proper usage are not yet solved, and that the situation is still in flux. Cf. <https://www.rechtschreibrat.com/amtliches-regelwerk-der->

Summarizing this section, we may state that German has a variety of linguistic means for expressing gender-fair concepts with different focuses. Current usage shows great divergence and variation. The fact that the use of both nominalised participles as well as non-binary neographies is gaining ground is an unmistakable sign of ongoing language change in the field of person reference in terms of gender concepts.

#### 4. Public debate

Public debate about language and gender with concomitant language-critical and normative questions has been ongoing for decades now, in rising and declining waves (cf. also Freitag, this volume). Currently, the complexities of non-binary gender issues have not only led to an upsurge of creativity in proposing new forms for person names, but also to a trend that might well be called a backlash: It propagates to stop (or even to ban) gender-fair language usage altogether, and to return to the old habits of usage, in particular to the rehabilitation of the so-called generic masculine, which is claimed by its proponents to be a gender-neutral form.

While this tendency is old, there are two new aspects in the current debate which deserve attention. The first one is the assumption that English can and should serve as a model for German. The second one is the fact that the suggestion to return to the so-called generic masculine is supported by young female writers and journalists who explicitly describe themselves as feminists. While this second aspect, which sometimes is seen as evidence for a (generational) divide among feminists, can only be mentioned here without further comment, the rest of this paper is devoted to a refutation on linguistic grounds of the appeal “to do like the English do.”

This suggestion claims that in German the use of masculine forms, such as *Lehrer* or *Student*, is an instance of gender-fair language use, and that those forms are equivalent to their English counterparts, i.e. *Lehrer* is assumed to directly correspond to English *teacher*, *Student* to *student*, etc. The following

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deutschen-rechtschreibung-ergaenzungspassus-sonderzeichen/ (accessed on August 5, 2023).

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quotes by Pollatschek, one of the most outspoken proponents of the English solution, are representative of a much larger group, arguing in a similar way.

Der englische Gedanke ist schlicht und ergreifend dieser: Der Weg zur Gleichheit ist Gleichheit. Wenn wir wollen, dass Männer und Frauen gleich sind, dann müssen wir sie gleich behandeln, auch in der Sprache. Jede sprachliche Sichtbarmachung von Geschlecht hebt das Geschlecht hervor, weist auf Unterschiede hin, betont, dass eben dieses Geschlecht so wichtig ist, dass es in jeder Lebenslage erwähnt werden muss, und zementiert damit die Ungleichheit. (Pollatschek, 2020: 192)

[‘The English thought is simply this: The way to equality is equality. If we want men and women to be equal, we have to treat them as equal, also in language. Any linguistic visualisation of gender highlights gender, points out differences, emphasises that this very gender is so important that it must be mentioned in every situation in life, and thus cements inequality.’]

In Pollatschek (2020a) the differences in the practice of gender-fair language between English and German are not attributed to differences in the two languages, but to differences in the general attitudes and collective mentality of “the Germans” as opposed to “the English” (“the British,” to be exact):

Während die Deutschen sich für das permanente Benennen von Geschlechterunterschieden entschieden haben, haben die Briten sich entschieden, das Anzeigen von Geschlechtlichkeit so weit wie möglich zu vermeiden. Dafür haben sie mit typisch britischer Pragmatik, die Form gewählt, die ihre Sprache sowieso als generisch hergibt. Diese Form ist im Englischen, genau wie im Deutschen, identisch mit der männlichen Form, im Deutschen wird sie durchaus kritisch als „generisches Maskulinum“ bezeichnet. (Pollatschek 2020a, my emphasis)<sup>72</sup>

[‘While the Germans have opted for the permanent naming of gender differences, the British have decided to avoid displaying gender as far as possible. For this,

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/deutschland-ist-besessen-von-genitalien-gendern-macht-die-diskriminierung-nur-noch-schlimmer/26140402.html> (accessed on December 18, 2022).

with typical British pragmatism, they have chosen the form that in their language is generic. In English, just as in German, this form is identical with the masculine form, in German it is quite critically referred to as “generic masculine”.’]

Not directly drawing on English as a model, but relying on the same assumptions as Pollatschek, Lühmann, 2021 states:

Aber ich finde, das generische Maskulinum gibt uns doch zumindest die Möglichkeit abstrakt zu bleiben, ohne uns zwanghaft für eine Geschlechtsform zu entscheiden. Ich muss dem Lehrer nicht immer die Lehrerin zur Seite stellen. Die Sprache hat die Möglichkeit, mich von diesem Benennungszwang zu befreien. (Lühmann, 2021)<sup>73</sup>

[‘But I think the generic masculine at least gives us the possibility to remain abstract without obsessively deciding on a gender form. I don’t always have to put the female teacher at the teacher’s side. Language has the possibility to free me from this naming compulsion.’]

These quotes nicely highlight the two premises underlying the suggested “solution”:

- (i) The “generic masculine” in German is an abstract, gender-neutral form.
- (ii) It is the German speakers who decide to make gender distinctions visible all the time.

In the rest of this section, it will be argued that both premisses are erroneous.

**Ad (i).** The notion of an abstract or gender-neutral meaning of the masculine forms has been refuted in a large number of studies (cf. Diewald & Steinhauer, 2022: 92-104 and Kotthoff & Nübling, 2018: 191-122 for surveys of relevant studies). While the details cannot be treated here (Diewald, 2018, 2021), some basic facts have to be referred.

The term “generic masculine” does not refer to a particular grammatical form or category in German, it refers to a traditional, patriarchal usage convention that applies only to those person names that exist in paired forms for

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. <https://www.haz.de/Hannover/Aus-der-Stadt/Gedern-oder-nicht-Hannah-Luehmann-und-Gabriele-Diewald-streiten> (accessed on December 18, 2022).

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denoting male and female referents, and that do not have a gender-neutral hypernym (cf. section 2). Examples are: *Autor* – *Autorin* ('male author'–'female author'), *Student* – *Studentin*, ('male student' – 'female student'), *Kunde* – *Kundin* ('male customer' – 'female customer').

The traditional rule of usage of those person names may be paraphrased as follows: Always use the masculine form (and never the feminine form) for reference to mixed groups, for indefinite reference or for class designation. Examples are:

*Die Lehrer treffen sich zweimal monatlich.*

'The teachers meet twice a month.'

*Der Kunde hat das Recht auf Rückgabe.*

'The customer has the right to return.'

*In den Kitas fehlen Erzieher.*

'There is a lack of educators in the Kitas [kindergartens].'

In German, this form always refers to male persons, while reference to female persons is dependent on context and/or situation. The allegedly inclusive or neutral reading of the masculine person names is due to conversational implicature: It is a deletable and unstable pragmatic enrichment, dependent on the interpretative effort of the recipient; it is not part of the lexical meaning (Diewald, 2021, Diewald & Steinhauer, 2022: 21-28).

The heavy gender bias in favor of the male gender in the masculine forms is also noticed and commented on in the standard reference grammar of German, the *Duden*. While older editions, for example the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of 1995, stick to the traditional description of the masculine forms as neutral<sup>74</sup>, the 9<sup>th</sup> edition

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. the following quote: "Besonders bei Berufsbezeichnungen und Substantiven, die den Träger eines Geschehens bezeichnen (Nomina agentis), verwendet man die maskuline Form vielfach auch dann, wenn das natürliche Geschlecht unwichtig ist oder männliche und weibliche Personen gleichermaßen gemeint sind. Das Maskulinum ist hier neutralisierend bzw. verallgemeinernd ('generisch')." Duden (1995: 196). ['Especially with profession names and noun that designate the carrier of an event (agentive nouns) the masculine form is often used, when natural gender is not important or male and female persons alike are addressed. In these cases, the masculine is neutralizing or generalizing ("generic").']

of the *Duden* grammar of 2016 comments the masculine forms of paired person names as follows:

“Am sexusindifferenten (generischen) Gebrauch wird kritisiert, dass er sich formal nicht vom sexusspezifischen Gebrauch unterscheidet. So können inhaltliche und kommunikative Missverständnisse entstehen, z. B. der Eindruck, dass Frauen gar nicht mitgemeint sind. Experimente stützen diese Annahme. Aus diesem Grund wird der sexusindifferente Gebrauch der Maskulina oft vermieden. Stattdessen werden Paarformen gebraucht.” Duden (2016: 160)

[‘The criticism levelled at sex-inclusive (generic) usage is that it does not formally differ from sex-specific usage. This can lead to misunderstandings in terms of content and communication, e.g. the impression that women are not meant at all. Experiments support this assumption. For this reason, the sex-indifferent use of masculines is often avoided. Instead, pair forms are used.’]

The latest, 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Duden* grammar goes one step further. In addition to the assessment given in the 9<sup>th</sup> edition (last quote), the following information is added:

“Selbst dann, wenn aus dem Kontext klar ist, dass genderindifferenten Bezug vorliegt, rufen Maskulina der Klasse C in überdurchschnittlichem Maß die Vorstellung männlicher Personen hervor. Es wurden daher alternative Formulierungen gesucht, die zu ausgeglicheneren Vorstellungen führen und wenn möglich auch andere Genderkonzepte als die traditionellen zwei einbeziehen sollen. Diese Bemühungen sind noch nicht abgeschlossen.” (Duden, 2022: 702)

[‘Even if it is clear from the context that there is a gender indifferent relation, masculine nouns of class C [nouns usable as “generic masculine,” my addition] evoke the image of male persons to an above average degree. Therefore, alternative formulations were searched in order to achieve a more balanced representation and, if possible, include gender concepts beyond the traditional binary one. These efforts have not yet come to a conclusion.’]

This change can be seen as a testimony of ongoing language change and its gradual recording in quasi normative linguistic reference literature.

The strong concerns about the masculine forms in their so-called generic use uttered by the *Duden* grammar are substantiated by a number of empirical

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and experimental studies. One of them, the study by Gygax et al. (2008), is briefly sketched out here, as representative of many others. Gygax et al. (2008) investigate the complex interaction between gender stereotypes and grammatical gender in English, German, and French. The experiments include measuring the reaction time of test persons who were asked to evaluate sequences of sentences. The test setting is described as follows:

“We recorded the participants’ responses (i.e., yes or no) and the time it took them to respond. Both measures were intended to evaluate the ease of integration of the information in the target sentence. In essence, if participants have trouble integrating that information, they are more likely to respond no. In addition, if they respond yes, it should take them longer to respond if they have trouble integrating the information” (Gygax et al., 2008: 476).

The test sequences contained a first sentence introducing a person name, followed by a second sentence providing explicit information about the gender of the persons designated by the person name in the first sentence. An example for the first sentence in a sequence in the German and English setting is:

*Die Sozialarbeiter liefen durch den Bahnhof.*

*The social workers were walking through the station.*

The second sentence comes in two versions, which are given to one half of the test persons respectively.

Version 1:

*Wegen der schönen Wetterprognose trugen mehrere Frauen keine Jacke.*

*Since sunny weather was forecast several of the women weren’t wearing a coat.*

Version 2:

*Wegen der schönen Wetterprognose trugen mehrere Männer keine Jacke.*

*Since sunny weather was forecast several of the men weren’t wearing a coat.*

The person names used in the test sequences vary according to their gender role bias, which had been ascertained independently. The three stages of gender bias in the test items are: male bias as in German *die Spione*, English

*the spies*, no gender bias (neutral) as in German *die Zuschauer*, English *the spectators*, and female bias as German *die Sozialarbeiter*, English *the social workers*.

The results of the experiments show that German and English are extremely different. In the English series, the stereotype is essential. The stereotypicality of person names influences reaction time and acceptance. Matched roles in both sentences lead to more positive evaluations and to fast reaction. Mismatched roles lead to more negative evaluations and delayed reaction.

In the German series, grammatical gender is essential. Gender role bias is overridden by the grammatical form (masculine) in the first sentence. Even for person names with a strictly female gender roles bias, such as *Kosmetiker* ('beauticians') a male person name in the second sentence is accepted to a higher degree and more quickly than a female one, due to the masculine form in sentence 1. As the authors state: "Interpretations were dominated by the masculinity of the masculine (allegedly) intended as generic" (Gygax et al., 2008: 464). Thus, grammatical gender marking in German overrules knowledge of stereotypical gender roles (cf. Gygax et al., 2008: 478).

Summarizing their study, Gygax et al. (2008: 480) conclude: "We believe that our results show that the so-called generic use of the masculine biases gender representations in a way that is discriminatory to women."

In the light of the assessment by the *Duden* grammar and by results of studies like the one quoted here, it is safe to say that from a linguistic perspective the masculine forms of paired person names are not gender-neutral, as their basic lexical meaning is male-specific. The most important advice for gender-fair language in German must thus be: Avoid the so-called generic masculine wherever possible! The suggestion made by Pollatschek and many others to return to the usage of masculine person names as gender-neutral forms must be refuted as contra linguistic evidence.

**Ad (ii).** The second assumption by Pollatschek is that German speakers choose to cling to obsessive gender marking, while they could do otherwise. This is clearly not the case. The linguistic system of German requires a choice between grammatical oppositions in almost every noun phrase.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> As Kotthoff & Nübling (2018: 19) pointedly observe: "Es ist nicht übertrieben zu sagen, dass das deutsche Sprachsystem eine Obsession mit Gender hat" ('It is no exaggeration to say that the linguistic system of German has an obsession with gender').

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This concerns the inflectional marking of grammatical gender in noun phrases as well as the derivation of female person names. Table 5 contrasts the inflectional and derivational conditions of English and German in terms of the marking of grammatical and lexical gender, comparing English *student* to German *Student* in the noun phrase with a definite article.

Table 5. Inflectional and derivational morphology in English vs. German for *student* vs. *Student*.

	English	German
Lexeme	One lexeme for person name No derivation  Gender neutral in singular and plural <i>student / students</i>	Two lexemes for person name Derivation (feminine movation): <i>Student / Studentin</i>  Male / female distinction in singular and plural <i>Student / Studenten</i> <i>Studentin / Studentinnen</i>
Determiner (definite article)	No grammatical gender: <i>the</i>    No number distinction: <i>the (student)</i> <i>the (students)</i>	Differential grammatical gender: <i>der, die, das</i>  Gender concord in the singular: <i>der (Student)</i> <i>die (Studentin)</i>  Gender neutralised in the plural: <i>die (Studenten)</i> <i>die (Studentinnen)</i>  Number distinction in the masculine: <i>der (Student)</i> <i>die (Studenten)</i> No number distinction in the feminine: <i>die (Studentin)</i> <i>die (Studentinnen)</i>

**Inflection.** English has no grammatical morphology (determiners, inflections) for gender distinctions. As a semantic gender language, it has no grammatical gender. This means, that – by definition – *there is no such thing as a “generic masculine” in English as there is no grammatical gender to begin with.* German, on the other hand, has a paradigm for grammatical gender, i.e. grammatical

gender distinctions are obligatorily expressed. This is evidenced in the determiners which have to agree with the inherent gender of their head nouns.

**Derivation.** English has no systematic derivational rule for lexical gender distinction (leaving aside unproductive relics such as *actor / actress*). English person names are per se gender-neutral for grammatical as well as for lexical gender.

German, on the other hand, has systematic and productive formatives and rules for the derivation of person names with lexical gender distinction. Person names are lexicalised in pairs. Choosing one means not choosing – eliminating – the other.

In short: There is no equivalence between English and German person names. English and German are very different in terms of the inventory and rules of the linguistic system. It is not appropriate to equate certain forms of one language with seemingly similar forms of the other language. Superficially similar person names like English *student* – German *Student* are false friends.

Concluding this section, the reply to the two premisses quoted in the beginning of this section is the following:

(i) While there is no “generic masculine” in English, there is no gender neutrality of the masculine forms of paired person names in German.

(ii) German speakers do not “choose” to represent gender categories arbitrarily or voluntarily; grammatical gender (as well as lexical gender via derivation) is deeply entrenched in the German linguistic system, and in most parts has to be obligatorily expressed.

For best practice in gender-fair language use, each language offers different possibilities. A simple transfer of forms, structural or usage patterns is not expedient.

## 5. Conclusion

It has been shown that German has a rich repository of linguistic possibilities for creating gender-fair person names. In particular, next to lexical and syntactic means, there is a variety of word formation processes including composition,

derivation, and conversion. Currently, new diacritic signs like the gender star or the gender gap, which are called neographies here, are applied to create gender-fair person names.

As German is a grammatical gender language, there are, beyond pragmatic and sociolinguistic issues, complex linguistic rules and restrictions steering to use of particular forms in syntactic constructions and in the establishment of textual coherence. The latest developments, i.e. the neographies like the gender star, devised for the inclusive expression of non-binary gender concepts, definitely need more linguistic investigation and evaluation in the future, as they heavily interact with the inflectional gender morphology of German.

Furthermore, it can be observed that the dispute about the complexities of the neographies led to a renewal of the old discussion on the presumed advantages of the so-called generic masculine forms. This reiterated claim of gender neutrality is raised with reference to the situation in English. However, it can be shown and has been shown in this paper that an equation concerning the referential potential of person names like German *Lehrer* vs. English *teacher* is inadequate and outright false: The different morphological structures of the two languages and the total loss of grammatical gender in English forbid superficial analogies.

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# Marquage et généricité : morphologie prescriptive, descriptive et créative en français et en allemand

Daniel Elmiger\*

## Résumé

En français et en allemand, on trouve principalement deux modes de formation pour créer des noms communs de personne : la flexion et la dérivation. En allemand, la différence entre les deux types est en général facile à établir et soulève surtout la question de savoir quels éléments font partie de la dérivation du nom d'agent et lesquels marquent le féminin. En français, la différence entre flexion et dérivation est moins claire ; en outre, il peut y avoir des formes concurrentes, auxquelles s'ajoutent des formes nouvellement proposées. Des propositions qui ont été faites dans les deux langues pour améliorer – voire se substituer à – un système des noms communs de personne considéré comme instable et déficient sont présentées et discutées.

**Mots Clés:** Français ; allemand ; flexion ; dérivation ; morphologie.

## Abstract

In French and German, there are two main ways of forming personal nouns: inflection and derivation. In German, the difference between the two types is generally easy to establish and mainly raises the question of which elements are part of the derivation of the noun of agent and which mark the feminine. In French, the difference between inflection and derivation is less clear; in addition, there may be competing forms, as well as newly proposed forms. Proposals that have been made in both languages to improve – or even replace – a system of personal nouns considered to be unstable and deficient are presented and discussed.

**Keywords:** French; German; flexion; derivation; morphology.

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## Introduction

En français comme en allemand – ainsi que dans d’autres langues –, le débat sur la langue ou la communication non sexiste / inclusive constitue l’un des enjeux majeurs de la politique linguistique, actuellement. Ce débat est certes déjà vieux de plus de quarante ans (il a porté d’abord majoritairement sur la « féminisation » du lexique, puis, dès les années 1980, aussi sur les formes masculines à valeur générique<sup>76</sup>), mais de nouvelles évolutions le maintiennent dans le débat tant public que spécialisé. Au milieu des années 2010, il a été relancé, dans l’espace francophone, par l’émergence, en France, de nouvelles formes abrégées telles que *agriculteurs.rices* – et sous le label d’écriture inclusive (cf. Elmiger, 2021)<sup>77</sup> ; dans les pays et régions germanophones, c’est davantage la prise en considération d’autres identités de genre (ou plus généralement : de la non-binarité) qui est discutée de manière controversée. Si aujourd’hui, la question de la compréhension, de l’utilisation – et, le cas échéant, de l’évitement, de formes masculines semble être au centre de l’attention<sup>78</sup>, les préoccupations en lien avec les considérations lexicales – et notamment morphologiques – sont toujours d’actualité.

Dans cette contribution, il est question des noms communs de personne (ou : noms d’humains) en français et en allemand, notamment de ceux qui existent en alternance au masculin et au féminin. Si la lexicologie prescriptive les décrit en général au moyen de règles dérivationnelles proches des adjectifs, on peut observer, dans les usages, mais aussi dans les ressources lexicographiques, un assez grand nombre de variantes. Tantôt, elles relèvent d’une certaine latitude du système (lorsque, par exemple, un mode de formation latin est en concurrence avec un mode de formation contemporain), tantôt d’une volonté délibérée de promouvoir de nouvelles formes, voire de nouveaux paradigmes tout entiers.

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<sup>76</sup> Dans cette contribution, *masculin (à valeur) générique* est utilisé pour les formes masculines censées référer à toute personne (ou groupe de personnes) indépendant de son/leur sexe ou identité de genre. Pour d’autres acceptions de *générique*, cf. Elmiger (2020b).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. en 2016 le guide de Haddad (dir.) (2016) : *Manuel d’écriture inclusive [...]*.

<sup>78</sup> En témoignent un grand nombre de guides de langue non sexiste / inclusive (Elmiger, 2022a, 2024).

Dans la suite, nous allons dans un premier temps (partie 1) procéder à une brève description des systèmes français et allemand des noms communs de personne, pour ensuite (partie 2) montrer quelles sont d'une part les instabilités inhérentes au système générant des variantes et d'autre part quelles propositions ont été faites pour améliorer – voire se substituer à – un état de langue considéré comme déficient.

### 1. Les noms communs de personne en français et en allemand

#### 1.1. En français

En français, le domaine des noms communs de personne est relativement complexe, et ce pour différentes raisons, que nous présentons ici de manière simplifiée (pour une discussion plus détaillée, cf. Elmiger, 2018). Du point de vue de la référence, la distinction entre les humains et les non-humains (individuels ou collectifs) n'est pas toujours facile à tracer – et d'ailleurs de nombreux noms d'agents s'utilisent tantôt pour désigner un être humain, tantôt pour désigner une personne juridique ou un référent – concret ou abstrait – non humain (p. ex. *assistant* (humain/électronique)). Pour les noms communs de personne, la question de savoir si leur formation relève de la flexion ou de la dérivation demeure quelque peu ambiguë (cf. Elmiger, 2013; Haspelmath & Sims, 2010 : 89 ss.). Pour n'évoquer que la question de la régularité, elle ne se pose pas de la même manière d'un point de vue flexionnel où, par exemple, on peut présumer une alternance régulière entre formes féminine et masculine, en comparaison avec le point de vue dérivationnel, où l'utilisation de certains suffixes peut être bloquée ou sujette à certaines contraintes.

D'un point de vue formel, la distinction entre les paradigmes adjectivaux et nominaux présente de nombreux recouvrements (Elmiger, 2020a) et si l'on considère le domaine des noms communs de personne dans son entièreté, comportant des dizaines de milliers de gentilés – de type *Portugais/Portugaise* – qui s'utilisent aussi, avec minuscule initiale, comme adjectifs – *lisbonnin/lisbonnine* –, ainsi que de nombreux noms issus d'une substantivation d'adjectifs ou de participes, la correspondance entre noms d'humains et adjectifs est plutôt la

règle que l'exception<sup>79</sup>, même si cela n'est pas nécessairement le cas si, au lieu de considérer les types, on tient compte des occurrences<sup>80</sup>.

Dans ce qui suit, nous nous limitons aux noms d'humains individualisants, laissant de côté les noms collectifs (*la clientèle, le personnel*). Formellement, on peut distinguer, en français, entre des noms communs de personne ayant un genre, mais se rapportant à toute personne indépendamment de son sexe ou identité de genre (1) et des noms qui s'utilisent au féminin comme au masculin (2-6). Parmi ces derniers, on trouve un petit nombre d'hétéronymes (2), un grand nombre de noms alternant formellement entre le féminin et le masculin (3-5), avec suffixes plus (3) ou moins (4) différents ou se distinguant à l'écrit seulement (5). Enfin, certains noms dits épïcènes ont la même forme dans les deux genres (6).

(1) *la personne, la victime, l'individu, l'être humain*

(2) *la sœur, le frère, la femme, l'homme*

(3) *la vendeuse, le vendeur ; la directrice, le directeur*

(4) *l'assistante, l'assistant ; la magistrate, le magistrat*

(5) *l'amie, l'ami ; la criminelle, le criminel*

(6) *la, le bibliothécaire ; la, le comptable*

Pour ce qui est des formes alternantes (3-5), on peut observer dans les ouvrages de référence deux types de description : tantôt, on considère le féminin comme étant dérivé du masculin, de manière simplifiée par l'ajout d'un suffixe -e (moyennant le cas échéant quelques modifications formelles) ; tantôt, on considère les deux formes comme alternantes entre elles sans que l'une soit la base de l'autre.

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<sup>79</sup> Dans une base de données en cours d'élaboration, comportant quelque 68 000 noms communs de personne, dont environ 39 000 en un mot (les autres étant composés – *secrétaire-réceptionniste* – ou polylexicaux – commissaire d'école), les trois quarts (30 000) s'utilisent comme nom et comme adjectif.

<sup>80</sup> Nous ne pouvons que formuler une hypothèse, car les données fréquentielles à disposition (cf. Elmiger, 2021b) ne permettent qu'indirectement de tenir compte de la fréquence d'utilisation dans les usages.

## 1.2. En allemand

Le système des noms communs de personne présente, en allemand, de nombreux parallèles, avec celui du français (cf. aussi la contribution de Gabriele Diewald, dans ce volume). Dans ce qui suit, il n'est pas possible de donner une description exhaustive d'un domaine complexe réunissant un très grand nombre de noms communs de personne<sup>81</sup>. À l'instar du français, certains noms ont un seul genre (en allemand, le neutre s'y prête au même titre que le féminin et le masculin) (7) ; d'autres sont hétéronymes (8), distinctes entre féminin et masculin (9) ou épïcènes<sup>82</sup> (10).

(7) *die Person, der Mensch, das Individuum* (« la personne, l'être humain, l'individu »)

(8) *die Schwester, der Bruder ; die Frau, der Mann* (« la sœur, le frère, la femme, l'homme »)

(9) *die Verkäuferin, der Verkäufer ; die Direktorin, der Direktor* (« la vendeuse, le vendeur ; la directrice, le directeur »)

(10) *die, der Reiche, Anwesende, Gewählte* (« la/le riche, présent-e, élu-e »)

Du point de vue de la formation des noms communs de personne, ces deux derniers cas correspondent aux types morphologiques les plus productifs, à savoir celui de la dérivation (11) et de la conversion (12) :

(11) *Arbeit+er+in*<sup>83</sup>

(12) *reich / der, die Reiche ; anwesend / der, die Anwesende ; angestellt / der, die Angestellte*

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<sup>81</sup> Dans notre collection, nous réunissons quelque 125 000 noms communs de personne, formées à partir de quelque 20 000 bases simples ou composées.

<sup>82</sup> En français, *épïcène* s'utilise avec des sens différents : à côté de « (mot/forme) ayant la même forme au féminin et au masculin », on en trouve d'autres acceptions, p. ex. « (mot/forme) se référant autant à des référents féminins que masculins ». Dans ce sens, on peut le rapprocher de l'usage allemand, où les *Epikoina* désignent des noms ayant un genre mais se référant à toute personne (p. ex. *die Person, das Individuum*) (cf. Klein, 2022).

<sup>83</sup> Dans cet article, nous utilisons le signe + pour marquer les frontières morphologiques que nous souhaitons mettre en évidence (sans toutefois faire une analyse morphologique exhaustive dans chaque cas).

La formation dérivationnelle de féminins par suffixation (-in), est très fréquente et productive : hormis les cas de conversion (cf. ci-après), c'est le modèle de formation par excellence en allemand<sup>84</sup>. Il est décrit comme *additive Movierung* (motion additive et relève clairement d'une dérivation spécifique pour les formes féminines : une description par alternance n'est envisageable que pour certains noms d'humains formés avec d'autres suffixes, p. ex. d'origine française (comme -eur/-euse, p. ex. *Masseur/Masseuse*, mais aussi : *Masseurin*).

Les noms communs de personnes obtenus par conversion sont pour l'essentiel le produit d'une nominalisation d'un adjectif, d'un participe présent (qu'on nomme en allemand aussi Partizip I) ou d'un participe passé (Partizip II). Les paradigmes pour les formes nominales suivent ceux des adjectifs.

Tableau 1 : nominalisation d'adjectifs, de participes présents et de participes passés ; paradigmes après article défini et indéfini, avec soulignement des formes différenciées.

adjectif	nominalisation (avec article défini)		nominalisation (avec article indéfini)	
	singulier	pluriel	singulier	pluriel
<i>klein</i> (adjectif, « petit-e »)	<i>der Kleine</i> <u><i>die Kleine</i></u> <i>das Kleine</i>	<i>die Kleinen</i>	<i>ein Kleiner</i> <u><i>eine Kleine</i></u> <i>ein Kleines</i>	<i>Kleine</i>
<i>abwesend</i> (participe présent, « absent-e »)	<i>der Abwesende</i> <u><i>die Abwesende</i></u> <i>das Abwesende</i>	<i>die Abwesenden</i>	<i>ein Abwesender</i> <u><i>eine Abwesende</i></u> <i>ein Abwesendes</i>	<i>Abwesende</i>
<i>interessiert</i> (participe passé, « intéressé-e »)	<i>der Interessierte</i> <u><i>die Interessierte</i></u> <i>das Interessierte</i>	<i>die Interessierten</i>	<i>ein Interessierter</i> <u><i>eine Interessierte</i></u> <i>ein Interessiertes</i>	<i>Interessierte</i>

La nominalisation donne des noms qui sont en principe utilisables avec les trois genres, mais seules les formes féminine et masculine s'utilisent communément pour des noms communs de personne ; les formes neutres sont tantôt plus ou moins lexicalisées (p. ex. *das Kleine* (notamment pour « le petit (d'un animal) » ou « le (= ce qui est) petit », tantôt interprétables en contexte (*das Abwesende* peut signifier « (tout) ce qui est absent »), tantôt inhabituel et difficile à interpréter (*das Interessierte* : « (tout) ce qui est intéressé [sans être animé] »).

<sup>84</sup> Dans notre base de données de *Personenbezeichnungen* (noms communs de personne) allemands, quelque 125 000 noms sont répertoriés, dont environ 118 000 en un mot : plus de 52 000 d'entre eux ont un féminin formé à l'aide du suffixe -in.

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Au singulier, une différence s'observe en général entre le féminin et le masculin (au niveau du déterminant, à celui de la désinence de la forme nominale ou aux deux). Au pluriel, en revanche, il n'existe pas de formes différentes selon le genre grammatical, ce qui a pour conséquence que les noms communs de personnes issus d'une nominalisation se prêtent idéalement pour la langue non sexiste / inclusive, en allemand<sup>85</sup>. Les nominalisations n'ont pas fait l'objet de propositions flexionnelles divergeant de la morphologie traditionnelle.

Quant à la composition, mode de formation typique pour l'allemand, elle s'avère certes également importante pour la création de noms communs de personne, mais n'est en général pas déterminante pour les parties d'un nom de personne qui donnent un indice (ou non) quant au genre de la personne désignée. Ainsi, un mot comme *Politikjournalistin* est certes le produit d'une composition (*Politik+journalist+in* ou *Politik+journalistin*), mais seule sa deuxième partie est sujette à variation et peut être décomposée en trois parties : *journal + ist + in*. Dans ce qui suit, nous ne nous concentrons que sur les bases et leurs propriétés morphologiques et référentielles – et non pas sur des noms plus complexes formés par composition. Nous ne tiendrons pas compte non plus des noms humains formés par composition avec des noms hétéronymes (13-15), un modèle qui ne concerne qu'un faible nombre de bases telles que *mann/frau, herr/herrin, herr/frau* (ou *herr/dame*) :

(13) *Feuerwehrmann, Feuerwehrfrau* (« pompier, pompière »)

(14) *Schirmherr, Schirmherrin* (« parrain, parraine », p. ex. d'une association caritative)

(15) *Freiherr, Freifrau* (« baron, baronne »)

D'autres cependant (p. ex. *junge/mädchen*) ne s'utilisent pas de manière symétrique (16) :

(16) *Schiffsjunge* (« mousse (apprenti matelot) ») – mais guère *Schiffsmädchen* ;  
*Zimmermädchen* (« femme de chambre ») – mais guère *Zimmerjunge*

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. Elmiger (2011) pour les nominalisations des participes présents, qui peuvent faire l'objet de critiques, notamment lorsqu'elles s'utilisent à côté (ou au lieu) de formes traditionnelles formées par dérivation (p. ex. *die Studierenden* vs. *die Studenten/Studentinnen* (« étudiant-e-s »)) ou lorsqu'elles sont perçues comme inhabituelles (p. ex. *die Zufussgehenden* vs. *die Fussgänger/Fussgängerinnen* (« piéton-ne-s »)).

## 2. Morphologie créative

### 2.1. Raisons de morphologies alternatives

Dans les deux langues, le système de formation tant des noms communs de personne – ou peut-être plutôt : sa formalisation – que des formes individuelles ont fait l'objet de nombreuses descriptions et commentaires critiques, entraînant parfois des formes ou systèmes alternatifs, censés compléter le système actuel (voire s'y substituer).

À côté de cela, on observe aussi de nombreux noms d'humains qui ne sont pas toujours faciles à interpréter : s'agit-il de variantes, de formes consciemment choisies ou de formations ou graphies erronées ? Et si la forme elle-même est choisie délibérément, il n'est pas nécessairement simple d'en connaître l'objectif : est-ce pour innover, pour varier ou au contraire pour se moquer d'un langage plus égalitaire ?

Ainsi, dans une intervention parlementaire (Conseil National suisse, 20 janvier 1998), un parlementaire s'en prend au postulat de Liliane Maury Pasquier demandant l'« Application des principes de la formulation non sexiste », en le considérant comme

l'expression d'une volonté de ségrégation méthodique et constante entre les hommes et les femmes.

En bonne logique, il faudrait donc aussi créer des masculins ayant le même sens que le féminin. Par exemple France Gall serait une vedette de la chanson, alors que Charles Aznavour deviendrait un vedet de la chanson. On voit bien que la logique de la minorité Maury Pasquier n'est pas une logique égalitaire, mais bien plutôt sexiste.

En créant, par analogie formelle, une forme masculine *vedet*, il souhaite tourner en ridicule les revendications politiques adversaires.

Si cette boutade peut encore passer comme une plaisanterie, il n'en va pas d'autres formulations, plus hostiles et plus sexistes, comme celle d'André Eskénazi (2000 : 575), qui crée *ad hoc* la forme dérivée *notablesse* : « N'en déplaise à un quarteron de notablesse, enfants gâtés dépourvues de cervelle mais non pas d'impudence, *ministre* n'est pas un masculin ».

Dans ce qui suit, nous allons considérer la variation des noms d'humains quelle que soit la visée énonciative ou argumentative, donnant toutefois la préférence à des formes qui semblent avoir été choisies délibérément.

### 2.2. Variation traditionnelle et nouvelle des noms communs de personne français

#### 2.2.1. Variation et modification des paradigmes morphologiques

Si la majorité des noms communs de personne ont des féminins uniques, il en a toujours existé pour lesquels deux ou plusieurs formes étaient dans l'usage, p. ex. certains noms en *-eur* (cf. Coutier, 2002; Valentini, 2015 ainsi que la contribution d'Hélène Giraudo et Aurélia Morel, dans ce volume)<sup>86</sup> :

(17) *le sculpteur / la sculptrice, la sculpteure*

Durant le dernier tiers du XXe siècle, la discussion au sujet de la « féminisation du lexique » a fait émerger d'autres cas (cf. à ce propos Dister, 2017<sup>87</sup>), de sorte qu'il existe encore de la variation pour des noms existant depuis longtemps :

(18) *l'auteur / l'autrice, l'auteure, l'auteur* (épïcène) ?

(19) *le professeur / la professeure, la professeuse, la professeur* (épïcène) ?

mais aussi pour des néologismes (pour lesquels la forme masculine peut aussi être sujette à variation) :

(20) *le youtubeur / la youtubeure, la youtubeuse* ?

(21) *le streamer, le streameur / la streamer* (épïcène), *la streamère, la streameur* (épïcène), *la streameure, la streameuse*

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<sup>86</sup> Les noms masculins se terminant par *-eur* (notamment les suffixes *-ateur*, *-teur* et *-eur*) présentent probablement le plus de variation, ce qui s'explique en partie par l'histoire de la langue (en français contemporain, on trouve des formes héritées du latin à côté de formes créées à des époques variables) et tantôt par des contraintes morphologiques.

<sup>87</sup> Dans le même article, l'autrice décrit aussi de nombreux cas de noms communs de personne qui ne sont pas répertoriés dans les ouvrages de référence, ou seulement au masculin ou au féminin.

Dans d'autres cas, les paradigmes morphologiques sont sujets à variation. En français, cela peut concerner les suffixes ; ainsi, une personne venant de ou habitant à Lisbonne, on peut rencontrer, à côté de *Lisbonn+in-e*, deux autres formes : *Lisbonn+ais-e* et *Lisboète*.

Pour ce qui est de la morphologie créative dans le domaine du système nominal français<sup>88</sup>, nous nous limitons à deux exemples, à savoir la créativité maximale et les tentatives de neutralisation partielle ou totale. D'autres reconfigurations existent (cf. p. ex. Kaplan, 2022 pour une vue d'ensemble sur les systèmes non binaires).

Dans son roman *L'Euguélienne*, l'autrice canadienne Louky Bersianik (1976) a placé de nombreux passages traitant d'inégalités, notamment langagières. Ainsi, il est question (p. 228-229) de nombreux noms communs de personne masculins qui n'ont pas de forme féminine correspondante :

« 675. 5 — *D'ici à ce que les genres soient abolis, nous voulons des féminins aux mots :*

- Administrateur
- Agent
- Amateur
- Auteur
- Chef
- Chauffeur de taxi
- Compositeur
- Député
- Directeur [...] »

Plus tard (p. 230, chapitre VIII : LE GÉNÉRIQUE), on lit : « Nous proposons notre recherche à l'Académie française, non à titre de mots à adopter, mais à titre de premier travail de déblayage, à titre aussi d'exemple de formation sauvage des mots, car nous avons évité les suffixes en *euse*, en *esse* ou en *trice* qui ont rarement donné de bons résultats comme substantifs, surtout en ce

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<sup>88</sup> Certains procédés valent aussi (ou surtout) pour d'autres catégories, p. ex. les formes en -ez, -iz-, -uz de Labrosse (1996), censées simplifier le système des formes participiales. En outre, de nombreuses propositions ont été faites pour les pronoms (p. ex. introduction de formes indéférenciées pour la troisième personne : cf. *illes* (Marois, 1987) et plus récemment *iel(s)* en français ou *xier* en allemand).

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qui concerne les activités professionnelles. Les mots que nous avons trouvés ne sont pas heureux pour la plupart. Ils sont même bizarres et parfois tout à fait drôles. Mais chacun d'eux représente une étape sur le chemin au bout duquel jaillira peut-être le mot adéquat. [...]

Puis, l'Euguélonne fit connaître à la foule le TABLEAU DE FÉMININS EN FORMATION dont voici quelques extraits :

[...]

MASCULIN	ÉTYMOLOGIE	FÉMININS
[...]		
Un peintre	Lat. : <i>pingere</i> , <i>pictus</i> : broder, tatouer <i>pigmentum</i> : peinture	Une artiste-peintre Une peintre Une peignante Une pictorèse Une pittorène Une pingiste Une pingicienne Une pittoricienne Une peinturelle Une pigmenticienne Une pigmentine »

Cette approche « sauvage », appliquée à huit noms masculins seulement, tient certes compte d'éléments linguistiques tels que l'étymologie des mots, mais cela de façon libre : à côté des étymons directs de la forme masculine, d'autres sont mobilisés de manière associative. Elle s'en sert de manière libre et parfois peu conforme aux habitudes morphologiques du français : le but n'étant pas de proposer des formes morphologiquement justes, mais d'en proposer une pléthore, quitte à ne pas savoir lesquelles passeront l'épreuve du temps.

Si l'approche de Louky Bersianik s'inscrit dans le cadre genre fictionnel d'un roman, d'autres tentatives de morphologie créative sont faites de manière plus décontextualisée par des spécialistes du langage. Dans la suite, nous nous concentrons sur des propositions de la fin du XXe siècle ainsi que sur une proposition plus complète récente.

Dans les années 1990, plusieurs voix ont exploré la possibilité d'étendre le domaine des formes épïcènes. Ainsi, Bourgault écrit, dans un article de presse (1994) :

« Or, la solution elle est là, à portée de la main. Il suffisait d'y penser et – bravo moi – j'y ai pensé : c'est le substantif épïcène. [...] »

On dit indifféremment un enfant et une enfant, un élève et une élève. Dans ce cas c'est le pronom qui détermine le genre : dans d'autres cas ce pourrait être l'article ou le contexte. On sait déjà que dans le cas des substantifs qui se terminent par un e muet la chose est déjà entendue. On dit indifféremment un ou une fonctionnaire, un ou une gestionnaire, un ou une ministre, un ou une dentiste. Mais pourquoi ne dirait-on pas, de la même façon : une professeur, une médecin, une auteur, une écrivain, une plombier ou une assassin ? »

Deux chercheuses canadiennes ont proposé une extension du domaine des formes épïcènes, notamment en simplifiant les paradigmes des formes qui sont déjà homophones, mais pas homographes.

Labrosse (1996) suggère ainsi un retour de balancier pour des formes pour lesquelles une forme commune était anciennement attestée : *brute, caduque, compacte, exacte, publique, puérole, pure, subtile, vile* (1996 : 52) – ainsi qu'une simplification des désinences participiales<sup>89</sup> : entre autres, elle suggère, en cas d'accord complexe, des formes telles que *assurez, avertiz* ou *bienvenuz* (1996 : 64-65). Ces modifications sont certes proposées pour les formes adjectivales et participiales, mais peuvent aussi s'appliquer aux formes nominales correspondantes.

Dans son ouvrage *Comment en finir avec la féminisation linguistique*, Larivière (2000) établit toute une série de propositions visant à multiplier les formes épïcènes, qu'elle résume de façon suivante (Larivière, 2000 : 102-105) :

**Possibilité 1** : Utiliser une forme non-genrée à finale épïcène reconnue.

p. ex. *un/une professoraire ou professoriste, écrivainaire ou écrivainiste, etc.*

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<sup>89</sup> Elle s'appuie dans son argumentation sur l'attestation historique de certaines formes : « Comme il est plus facile de faire accepter des formes ayant existé antérieurement que d'en créer de toutes pièces, cette finale en –ez pourrait être réactivé et investie d'une autre fonction, à savoir la représentation des deux genres, le féminin et le masculin, sans distinction hiérarchique. » (Labrosse, 1996 : 63).

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**Possibilité 2** : Utiliser la forme genrée la plus répandue, soit le féminin.

p. ex. *un/une professeure, médecine, plombière, assassine*

**Possibilité 3** : Utiliser la forme genrée la moins marquée, soit le masculin.

p. ex. *un/une professeur, médecin, plombier, assassin*

Néanmoins, elle conclut (p. 107) : « Non, la solution épïcène, ce n'est pas la solution pour les noms déjà genrés ni pour les noms n'ayant pas de formes féminines attestées ! Elle l'est, toutefois, pour les nouveaux noms à créer. » Ainsi, l'encouragement aux formes épïcènes ne sert pas à « résoudre » le problème de la différenciation des paradigmes, mais à l'atténuer. Il n'est guère possible de savoir dans quelle mesure cette voie a été suivie, car si elle peut donner lieu à des formes nouvelles (comme dans la *Fédération des professionnelles* (faisant partie de la confédération québécoise des syndicats nationaux), elle demeure « invisible » lorsque certains suffixes (tels que *-iste* ou *-aire*) sont choisis pour la création de nouveaux termes.

Si ces propositions étaient faites dans une optique de « féminisation » et dans le cadre d'une bicatégorisation (femmes/hommes), certaines réflexions plus récentes se placent au sein d'une catégorisation des genres qui inclut l'existence de personnes ayant une identité de genre non binaire (entre les pôles féminin et masculin ou au-delà ; fixe ou fluctuant ; sujet à des transitions, etc.). Dans les années 2010, Alpheratz, linguiste non binaire, a rédigé toute une *grammaire du français inclusif* (Alpheratz, 2018) où tous les paradigmes variables (p. ex. *-eur/-euse, -er/ère* ou *an/ane*) sont augmentés d'une forme épïcène permettant d'exprimer la non-binarité : p. ex. *autaire, usagæer, Afghaine*. Ces désinences, tantôt empruntées à d'autres formes, tantôt nouvellement créées, sont toutefois plus facilement identifiables à l'écrit qu'à l'oral, où certaines peuvent être homophones à des formes masculines ou féminines existantes.

Ce système n'est pas le seul ; Borde (2016) en a proposé un autre et Kaplan (2022) fait part d'un système non publié établi par de Villeneuve et Gheeraert en 2018, qui propose en partie d'autres formes telles que *passagex* et *profes-seux* (le *x* étant prononcé [ks]), mais aussi des formes réunissant les deux suffixes masculin et féminin en un nom d'humain, p. ex. *joueureuse*.

### 2.2.2. *Formes brèves*

Comme dernier procédé de variation graphique et/ou morphologique (la limite entre les deux n'étant pas toujours très nette), nous abordons le domaine des noms communs de personnes abrégées : non pas les abréviations traditionnelles (comme *prof.* pour *professeur-e*), mais des graphies visant à rendre (ou éviter), en notation abrégée, des doublets du type *étudiantes et étudiants* ou *auditeurs et auditrices*. Dans cette contribution, il n'est pas possible de faire l'inventaire complet des procédés, signes abrégatifs et des possibilités d'oralisation<sup>90</sup> : nous nous en tiendrons ainsi à quelques exemples.

En français, certaines formes sont de type consécutif : homophones (22) ou non (23), tandis que d'autres sont de type disjonctif (24). Si ces types d'abréviations ne font pas traditionnellement partie du champ de la morphologie, il en est autrement de formes telles que *auditeurices* (25), une sorte de contamination amalgamant en une seule forme les deux désinences masculine et féminine.

(22) *Kosovar-e*

(23) *étudiant-e*

(24) *auditeurs-rices*

(25) *auditeurice ; chômeureuse*<sup>91</sup>

Il est sans doute trop tôt pour savoir quel sera l'avenir de ce type de néomorphologie : sera-t-elle confinée à certains groupes (p. ex. non binaires, cf. Kaplan, 2022) ou sera-t-elle productive dans d'autres contextes plus généraux aussi ?

## 2.3. Propositions alternatives pour le système des noms communs de personne allemands

### 2.3.1. *Variabilité et modification des paradigmes morphologiques*

Dans le système des noms d'humains allemands, la variation concerne en partie les noms communs de personne provenant d'une autre langue, p. ex. le français et l'anglais, où ces noms sont soumis à d'autres règles. Ainsi, de

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. à ce propos Elmiger (2022b).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Abbou (2011, annexes, 9).

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nombreuses formes françaises en *-eur* et *-ier* ont été empruntées en allemand (*Friseur/Coiffeur*<sup>92</sup>, *Ingenieur* ; *Sommelier*, *Hotelier*, etc.). Si, dans certains cas, les formes féminines françaises correspondantes s'utilisent aussi en allemand<sup>93</sup> (*Coiffeuse*, *Sommelière*), on rencontre aussi des féminins formés selon le modèle allemand (*Ingenieurin*, *Hotelierin*).

Actuellement, ces formes peuvent maintenir un paradigme et une graphie proches du français (plutôt en Suisse) ; souvent (en Allemagne), on rencontre des formes aux graphies germanisées :

	morphologie : français	morphologie allemande
graphie française	<i>Friseur, Friseuse</i>	<i>Friseur, Friseurin</i>
graphie allemande	<i>Frisör, Frisöse</i> <sup>94</sup>	<i>Frisör, Frisörin</i>

Pour ce qui est des noms d'humains issus par dérivation, la plupart sont formées comme d'autres noms d'agent désignant des référents non humains, p. ex.:

(26) *arbeit* + *er* : *Arbeiter* (seulement nom d'humain : « travailleur »)

(27) *flieg* + *er* : *Flieger* (nom d'humain et référent concret : « aviateur », « avion »)

(28) *spitz* + *er* : *Spitzer* (seulement référent concret : « taille-crayon »)

Si elles désignent un référent humain, les formes masculines en *-er* ont en général aussi une forme féminine équivalente, obtenue par *motion* (en allemand « *Movierung* »). En allemand, le suffixe dérivationnel par excellence pour former des noms communs de personne féminins est *-in*, qui s'ajoute en général à un nom base qui, en général, correspond à la forme masculine : souvent, celle-ci est formé avec le morphème *-er* (29), ou des variantes formellement proches, telles que *-ler* (30), *-ner* (31), mais le suffixe *-in* s'ajoute aussi à d'autres morphèmes tels que *ist* (32) et *är* (33) :

<sup>92</sup> En Suisse, la forme *Coiffeur* est plus fréquente que dans les autres régions germanophones.

<sup>93</sup> Les formes françaises semblent être plus fréquentes en Suisse, où le français est l'une des quatre langues nationales – et souvent langue du voisinage aussi.

<sup>94</sup> Ces formes s'utilisent de manière inégale dans les différents centres de la germanophonie. Dans le *Variantenwörterbuch* (dictionnaire des variantes, Ammon et al., 2016), la forme *Frisöse* n'est pas répertoriée, mais on en trouve des attestations facilement sur Internet et dans de grands corpus comme ceux du Leibniz-Institut für deutsche Sprache.

- (29) *Arbeit+er, Arbeit+er+in* (« travailleur, travailleuse »)
- (30) *Sport+ler, Sport+ler+in* (« sportif, sportive »)
- (31) *Rent+er, Rent+er+in* (« rentier, rentière »)
- (32) *Klarinett+ist, Klarinett+ist+in* (« clarinettiste »)
- (33) *Million+är, Million+är+in* (« millionnaire »)

Ce procédé n'est pas universel (cf. Elmiger, 2008 : 70-71 pour les restrictions) et dans certains cas (lorsque la base verbale ou nominale se termine en *-er*), on peut observer une haplogogie dans la forme féminine, où l'élément *-er-* n'est pas répété :

- (34) *Ruder+er, Ruder+in* (pas : *Ruder+er+in*) (« rameur, rameuse »)
- (35) *Zauber+er, Zauber+in* (pas : *Zauber+er+in*) (« magicien, magicienne »)

Dans d'autres cas, on observe pour la forme féminine un umlaut pour la première voyelle :

- (36) *Bau+er, Bäü+er+in* (« paysan, paysanne »)
- (37) *Arzt, Ärzt+in* (« médecin »)

La « movierung » à l'aide du suffixe *-in* a souvent fait l'objet de critiques, qui portent essentiellement sur le fait que les formes féminines sont morphologiquement marquées (par l'ajout d'un suffixe supplémentaire), ce qui les rend secondaires par rapport aux formes masculines correspondantes.

Plusieurs modèles de morphologie créative ont été proposées pour remédier à cela ; aucune ne semble avoir dépassé le cadre expérimental, bien qu'on puisse en trouver sporadiquement des attestations<sup>95</sup> :

Création d'un morphème masculin *-is* équivalent au morphème *-in* (les deux s'ajoutant à la forme en *-er*) pour rétablir une équivalence formelle entre les deux (Behlert, 1998<sup>96</sup>) :

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<sup>95</sup> Par exemple, le chroniqueur *Phettberg* utilise ses formes en *-y* depuis une trentaine d'années dans ses textes.

<sup>96</sup> Les propositions de Behlert, illustrées dans son ouvrage à l'aide d'une série de contes traduits en « entpatrifiziertes Deutsch » (« allemand dépatricialisé »), comporte aussi plusieurs autres modifications du système nominal et pronominal de l'allemand, que nous ne développerons pas ici.

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(38) *der Bäck+er+is* (« le boulanger »), *die Bäck+er+in* (« la boulangère »)

Formation des formes féminines en *-in* sans morphème *-er* (Pusch, 2013 : 108-110) :

(39) *der Bäck+er* (« le boulanger »), *die Bäck+in* (« la boulangère ») :

Utilisation épïcène des formes en *-er* (une sorte de « solution anglaise », cf. Pollatschek, 2022) :

(40) *der Bäck+er* (« le boulanger »), *die Bäck+er* (« la boulangère »)

Utilisation des formes en *-er* aux trois genres (au neutre comme forme générique, cf. Pusch, 1980) :

(41) *der Bäck+er* (« le boulanger »), *die Bäck+er* (« la boulangère »), *das Bäck+er* (« personne boulangère »)

Utilisation d'autres morphèmes permettant l'utilisation épïcène dans deux ou dans les trois genres (Phettberg, 1995 et Kronschläger, 2022 (42) ; Pusch 2011, 27 ss (43) ; Hornscheidt et Sammla, 2021 (44)) :

(42) *der Bäck+y* (« le boulanger »), *die Bäck+y* (« la boulangère »)

(43) *der/die Bäck+a* (« le boulanger/la boulangère »)

(44) *dens Bäck+ens* (« personne boulangère »)

Pour l'instant, la plupart de ces modèles semblent être de nature plutôt expérimentale, sans remettre en question la morphologie traditionnelle. Dans d'autres cas, il n'est pas clair si les paradigmes prescriptifs présentés dans les grammaires et les descriptions traditionnelles de la langue sont encore valables ou si certaines formes alternatives ne sont pas en train de les faire évoluer sans que l'on soit en présence de propositions interventionnistes.

Ainsi, les formes adjectives et participiales nominalisées sont traditionnellement invariables après l'article défini et variables après l'article indéfini (cf. ci-dessus, tableau 1) : elles suivent ainsi la flexion adjectivale :

(45) *der Grüne, die Grüne* (« le Vert, la Verte (parti écologique) »), comme *der grüne Ball* (« le ballon vert »), *die grüne Lampe* (« la lampe verte »)

(46) *ein Angestellter, eine Angestellte* (« un employé, une employée »), comme *ein angestellter Kollege* (« un collègue employé »), *eine angestellte Freundin* (« une amie employée »)

Peut-être sous l'influence des paradigmes dérivationnels des noms communs de personnes en (*er*)*in*, on peut rencontrer, çà et là, des formes telles que *Grünerin, Angestelltin*. Dans une chronique de la revue suisse *Sprachspiegel*, consacrée à la langue allemande, on lit (David, 1989 : 52) :

Wird der «Angestellte» bald eine «Angestelltin», der «Gelehrte» bald eine «Gelehrtin» zur Seite haben?

(Le *Angestellte* aura-t-il bientôt à son côté une *Angestelltin*, le *Gelehrte* (« savant ») bientôt une *Gelehrtin* (« savante »)?)

Ce qui se lit, rétrospectivement, comme une prémonition satirique, semble aujourd'hui constituer une variante dérivée – bien que rare – à côté de la forme fléchie traditionnelle.

Dans d'autres occurrences, l'intention du sujet écrivain n'est pas nécessairement claire. Ainsi, dans l'extrait suivant, il n'est pas évident de savoir si *Grünin* s'utilise de manière neutre ou pour critiquer le comportement de la parlementaire écologique dont il est question dans l'article commenté :

*Es fehlten Motiv und Beweise, aus dem der Saftladenbesitzer eine emanzipierte Ex-Parlamentarierin und Grünin anpöbeln sollte, nicht aber dafür, dass diese den Saftladen schädigen wollte. Nach dem, wie das hier beschrieben wurde, hätte jeder Richter die Grünin verurteilt.*<sup>97</sup>

(Il manquait un motif et des preuves pourquoi le propriétaire du magasin de jus de fruit s'en prenne à une ex-parlementaire émancipée et à une *Grünin*, mais pas pourquoi celle-ci veuille nuire au magasin de jus de fruit. D'après la description qui en a été faite, n'importe quel juge aurait condamné la *Grünin*.)

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<sup>97</sup> Message posté sous un article de blog (<https://netzpolitik.org/2018/100-000-euro-in-zweitagen-sigi-maurer-sammelt-spenden-fuer-klagen-gegen-hass-im-netz/>, 18 octobre 2018).

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Enfin, de nouvelles formes se trouvent aussi là où la littérature spécialisée postule un blocage, p. ex. en ce qui concerne les formes féminines en *-in*, p. ex. pour les formes en *-ling* (*Liebling*, *Flüchtling*, *Zwilling*, « bien-aimé-e », « réfugié-e », « jumeau/jumelle »). Des formes en *-lingin* sont attestées en diachronie (Leonhard & Siegel, 2021 : 198), mais aussi en synchronie (47), et le même phénomène s'observe pour d'autres suffixes, (p. ex. *-bold*, (48)) :

(47) *der Zwilling*, *die Zwillingin* (« le jumeau, la jumelle »)

(48) *der Witzbold*, *die Witzboldin* (« le farceur, la farceuse »)

### 2.3.2. Formes brèves

En allemand, les formes brèves existent depuis longtemps. Si elles ont concerné longtemps la variation entre formes féminine et masculine, elles sont censées représenter aussi les identités de genre non binaires, ce qui se répercute aussi sur le choix des signes ou moyens abrégatifs (cf. la contribution d'Ana Margarida Abrantes dans ce volume, à propos de l'astérisque). Ainsi, des signes ayant émergé récemment :

(45) *Student\*in*, *Student:in* ou *Student\_in* (« étudiant-e »)

Ces procédés ont désormais tendance à en supplanter d'autres, qui étaient en usage au XXe siècle déjà :

(46) *Student/-in*, *StudentIn*, *Student(in)*

Puisque dans la plupart des cas, le féminin se forme par ajout d'un morphème dérivationnel, les formes abrégées sont de type additif (47), ce qui laisse en général, à gauche, une forme nominale complète. Dans les guides de langue non sexiste/inclusive, ceci était en général considéré comme une condition pour que l'abréviation puisse être considérée comme valable ; en cas de modification de la base (48) ou de troncation de la forme masculine (49), elle était déconseillée.

(47) *Student:in* (*Student*, *Studentin*)

(48) *Ärzt:in* (*Arzt*, *Ärztin*, « médecin »)

(49) *Expert:in* (*Experte*, *Expertin*, « expert-e »)

Certains guides récents ne font plus les mêmes recommandations, de sorte que *Ärzt:in* et *Expert:in* font désormais partie des formes préconisées. Si à l'écrit, le statut morphologique de l'abréviation ne semble pas plus clair qu'en français, il n'en va pas de même pour l'oral, où plusieurs réalisations sont possibles : par exemple sous forme de doublets (*Expertinnen und Experten*, [ɛks'pɛʁtɪnənundɛks'pɛʁtən]) ou en un seul mot, avec un coup de glotte (*Expert?innen*, [ɛks'pɛʁtʔɪnən]). De ce fait, on peut se demander si cela ne crée pas, à l'oral, une sorte de féminin générique marqué phonologiquement.

## Conclusion

Dans le panorama qui précède, nous avons montré d'une part que, dans les deux langues étudiées, le système morphologique des noms communs de personne contient déjà un certain nombre de variantes, mais que diverses propositions ont été faites pour le rendre plus apte à tenir compte de la variation des genres, que celle-ci soit conceptualisée de manière binaire (femmes et hommes) ou non binaire (prise en considération d'autres genres). Ainsi, le domaine des noms communs de personne peut fasciner du fait de son dynamisme morphologique et graphique – mais aussi déconcerter par les discussions polémiques et projets interventionnistes qui en découlent.

La plupart des propositions délibérées sont soit expérimentales soit adaptées à des besoins d'individus ou de groupes qui ne se retrouvent pas dans les désignations et structures traditionnelles. Certaines apportent des alternatives à quelques formes tandis que d'autres ont la prétention de modifier plus profondément le système des noms communs de personne.

Sont-elles amenées à durer ? Étant donné leur caractère nouveau, il est sans doute trop tôt pour en juger. Il est probable que certaines propositions qui interviennent profondément dans le système morphologique du français ou de l'allemand resteront confinées à des niches. D'autres innovations, p. ex. la double suffixation amalgamée du type *lecteurice* ou *chanteuseuse*, ont peut-être non seulement le potentiel de complexifier la morphologie des noms d'humains, mais aussi d'amener davantage de variation dans les usages.

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# How gender-fair are gender-neutralizing and feminization strategies? Grammatical gender choices in Netherlandic vs Belgian Dutch sports press on women's football

Machteld Meulleman\*

## Abstract

This paper offers a comparative corpus-based analysis of the distribution of masculine, feminine and epicene nouns denoting female players in written football press in the Netherlandic and Belgian varieties of Dutch. Our study reveals that in Belgian Dutch the feminine forms clearly dominate, despite a more marked use of epicene nouns in the plural. In Netherlandic Dutch, by contrast, the use of masculine nouns is much more extensive, especially when it comes to technical football terms, a fact compensated by the massive presence of general terms denoting female football players and women in general. In both language varieties, however, titles contain significantly more feminine nouns, while masculine nouns are most common in players' quotations, illustrating how diatopic differences may be overruled by discursive constraints, in this case of sports press.

**Keywords:** Dutch; masculine generics; feminization; gender-neutral nouns; women's football; sports press.

## Introduction

Germanic languages display a great variety with respect to the use of masculine and feminine nouns referring to women (i.a. De Backer & De Cuypere, 2012): for instance, German systematically uses feminine nouns (especially

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through derivation, as in *Kapitänin* ‘captainf’) while these are extremely rare in English, where the use of etymologically masculine nouns can nowadays be considered as genuinely generic, in the sense of behaving as common person nouns.<sup>98</sup> As in many other linguistic domains (cf. Haeringen, 1956), Dutch occupies an intermediate “sandwich” position between German and English in the sense that most occupational nouns have both a masculine and feminine form, but the masculine form may be used generically in order to refer merely to the role of a person. In order to say that Lucy is a teacher, for instance, it is possible to say either *Lucy is leraar* with the morphologically masculine noun *leraar* (‘teacherM’) or *Lucy is lerares* (‘teacherF’), the difference between both forms being considered a matter of personal preference (cf. Taaladvies.net). The use of the masculine forms, however, has been linked to androcentric language use (cf. Romein-Verschoor, 1975; Verbiest, 2000) and in order to attempt to achieve non-sexist or gender-fair language use, Dutch resorts to both feminization and gender-neutralizing strategies, which often leads to competing alternatives as in the case of the opposition between the already mentioned feminine form *lerares* ‘teacherF’ and the epicene form *leerkracht* ‘teaching force’ (cf. De Caluwé, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Gerritsen, 2002; Mortelmans, 2008). In addition, the issue is complicated by the added peculiarity that Belgian Dutch is a contact language of French, a language where the creation of gender-neutral nouns is much more restricted for grammatical reasons, and where the use of feminization is relatively advanced within the Romance language family (e.g. Meulleman, 2022).

Considering the general lack of corpus studies on the actual use of masculine, feminine and epicene human nouns in Dutch, be it in the Netherlands or in Belgium, the present paper offers a comparative empirical analysis of the distribution of nouns of the three genders used to denote female football players in general newspapers with a sports section in October-November 2021 (*De Telegraaf* and *Algemeen Dagblad* for the Netherlands and *Het Laatste Nieuws* and *Het Nieuwsblad* for Belgium). Table 1 details the constitution of the corpus:

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<sup>98</sup> For a discussion of the notion of genericity, see Elmiger (this volume). In this contribution, the term *generic* is used to refer to the use of nouns in order to denote persons or human beings (irrespective of their gender).

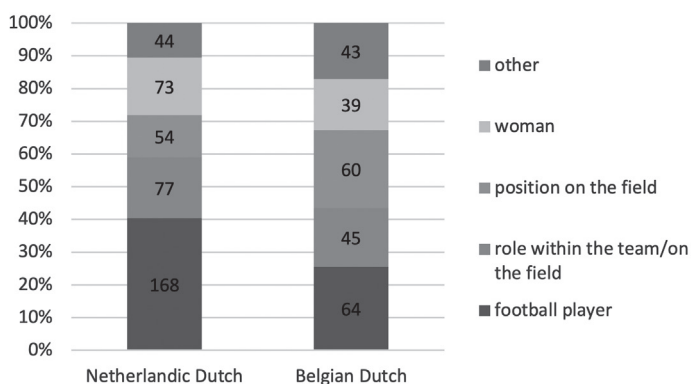
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Table 1. Presentation of the corpus.

		Number of words	
Netherlandic Dutch	De Telegraaf	11,083	
	Algemeen Dagblad	10,124	21,207
Belgian Dutch	Het Nieuwsblad	11,211	
	Het Laatste Nieuws	11,705	22,916
			44,123

In order to examine the use of masculine, feminine and epicene nouns in Dutch, we will combine a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the use of the three genders among the nouns used to refer to the female football players (and football professionals in general) in our corpus. From a quantitative point of view, it is striking that our Netherlandic corpus contains 416 occurrences of such nouns, accounting for 62% of them, while the Belgian articles only include 250 occurrences. In addition, as shown in table 2, both varieties of Dutch slightly differ with respect to the proportional importance of the semantic categories these human nouns belong to: in Netherlandic Dutch we find more general (basic level) terms referring to football players (mainly *speler/spelster* 'playerM/F' and *voetballer/voetbalster* 'footballerM/F'), while our Belgian corpus relatively contains more technical terms, especially terms referring to players occupying a precise position on the field.<sup>99</sup>

Table 2. The distribution of nouns denoting female players in our corpus according to their semantic category.



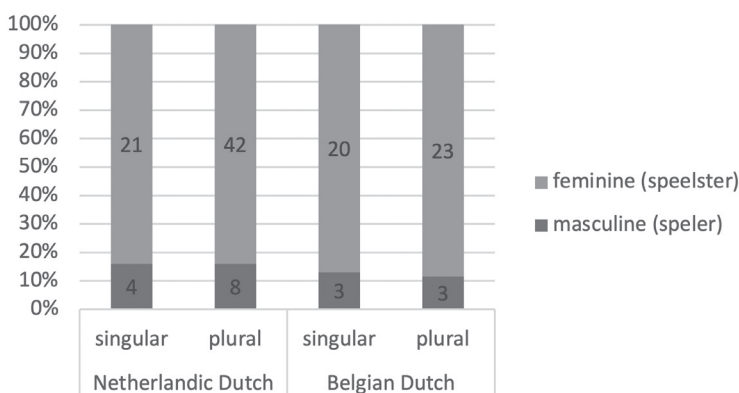
<sup>99</sup> For a more general morpho-semantic analysis of nouns denoting humans that practice sports, see Lagae (2018) and Aleksandrova & Lagae (2018).

In what follows, we will first focus on the use of general terms referring to football players in our corpus (section 1), before examining the behavior of more technical terms on the one hand (section 2), and terms denoting women in general on the other hand (section 3).

## 1. General terms

The most frequent human nouns in our corpus refer to the concept of ‘player’, either with or without specifying the sport in question. In both cases, the nouns used in Dutch are either masculine or feminine, while there are no epicecne (quasi-)equivalents.<sup>100</sup> In the case of the hyperonymic item ‘player’, the feminine noun *speelster* clearly dominates in both varieties of Dutch accounting for more than 80% of occurrences both in the singular and the plural. The only notable difference between Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch is that in Netherlandic Dutch the item is twice as frequently used in the plural as in the singular while there is no such contrast in Belgian Dutch.

Table 3. The distribution of masculine and feminine nouns denoting ‘players’ in our corpus.

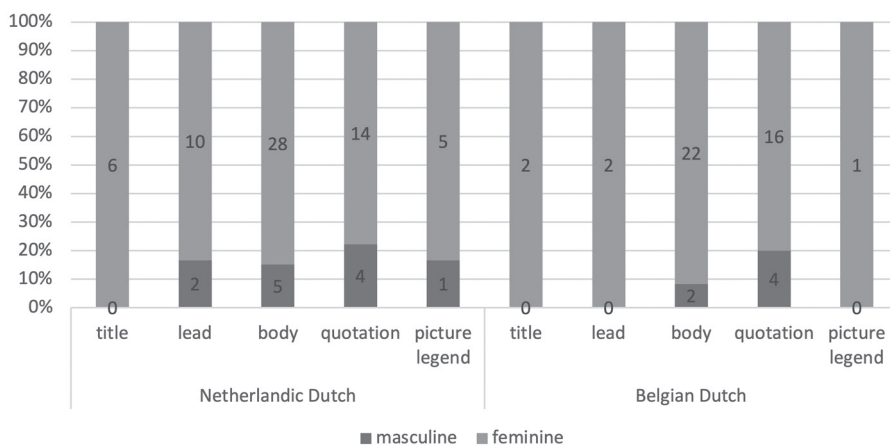


<sup>100</sup> Strangely, the Dutch nouns referring to ‘sporters’, which exist both in masculine (*atleet, sporter, sportman*) and feminine forms (*atlete, sportster, sportvrouw*), are almost completely absent in our corpus. The only occurrence is the plural use of the masculin form *sporter* in the Netherlandic Dutch journal *De Telegraaf*, where it appears in the composed noun *collega-sporters* ‘sport colleagues’. We will treat nouns denoting teammates in section 2.

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At first sight the distribution of masculine and feminine nouns referring to football players in our corpus might seem arbitrary. Just as in the case of Romance languages (Meulleman, 2022), however, their textual distribution varies significantly. As shown in table 4, in both varieties, there are no masculine forms to be found in the titles of the journal articles, while they reach a proportion of 20% in quotations.

Table 4. The textual distribution of masculine and feminine nouns denoting 'players' in our corpus.



The difference between titles and the body of the text is especially clear in examples (1) and (2) which both come from the same journal article published by *De Telegraaf* on November 18th about the attack on the PSG-player Kheira Hamraoui. In (1), the title of the article, we find the feminine noun *speelster*, while in (2), an excerpt from the body of the text, the masculine noun *speler* is used to denote the same woman. Given that in the title the first name of the player is clearly feminine, the choice for the feminine noun is not indispensable for the reader to understand that the question bears on a woman. Therefore, it can be considered as a way to reinforce the message that the article in question will deal with women's football. In the body of the text, the masculine form can only be understood as an epicene form with a generic reading, since in this context there is no doubt that the noun *speler* refers to a specific woman.

(1) Mishandelde PSG-*speelster* Kheira Hamraoui doet haar verhaal: 'Hij haalde uit met ijzeren staaf' (*De Telegraaf*, 18/11/21)

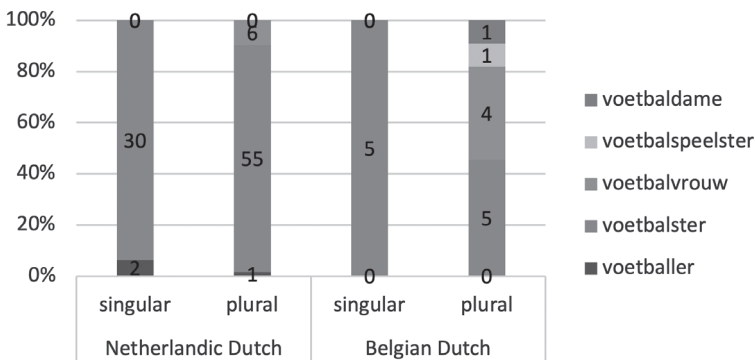
‘Assaulted PSG-playerF Kheira Hamraoui tells her story: “He lashed out with an iron bar”’

(2) De PSG-speler werd op 5 november op het politiebureau van Versailles ondervraagd en gaf haar relaas van een avond die in een nachtmerrie veranderde. (*De Telegraaf*, 18/11/21)

‘The PSG-playerM was questioned at the police station of Versailles on November 5<sup>th</sup> and gave her account on an evening that turned into a nightmare.’

As for the concept of ‘footballer’, feminine nouns are even more frequent than in the case of ‘players’. As shown in table 5, the masculine noun *voetballer* is extremely rare in Netherlandic Dutch (2/32 in the singular, 1/56 in the plural) and completely absent in our Belgian corpus. In Netherlandic Dutch the preferred feminine form clearly is *voetbalster*, while our Belgian corpus shows more variation alternating between *voetbalster*, a feminine noun by grammatical derivation, and three nouns that are feminine by composition, e.g. *voetbalvrouw* ‘football woman’, *voetbalspeelster* ‘football playerF’ and *voetbaldame* ‘football lady’. As in the case of ‘player’, these varieties differ in that in Netherlandic Dutch nouns denoting ‘footballers’ are almost twice as frequent in the plural as in the singular, while no difference in this respect can be observed in our Belgian corpus.<sup>101</sup>

Table 5. The distribution of masculine and feminine nouns denoting ‘footballers’ in our corpus.

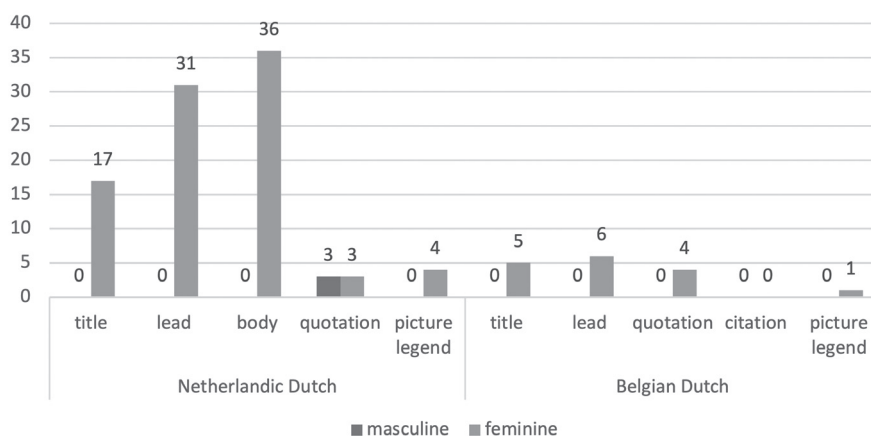


<sup>101</sup> This seems to invalidate a possible explanation, linked to the fact that in the singular *voetbalster* is homonymous between the epicene composition ‘football star’ (mainly used for exceptional male players such as Maradona) and the feminine form of *voetballer* ‘footballer’, *ster* being either an independent lexeme (‘star’) or the grammatical morpheme marking the feminine (cf. -ess in English).

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When it comes to the textual distribution of the masculine and feminine forms, table 6 reveals that the masculine nouns in Netherlandic Dutch are only found inside quotations. Besides, the frequency of the concept of ‘footballer’ is remarkably high in titles (22/110, i.e. 20%), compared to the frequency of ‘player’ in titles on the one hand (8/124, i.e. 6%), and in proportion to the small number of words concerned by titles (especially compared to the main text) on the other hand (22/2002, i.e. 1% vs. 88/42121, i.e. 0,2%).

Table 6. The textual distribution of masculine and feminine nouns denoting ‘footballers’ in our corpus.



The frequent use of the feminine noun *voetbalsters* in titles corresponds to the journalists’ need to indicate that the articles in question deal with women’s football. For this purpose, the noun can be used either alone as in (3), or in combination – with proper names of specific teams as in (4) or of national selections as in (5). In all these contexts, the use of the masculine noun *voetballers* would probably not be interpreted in a gender-neutral but a masculine reading, confirming thus Gygax et al.’s (2008) hypothesis that masculine generics do not really exist.

(3) *Voetbalsters* strijden in Sydney om wereldtitel (*Het Nieuwsblad*, 02/12/21)  
 ‘Footballers<sub>F</sub> battle for world title in Sydney’

(4) *Voetbalsters* FC Twente rekenen af met Ajax (*De Telegraaf*, 05/09/21)  
 ‘The FC Twente Footballers<sub>F</sub> deal with Ajax’

- (5) *Voetbalsters* Oranje gelijk in oefenduel tegen Japan (*De Telegraaf*, 29/11/21)  
'The Orange FootballersF ties in friendly match against Japan'

In this light, it is unsurprising that the feminine noun is also frequently found with superlatives, as in (6) and (7), where the use of the masculine alternative would give rise to an overly generic interpretation and be clearly false:

- (6) BBC roept Vivianne Miedema uit tot beste *voetbalster* ter wereld: 'Een beetje overweldigd' (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 29/11/21)  
'The BBC declares Vivianne Miedema the best footballerF in the world: "A bit overwhelming"'

- (7) Topclubs in rij voor Vivianne Miedema: Oranje-spits kan een van best betaalde *voetbalsters* worden (*De Telegraaf*, 30/11/21)  
'Top clubs queueing for Vivianne Miedema: the Orange-striker can become one of the best paid footballersF in the world'

Example (8) illustrates the similar use of the feminine noun in the lead of articles, where the presence of the noun at the very beginning explicitly indicates that the question bears on women's football. In the subsequent sentence, the subject *Engelsen* is a morphologically epicene nominalization of the nationality adjective *Engels* and would be ambiguous if it were not clearly anaphoric.

- (8) De Engelse *voetbalsters* hebben in de WK-kwalificatie flink huisgehouden tegen Letland. De Engelsen die onder leiding staan van Sarina Wiegman, oud-bondscoach van de Leeuwinnen, maakten dinsdagavond gehakt van de bezoekers en wonnen met maar liefst 20-0. (*De Telegraaf*, 01/10/21)  
'The English footballersF wreaked havoc in the WC qualifications against Latvia. The English who are led by Sarina Wiegman, former national coach of the Lionesses, made minced meat of the visitors Tuesday night and won by as much as 20-0.'

For their part, masculine nouns referring to football players are exclusively found in citations, where they reach 50% of all forms in Netherlandic Dutch. In (9), the female player Daniëlle van de Donk consistently combines the use of masculine nouns (*voetballer*, *speler*, *voetballers*) with that of female pronouns (4 x *she*) and the rather general female gender noun *meid* 'girl'.

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(9) “Damaris is een goede *voetballer*, ze speelt niet voor niets bij Lyon. Daarnaast is ze een heel leuke meid. Ze zou er goed tussen passen. Ze vraagt ook wel eens aan me hoe het is bij Oranje. Als ik iets kan betekenen, doe ik dat graag. We hebben veel goede *spelers*, maar er is altijd ruimte voor meer sterke *voetballers*.” (*De Telegraaf*, 25/11/21)

“Damaris is a good footballer<sub>M</sub>, it is no coincidence if she plays for Lyon. Besides, she is a very fun girl. She would nicely fit in. She asks me sometimes how it is [to play] for Orange. If I can do something, I will do it gladly. We have many good players<sub>M</sub>, but there is always space for more strong footballers<sub>M</sub>.”

In (10), the male coach Parsons is systematically using masculine nouns in order to refer to the female players of his team, next to the epicene *persoon* (‘person’) and only the possessive form *haar* ‘her’ reveals that he is talking about a women’s team. In this particular case, however, the coach in question is British and he probably said the cited words in English. In this light, the use of the masculine forms can merely result from the journalist’s choice.

(10) De Britse Parsons hoopt van harte dat Egurrola uiteindelijk voor Nederland kiest. “Ze is een fanatische *speler* en zou een geweldige extra optie zijn. Niet alleen vanwege haar profiel als *voetballer*, maar ook als persoon,” aldus de keuzeheer van Oranje, die zijn rol als bondscoach tot voor kort combineerde met een baan als clubtrainer bij Portland Thorns in Amerika, tegenover de NOS. (*De Telegraaf*, 25/11/2021)

‘The British [coach] Parsons sincerely hopes that Egurrola will finally choose the Netherlands. “She is a fantastic player<sub>M</sub> and would be a great extra option. Not only because of her profile as a footballer<sub>M</sub>, but also as a person,” so the national coach of the Orange selection, who until recently combined his role as national coach with a job as club trainer of the Portland Thorns in the US, to the DBF [Dutch Broadcasting Foundation].’

In conclusion, in our press corpus, both in Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch, in order to denote ‘players’ and ‘football players’ the journalists almost exclusively use feminine forms, while masculine forms are mainly found in quotations of players and trainers. The main difference between the two varieties of Dutch is that these rather general feminine terms appear considerably more frequently in the Netherlandic than the Belgian variety.

## 2. Technical terms

As any specialized domain, football has its own specific vocabulary with various degrees of technicity. What is of interest to us here is that in order to denote players with specific positions or roles on the football field, Dutch often has masculine, feminine and epicene alternatives. Table 7 offers some concrete examples of such gender alternatives:

Table 7. Examples of gender-specific and unmarked alternatives for technical terms.

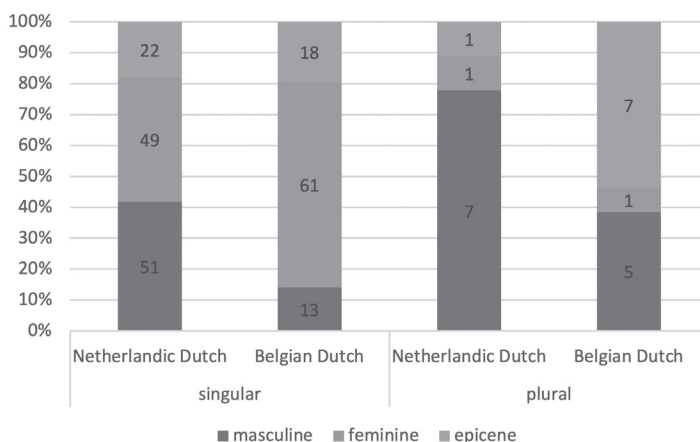
	Masculine nouns	Feminine nouns	Epicene nouns
'forward'	<i>aanvaller</i>	<i>aanvalster</i>	<i>linksbuiten, rechtsbuiten</i>
'midfielder'	<i>middenvelder</i>	<i>middenveldster</i>	<i>spil</i>
'defender'	<i>verdediger</i>	<i>verdedigster</i>	<i>linksback, rechtsback</i>
'goalkeeper'	<i>doelman, keeper</i>	<i>doelvrouw, keepster</i>	<i>goalie</i>
'captain'	<i>aanvoerder</i>	<i>aanvoerster</i>	<i>kapitein</i>
'teammate'	<i>ploeggenoot</i>	<i>ploeggenote</i>	<i>ploegmaat</i>
'trainer'	<i>trainer</i>	<i>trainster</i>	<i>coach</i>
'referee'	<i>scheidsrechter</i>	<i>?? scheidsrechtster</i>	<i>official</i>
'top scorer'	<i>topschutter, topscorer</i>	<i>topschutster</i>	

Before presenting some quantitative data on the distribution of the three genders in our corpus, several differences between these quasi-equivalents must be pointed out. First, for some concepts, the three nouns are close to synonyms (e.g. 'captain', 'trainer', 'goalkeeper'), while in other cases (especially the nouns referring to positions such as 'forward', 'midfielder', 'defender') the epicene nouns are more specific than their masculine and feminine alternatives (e.g. *linksbuiten* 'left winger' vs. *aanvaller/aanvalster* 'forward [litt. attackerM/F]'). Second, some concepts cannot be expressed by nouns of the three gender categories: Dutch has no epicene term for 'top scorer', while the feminine noun *scheidsrechtster* is not standard (but attested in football press, cf. Op de Beeck, 2014). Finally, many of these technical terms are English loanwords that are epicene in this language but for which feminine forms exist in Dutch. In these cases, the use of the morphologically masculine variant can be

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considered either as masculine (if considered as a Dutch noun) or as epicene (if considered as a loanword). With these three observations in mind, table 8 gives an idea of the overall distribution of masculine, feminine and epicene technical nouns referring to football players in our corpus. In general, the distribution of the three gender categories in the two varieties of Dutch differs according to the number. In the singular, female nouns dominate in Belgian Dutch, while the use of masculine nouns is clearly more important in Netherlandic Dutch. In the plural, Netherlandic Dutch has an even clearer preference for masculine nouns, while we observe an almost equal distribution between masculine and epicene nouns in Belgian Dutch. In both varieties, however, the use of masculine nouns is more pronounced in the plural than in the singular, while the dominant feminine nouns of the singular are exceptional in the plural.

Table 8. Overall distribution of the grammatical gender of technical nouns referring to female football players in our corpus.<sup>102</sup>



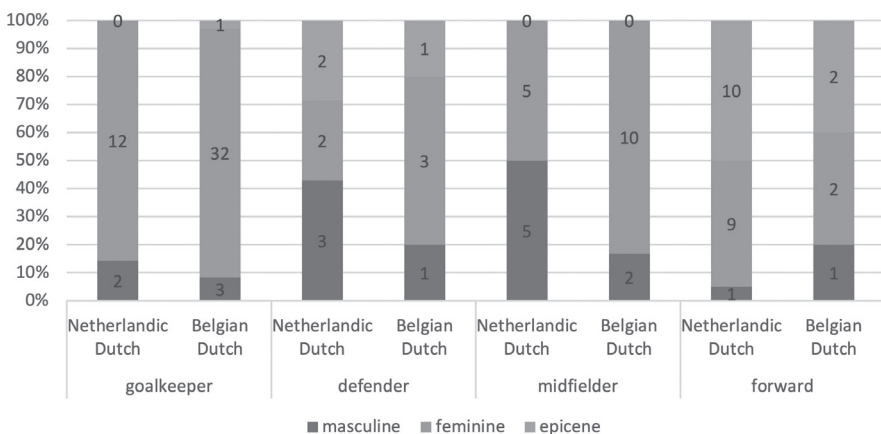
<sup>102</sup> The masculine nouns taken into consideration are *aanjager* ('boosterM'), *aanvaller* ('forwardM'), *aanvoerder* ('captainM'), *assistent*, *clubgenoot* ('teammateM'), *collega-sporter* ('sports-colleagueM'), *invaller* ('substituteM'), *keeper*, *middenvelder* ('midfielderM'), *ploeggenoot* ('teammateM'), *sterkhouder* ('mainstayM'), *teamgenoot* ('teammate'), *topschutter* ('top scorerM'), *topscorer*, *trainer* and *verdediger* ('defenderM'). The feminine nouns are *aanvalster* ('forwardF'), *aanvoester* ('captainF'), *doelvrouw* ('goalkeeperF'), *flankspeelster* ('wingerF'), *flankverdedigster* ('wing backF'), *invallster* ('substituteF'), *keepster* ('goalkeeperF'), *middenveldster* ('midfielderF'), *ploeggenote* ('teammateF'), *teamgenote* ('teammateF'), *topschutster* ('top scorerF'), *trainster* ('trainerF'), *verdedigster* ('defenderF') and *vervangster* ('substituteF'). The epicene nouns are *bondscoach* ('national coach'), *coach*, *collega* ('colleague'), *goalie*, *grensrechter* ('linesman'), *international*, *kapitein* ('captain'), *linksback* ('left back'), *linksbuiten* ('left winger'), *maat* ('mate'), *official*, *ploegmaat* ('teammate'), *rechtsback* ('right back'), *rechtsbuiten* ('right winger'), *scheidsrechter* ('referee'), *spits* ('striker'), *reserve* ('substitute') and *teamlid* ('team member').

Given the specific constellation of each concept (number of equivalents, (co-)existence of loan words, etc.), we will now consider the main technical concepts separately in the next section. The technical nouns under study being much more frequent in the singular than in the plural, which is not surprising for subordinate human nouns (cf. Mihatsch, 2017), we will only take into account the singular forms when it comes to comparing Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch in quantitative terms, except for the concept of ‘teammate’. We will first examine separately nouns referring to players occupying specific positions on the field and nouns denoting specific roles within the team and on the field, before considering the use of nouns denoting ‘teammates’.

### 2.1. Nouns indicating positions on the field

As shown in table 9, human nouns denoting (female) players according to their position display much variation with respect to their proportional frequency according to gender. In both varieties of Dutch, nouns referring to goalkeepers appear generally in the feminine form, for midfielders either feminine or masculine forms are used, while forwards and defenders are expressed by epicene forms in more than 30% of occurrences. Nevertheless, across the board, Netherlandic Dutch tends to use less feminine forms (except for ‘forwards’, where the proportion is equal in both varieties) and more masculine and epicene forms than Belgian Dutch.

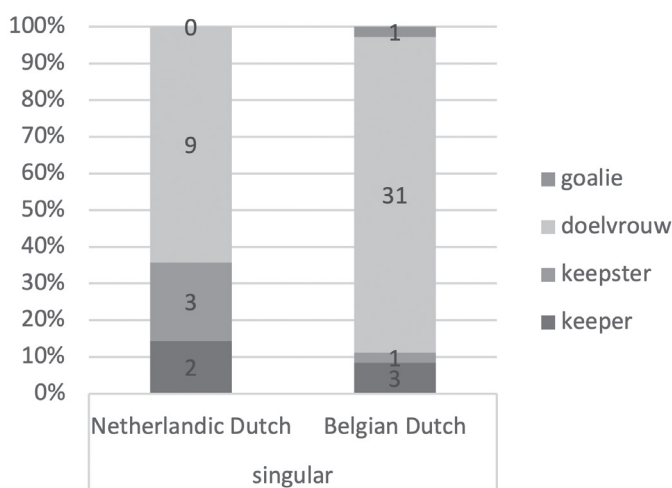
Table 9. Distribution of the grammatical gender of technical nouns referring to female football players occupying specific positions on the field in our corpus.



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In Belgian Dutch feminine forms are not only more frequent, but their feminine character is also more heavily morphologically marked. As shown in table 10, as for the nouns denoting ‘goalkeepers’, Netherlandic Dutch uses both the composed item *doelvrouw* (‘goal woman’) and *keepster* (the morphologically derived feminine form of the English loan word), whereas in Belgian Dutch the use of the latter is rare compared to that of *doelvrouw* (which, besides, is much more frequent in absolute terms). In both varieties of Dutch, the composed masculine noun *doelman* (‘goal man’) is not attested in our corpus.

Table 10. The distribution of the nouns used to denote the ‘goalkeeper’ in our corpus.



The analysis of some concrete examples of the human nouns in question reveals that textual distribution again plays an important role. In Belgian Dutch, almost all masculine and epicene forms appear in quotations of players, as *keeper* in (11) and *goalie* in (12). Interestingly, there are no female markers within these quotes themselves and it is only the journalist’s mention of the name of the cited players and the additional mention of the possessive *haar* ‘her’ in (12) which indicate that the football players in question are women.

(11) Tessa Wullaert: “(...) Ik herinner mijn eerste doelpunt ook nog. Langs de *keeper* in dan binnen.” (*Het Nieuwsblad*, 21/09/21)

‘Tessa Wullaert: “(...) I also still remember my first goal. Alongside the goalkeeperM and then inside.”’

(12) “Een diepe vriendschap zette me oog in oog met de Zultse *goalie*. Ik week uit naar links en schoof rustig binnen,” vertelde Giuga over haar doelpunt. (*Het Laatste Nieuws*, 21/11/21)

“A deep free kick put me face to face with the Zulte goalie. I swerved to the left and gently slid the ball in,” said Giuga on her goal.’

On the contrary, technical terms referring to positions are almost systematically feminine in titles, where they tend to co-appear with other explicit feminine markers such as the first name of the player as in (13) and the name of Belgium’s national football selection for women (*Red Flames*) as in (14). In this light, it is interesting to note that in (14), the only title where we find a masculine form in Belgian Dutch, the noun *keeper* does not open the title, as does *doelvrouw* in (13), and only appears after the mention of the proper name *Red Flames*.

(13) *Doelvrouw* Justien Odeurs opnieuw in selectie Red Flames (*Het Nieuwsblad*, 18/11/21)

‘GoalkeeperF Justien Odeurs again selected for the Red Flames’

(14) Gerommel in doel bij de Red Flames: vragen na verrassende niet-selectie van eerste *keeper* Justien Odeurs (*Het Nieuwsblad*, 20/10/21)

‘Rumbling in the goal of the Red Flames: questions after surprising non-selection of the first goalkeeperM, Justien Odeurs’

In Netherlandic Dutch, the use of technical human nouns specifying positions on the field is very rare compared to Belgian Dutch, which might be linked to the fact that in this text initial position feminine nouns are preferred. One of the rare contexts is example (15) where the epicene noun *spits* (‘striker’) follows the masculine plural form *kandidaten* (‘candidates’) and the last name Miedema, which as a family name only constitutes an implicit feminine marker for the informed reader. The proper name *Leeuwinnen* (‘Lionesses’) at the very end of the title is the only element clearly indicating that the article is dealing with women’s football, especially thanks to the fact that the women’s selection of the Netherlands contains the feminine morpheme *-in* (nowadays an unproductive morpheme).

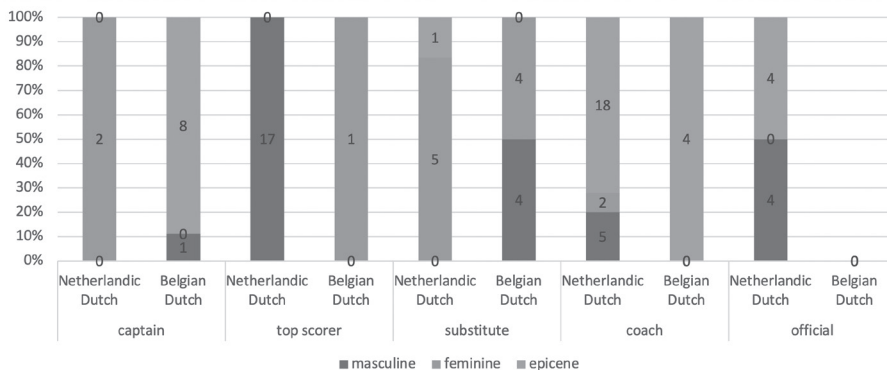
(15) Parsons ziet drie *kandidaten* om Miedema te vervangen als *spits* bij *Leeuwinnen* (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 25/10/21)

‘Parsons sees three candidatesM to replace Miedema as striker among the Lionesses’

## 2.2. Nouns indicating roles (within the team and on the field)

In our corpus, there does not seem to be any clear trend in the distribution of masculine, feminine and epicene human nouns referring to women with specific roles in the football competition. As shown in table 11, for ‘top scorer’ we only find masculine nouns in our Netherlandic Dutch corpus next to one single feminine form in Belgian Dutch, while inversely for ‘substitutes’ Belgian Dutch uses more masculine nouns than Netherlandic Dutch. Furthermore, for ‘captains’ Netherlandic Dutch exclusively uses the feminine form *aanvoerder*, while the epicene *kapitein* is very dominant in Belgian Dutch. Finally, for coaches and officials, Netherlandic Dutch uses both epicene and masculine terms, while in Belgian Dutch we only find the epicene loanword *coach* for ‘trainers’.

Table 11. Distribution of the grammatical gender of technical nouns referring to female football players with specific roles in our corpus.



The logic behind these data is difficult to disentangle and is probably linked to different levels of integration of loanwords in Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch, two varieties spoken in different countries with their own socio-historical contexts and contact languages. In Flanders, for instance, our data suggest that the French loanword *kapitein* is more integrated than in Netherlandic Dutch where the heritage nouns *aanvoerder* and *aanvoester* are more common (a fact that should be checked in a corpus on men’s football), while in the Netherlands we find more English loanwords referring to coaches (*trainer*, *assistant*, *coach*) and these seem to be used more frequently in the masculine form, i.e.

as epicene nouns just as in English. Another difficulty is that several of these roles are not necessarily occupied by women: contrary to captains and substitutes who are players on the field and must be women in women's football, trainers and officials may be either men or women, which might explain the relatively high number of epicene forms for 'trainers' in both varieties. In this light, the masculine use of *trainer* in (16) definitely has a generic interpretation, while the epicene *bondscoach* clearly refers to a specific woman:

(16) Sarina Wiegman, de voormalig *bondscoach* van de voetbalsters van Oranje, staat op de nominatielijst van *trainer* van het jaar van een vrouwenelftal. (*De Telegraaf*, 22/11/21)

'Sarina Wiegman, the former national coach of the footballersF of the Orange selection, is listed for the nomination of trainerM of the year of a women's football team.'

In the case of 'officials', for which there is no feminine noun in Standard Dutch, once again a difference between title and main text can be observed: in titles we only find the epicene loanword *official* preceded by the adjective *vrouwelijk* 'female' as in (17), while in the body of the text we also find the morphologically masculine noun *scheidsrechter* used without any gender precision as in (18).

(17) Primeur: Franca Overtoom eerste vrouwelijke *official* in Eredivisie (*De Telegraaf*, 16/11/21)

'Scoop: Franca Overtoom first female official in Premier division'

(18) Overtoom maakte haar debuut in 2018 in het betaalde voetbal als *assistent-scheidsrechter* bij Telstar tegen Jong Utrecht in de eerste divisie. (*De Telegraaf*, 16/11/21)

'Overtoom made her debut in professional football in 2008 as assistant-official<sub>M</sub> at Telstar against Young Utrecht in the first division.'

As for 'top scorer', for which no epicene form exists in Dutch, the masculine forms *topscorer* and *topschutter*, as in (19) and (20) respectively, remain ambiguous to the uninformed reader. In both examples, the player in question (Vivianne Miedema) is presented as top scorer of the national team of Orange without mentioning if this is to be interpreted in general or only for the women's

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national selection. In (21), it is specified that she is top scorer of the women's team, but even in this case the reader cannot infer whether this also holds in general or not.

(19) De spits van Arsenal, met 85 doelpunten de *topscorer* aller tijden in de nationale ploeg, krijgt rust en is daarom niet meegereisd naar Minsk. (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 25/10/21)

'Arsenal's striker, with 85 goals the all time topscorer<sub>M</sub> of the national selection, gets rest and has not travelled to Minsk for that reason.'

(20) De *topschutter* van Oranje, op clubniveau uitkomend voor Arsenal, belde met de Engelse oud-speelster (tegenwoordig analist) Alex Scott over hoe ze door Nederland gewonnen trofee veilig richting Engeland kon krijgen. (*De Telegraaf*, 28/10/21)

'The top scorer<sub>M</sub> of Orange, who at club level represents Arsenal, called the English ex-player (nowadays analyst) Alex Scott about how to bring safely to England the trophée won in the Netherlands.'

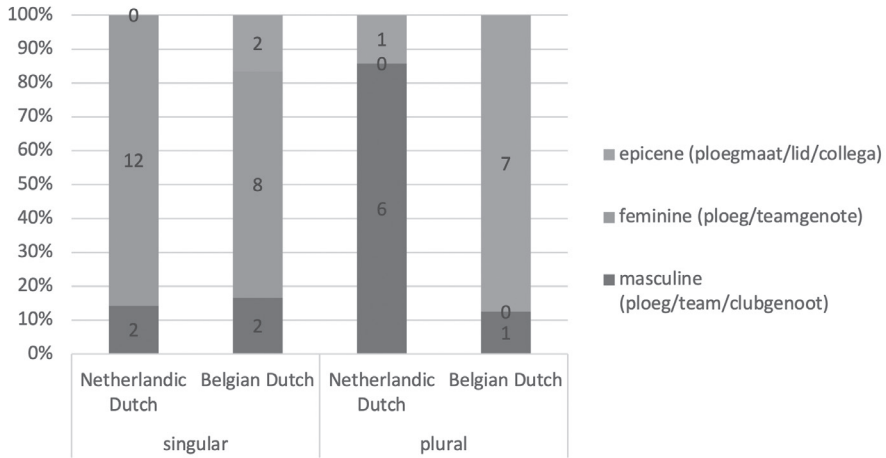
(21) Miedema is de *topscorer* aller tijden van de Nederlandse voetbalsters met 85 doelpunten in 103 interlands. (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 29/11/21)

'Miedema is the all time top scorer<sub>M</sub> of the Dutch footballersF with 85 goals in 103 interlands.'

### 2.3. Nouns denoting 'teammates'

One of the rare concepts for which there is a true threefold opposition between masculine, feminine and epicene forms in Dutch is 'teammate': in our corpus, we find the masculine nouns *ploeggenoot*, *teamgenoot* and *clubgenoot*, the female nouns *ploeggenote* and *teamgenote* as well as the epicene gender-neutral nouns *maat*, *ploegmaat*, *collega* and the neuter *teamlid*. As shown in table 12, feminine nouns heavily dominate in the singular, while epicene nouns are mainly used in the plural, especially in Belgian Dutch.

Table 12. The gender distribution of nouns denoting ‘teammates’ in our corpus.



In the singular, the difference between the use of the feminine noun *ploeggenote* in (22) and the masculine equivalent *ploeggenoot* in (23) is that in the latter case the noun precedes the female proper name Lieke Martens and can thus be considered to function as an apposition indicating her role, while in the former case the noun is referring to a specific woman. Similarly, in (24), the masculine occurrence of *teamgenoot* appears in a predicative context. In this particular example, the fact that youth divisions are mixed competitions may also favor the use of the masculine form in the intention to obtain a generic interpretation.

(22) Diallo werd eerder deze week aangehouden omdat ze het plan voor de aanval op haar *ploeggenote* zou hebben bedacht. (*De Telegraaf*, 16/11/21)

‘Earlier this week Diallo was arrested because she is suspected of having thought up the plan for the attack on her teammate<sub>F</sub>.’

(23) Vivianne Miedema heeft geen prettige Champions League-avond beleefd op bezoek bij het Barcelona van Oranje-*ploeggenoot* Lieke Martens. (*De Telegraaf*, 05/10/21)

‘Vivianne Miedema did not experience a nice Champions League evening when visiting the Barcelona team of her Orange teammateM Lieke Martens.’

(24) Deze Ajax-speelster was in de jeugd van FC Abcoude *teamgenoot* van Matthijs de Ligt (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 08/09/21)

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'This Ajax-player<sub>F</sub> was in the youth division of FC Abcoude a teammate of Matthijs de Ligt'

In the plural, however, both masculine and epicene nouns are used to refer to specific players as in (25) and (26) respectively.

(25) Maar zij kreeg tegen de [*sic*] het stugge Oost-Europese land amper ruimte en werd door haar *ploeggenoten* bovendien bijna nooit bereikt. (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 26/10/21)

'But against the stiff Eastern European country she was barely given space and was in addition hardly ever reached by her teammates<sub>M</sub>.'

(26) Rond 19.50 uur kwamen de drie *teamleden* bij het restaurant aan en parkeerden ze. (*De Telegraaf*, 18/11/21)

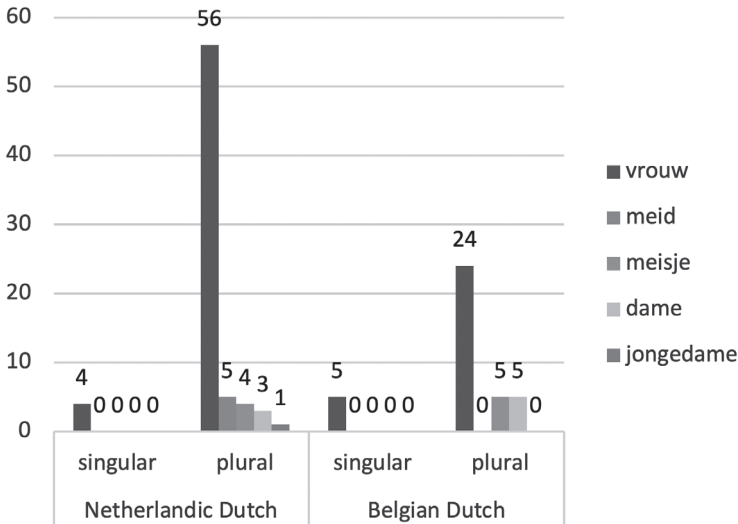
'Around 7:50 pm the three teammates<sub>M/F</sub> arrived at the restaurant and parked their car.'

As a general conclusion, our data on technical nouns reveal that for this semantic category, which is most often used in the singular, Netherlandic Dutch has a larger use of masculine nouns, whereas Belgian Dutch tends to prefer feminine nouns.

### 3. General terms for 'women'

In the last section of this chapter, we will look at the frequency and distribution of general terms referring to 'female human beings' (women, girls, etc.) in our corpus. As shown in table 13, these terms are much more frequent in the plural than in the singular in both varieties of Dutch, which differ however in two respects: there is more variation in the plural nouns used and they are twice as frequent in Netherlandic than in Belgian Dutch.

Table 13. The distribution of general nouns denoting ‘female human beings’ according to their number in Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch.



In general, the frequent use of the plural forms corresponds to the journalistic necessity to indicate that the question is about women’s football, since as already mentioned in our discussion on the use of *voetbalsters*, the proper names of teams and competitions are generally epicene. In (27) we find the team names *Bayern München* and *Olympique Lyon* and the competition *Champions League* and it is only the mention of ‘for women’ that distinguishes the competition in question from the men’s competition.

(27) Op de vierde speeldag in groep D van de Champions League voor vrouwen heeft Bayern München het Franse Olympique Lyon woensdag een eerste nederlaag toegediend. (*Het Nieuwsblad*, 17/11/21)

‘On the fourth day of play in group D of the Champions League for women Bayern München delivered a first defeat to the French Olympique Lyon on Wednesday.’

In addition, contrary to French for instance, where the masculine *Allemand(s)* can be opposed to the feminine *Allemande(s)* in the singular and the plural, in Dutch the nominalization of nationality adjectives is gender specific in the singular (*DuitserM* vs. *DuitseF*), but in the plural the masculine form is the only possible form (*DuitsersM* vs. *\*DuitsesF*). In example (28), the epicene plural noun *Duitsers* is refers to a female German team, while the singular form *Japans*

is the feminine form of ‘Japanese’. Thus, in this example, the reader can only know after the latter form that the sentence is about women’s football. In example (29), the use of *vrouwen* is the only indication that the sentence is about women’s football: the nominalized form *de Belgen* would be ambiguous (and probably interpreted as a reference to the men’s team).

(28) De *Duitsers* wonnen met 1-0, dankzij een kopbaldoelpunt van de *Japanse* Saki Kuagai, die vorig seizoen nog de kleuren van Lyon verdedigde. (*Het Nieuwsblad*, 17/11/21)

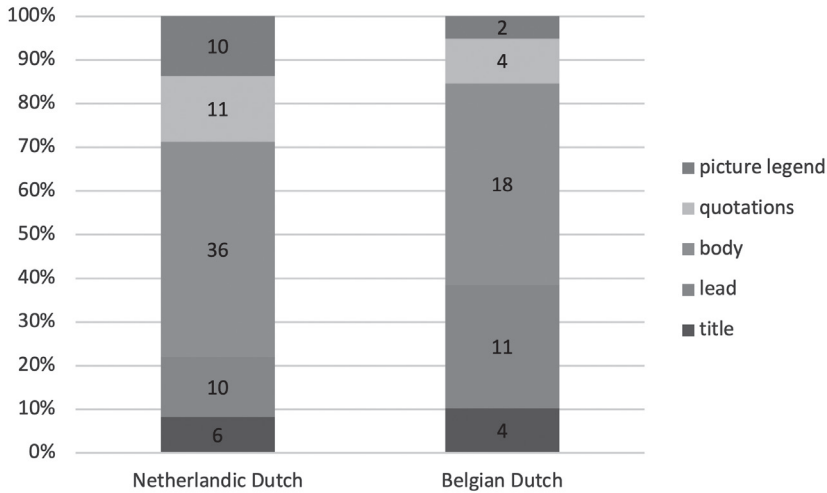
‘The Germans won by 1-0, thanks to a head goal of the Japanese<sub>F</sub> Saki Kuagai, who defended the colours of Lyon last season.’

(29) Niet de 19-0 van vorige week tegen Armenië, maar wel deze cruciale overwinning tegen Polen is de referentiewedstrijd waren [*sic*] de Belgische *vrouwen* behoefte aan hadden. (*Het Nieuwsblad*, 30/11/21)

‘Not the 19-0 of last week against Armenia, but this crucial victory against Poland is the reference match that the Belgian women needed.’

In the plural the general nouns referring to women thus have a very similar function as the feminine plural form *voetbalsters* discussed in section 1, which is also reflected in their textual distribution. As can be seen in table 14, in Belgian Dutch almost 40% of the general nouns denoting ‘women’ appear either in the title or in the article’s head specifying that the article is about women’s football. In Netherlandic Dutch, however, this role only accounts for 20% (the noun *voetbalsters* being more common in these text parts in this variety, cf. table 6). In the body of the text, Netherlandic Dutch uses more general nouns referring to women both in absolute and proportional terms, which might be linked to and compensate the more important use of masculine forms of technical football terms in this text part.

Table 14. The textual distribution of general nouns denoting ‘female human beings’ in our corpus.



In conclusion, in our corpus, the lion’s share of general terms denoting women (even without considering the frequency of adjectives meaning ‘female’, etc.) are used by the journalists to make it clear that their article is about women’s football. Similarly to general terms denoting football players, they are clearly more frequent in Netherlandic Dutch than in Belgian Dutch. In this light, it would be interesting to know the frequency of general terms denoting men in football press on the men’s competition, but we can imagine this to be much lower given that, despite a recent increase in media coverage, women’s football is still not given comparable means and receives considerably less media attention than men’s football (cf. Kreisky & Spitaler, 2006; Petty & Pope, 2019; Parry et al., 2021).<sup>103</sup>

<sup>103</sup> According to Ngram Viewer, in English, the frequency of *women’s football* and *women’s soccer* is far more extensive than that of *men’s football* and *men’s soccer* (cf. [https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=men%27s+football%2Cwomen%27s+football%2Cmen%27s+soccer%2Cwomen%27s+soccer&year\\_start=1930&year\\_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3](https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=men%27s+football%2Cwomen%27s+football%2Cmen%27s+soccer%2Cwomen%27s+soccer&year_start=1930&year_end=2019&corpus=26&smoothing=3) (last accessed on 01/10/21))

### Conclusion

Based on an empirical approach combining quantitative and qualitative analyses, this study reveals that the written football press on women's football refers to the female players in a relatively different way in Netherlandic and Belgian Dutch. Although in our corpus the distribution between masculine, feminine and epicene alternatives significantly varies depending on the nouns in question, in general, the use of masculine nouns is far more frequent in Netherlandic Dutch, particularly when it comes to technical football terms, whereas Belgian Dutch has a clear preference for feminine nouns in the singular and a more or less equal distribution between feminine and epicene equivalents in the plural. Another striking difference between the two varieties is that technical terms referring to players occupying specific positions on the field are slightly more frequent in Belgian Dutch, while the use of less specific feminine nouns referring to football players (*speelsters* 'playersF', *voetbalsters* 'footballersF') and general nouns denoting female human beings (*vrouw*, *dame* 'woman', *jongedame*, *meid*, 'girl', etc.) is over twice more frequent in Netherlandic Dutch, which might be interpreted as a way to compensate for the larger use of masculine technical nouns in this variety. From a qualitative point of view, these feminine forms are consistently used to specify that the articles bear on women's football (as opposed to men's football), and our results may correspond to very specific practices in sports press. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that in both language varieties, titles contain significantly more feminine nouns, while masculine nouns are most common in journalists' quotations of players or other football professionals. More fundamentally, if the extensive feminization of football related terms as in Belgian Dutch inevitably results in representing women's football as a different sport than men's football (cf. Meulleman, 2023), the Netherlandic way of compensating for the generic use of masculine nouns for technical terms with a disproportionate frequency of very general human nouns referring to women paradoxically seems to treat women's football to a larger extent as the female practice of a men's sport.

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# The gender asterisk in German: the sensorial impact of linguistic change

Ana Margarida Abrantes\*

## Abstract

Changes to orthography are bound to meet strong resistance by language users. Examples of this are reactions to the orthographic reform of the German language in the late 90s (Heller, 1996) or the debate around an orthographic agreement for Portuguese as pluricentric language (Correia, n.d.). Negative opinions about these two processes are often supported by argumentation concerning the apparent contradiction of having principles of phonology and etymology guiding the changes. A similar situation has recently been introduced by the gender asterisk in German, an orthographic change seeking more gender justice in language. The asterisk in writing has led to a sensorially disruptive change in how words are pronounced, namely through the introduction of a glottal stop in a sound context that normally does not foresee it, as a way to mark in speaking what the asterisk does in writing: to highlight the difference between the gender-inclusive form and the representation of the feminine in a binary morphological marking; e.g. *Student\*innen* vs. *Studentinnen*.

This paper proposes to investigate the resistance to the gender asterisk and to explain it from a linguistic perspective, namely with consideration of the morphological rules of the language. It further seeks to relate this analysis to the argumentation used against the asterisk to see whether this is sustained by language studies.

**Keywords:** Gender asterisk; gender identity; representation; orthography; language change.

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## 1. The problem: biological gender, grammatical gender and identity

Inspired by a visit to Italy in 1920, German poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote a letter to his Swiss friend and patron Nanny Wunderly-Volkart in which he disserted, among other things, about grammatical gender. Rilke was puzzled by the difference between Romance languages, in which the sun is masculine and the moon is feminine, and the German exact opposite:

[I]ch denke immer im Sinne von le soleil und la lune, und das Umgekehrte in unserer Sprache ist mir konträr, so daß ich immer machen möchte „der“ große „Sonn...“ und die Möndin!... so geht es einem oft, daß man mit dem äußerlichen Benehmen der Sprache uneins ist und ihr Innerstes meint, oder eine innerste Sprache...

I always imagine that, as in French, the sun is masculine and the moon feminine; the opposite phenomenon in our language doesn't make sense to me. I would always prefer to speak of the great masculine sun (“der große ‘Sonn...’”) and the feminine moon (“die Möndin”)!... It frequently happens that we disagree with the external manifestation of our language and intend what is most intimate (Innerstes), or a most intimate speech.<sup>104</sup>

Rilke's observation is linguistically philosophical, as he mentions the difference between the surface of expression and the depth of meaning, in its relationship with the referent. To him it seems less natural that the sun be feminine, and the moon be masculine.

Some 40 years before, and in a wittier tone, American writer Mark Twain (1997 [1880]) wrote about the same randomness and apparent unnatural attribution of grammatical gender in the report on his travels through Europe, *A Tramp Abroad*. In the appendix to this book, called *The Awful German Language*, Twain disserts about young girls and turnips, and how unfairly the first are treated in speech:

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<sup>104</sup> Rilke, Rainer Maria. Translated in Corbeil (2015: 59-60).

In German, a young lady has no sex, while a turnip has. Think what overwrought reverence that shows for the turnip, and what callous disrespect for the girl. See how it looks in print -- I translate this from a conversation in one of the best of the German Sunday-school books:

Gretchen: "Wilhelm, where is the turnip?"

Wilhelm: "She has gone to the kitchen."

Gretchen: "Where is the accomplished and beautiful English maiden?"

Wilhelm. "It has gone to the opera."

Twain seems impressed by the callousness with which the German language treats women. And in fact, while the reference to men, young and old, is consistently masculine in the grammar (*der Bub, der Junge, der Jugendliche, der Man, der Greis*, 'the boy, the youth, the man, the old man'), women are traditionally only entitled to their gender either when married or rich: *das Mädchen, das Weib* vs. *die Frau, die Dame* 'the girl, the woman' vs. 'the [married] woman, the lady'.

The apparent arbitrariness and unfairness in the distribution of grammatical gender is thus not a new problem. Yet today it resonates loudly in society originating a debate around *gendergerechte Sprache*, i.e. gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language. Within this broad issue, the specific concern of how to address a person in language so that they feel included, or at least meant in and by the designation, has gained more prominence.

While linguists of the second wave feminism raised awareness to the inequalities in the way language refers to men and women<sup>105</sup> – namely by the pervasiveness of the generic masculine – today this problem is more complex: it is no longer only about how to include women in language, but how to acknowledge multiple and more differentiated categories of gender in a language that remains, for the most part, openly masculine.

So, what forms are languages finding to address the problem more adequately? How flexible and creative are they to allow for new forms, especially schematic or closed-class new words? Creating a new categorical word or morpheme for a new semantic referent is not difficult: language is ever

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<sup>105</sup> See Kramer (2016), Cameron (1998) or Pusch (1991).

permeable to new nouns, new adjectives, new verbs. But how easily can it accommodate a new conjunction, a new number category or a new pronoun? And is it language that accommodates these changes, or rather the community of its users, the speakers who keep it alive?

## 2. One solution: the gender asterisk

The recent and ongoing polemic over the new inclusive plural pronoun *iel* in French, and how it found a way into the dictionary *Le Robert*<sup>106</sup>, is just an example of both the flexibility of linguistic structure and the creativity of its speakers.

In German, one of the ways to mark inclusive reference, when referring to a group of people who share an occupation or a function, but not gender identity, is the so-called *Sternchen* or “little star,” i.e. the asterisk used between the main morpheme and the suffix, as in *Student\*innen* or *Zuschauer\*innen*. Other proposed differentiating spellings are adding a colon before the feminine plural suffix (*Student:Innen*, *Zuschauer:Innen*), capitalizing the feminine plural suffix, known in German as „das Binnen I“ or “the inside (or *internal*) I” (*StudentInnen*, *ZuschauerInnen*) or adding an underscore before the suffix (*Student\_Innen*, *Zuschauer\_Innen*). All these forms introduce a visual disruption into the rules of spelling: a punctuation marker as a colon is normally not used inside a word, and capitalizing one of its middle letters is far from conventional. Also, the underscore and the asterisk are not letters or graphemes, nor are they diacritic signs, as is the German *Umlaut*.<sup>107</sup> The use of these markers in writing is a new generalized form of signaling the inclusion of various gender identities. Just as *Le Robert* enunciates the new pronoun *iel/iels* as a generalized form in language use, but not a norm<sup>108</sup>, so are the alternatives mentioned for German becoming more recurrent, generalized in use, but not yet a rule of language.

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<sup>106</sup> See “French Dictionary Accused of ‘Wokeism’ over Gender-Inclusive Pronoun.” *The Guardian*, November 17, 2021. (Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/17/french-dictionary-wokeism-gender-inclusive-pronoun-iel>.)

<sup>107</sup> The asterisk is a pointer that signals information to be looked for elsewhere in a text or page (normally at the bottom, as a footnote) and the underscore, used before as underlining sign in typewriting, has seen its use generalized to mark in electronic contexts the gaps normally left in writing (e.g. the gap between first and last name in an e-mail address).

<sup>108</sup> “*iel* – Définitions, Synonymes, Conjugaison, Exemples” | *Dico En Ligne Le Robert*,” n.d. (Available online: <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/iel>.)

Why these new forms are emerging and being adopted or negotiated by language users shows how language is very much alive and changing, flexibly adapting to the expressive needs of its users and to changes in society. The need that spiked these forms is the emancipation of multiple gender identities and the claim for heteronormative groups to acknowledge these identities.

However, two questions emerge: The first is why a gap or disruption (marked in writing by the asterisk and in speaking by an unexpected glottal stop) between the masculine lexeme and the feminine suffix is considered a good form for representing all gender identities. In other words, how is including these alternative identities in a graphic gap between masculine and feminine, different from the classic problem of including the feminine reference in the generic masculine? If earlier feminist linguists called attention to the fact that women did not feel automatically represented by the masculine form just because it was supposedly generic, do other gender identities – queer, transgender, bisexual, etc. – feel represented now by a generalized yet not differentiating gap? And does the same gap duly represent such diverse identities? Is it gender fair (*gendergerecht*), or does it amalgamate gender identities in a overgeneralized, non-differentiating form?

The second question has to do with the reactions to this change. As happens with any change in language, it is welcomed by a few, and resisted by the majority, who hardly ever sees the point of changing what supposedly has worked all along. The point, though, is that while changes in orthography are normally met with resistance but acknowledged still within the boundaries of what spelling does, the gender-inclusive signs mentioned before are sensorially disruptive: both in the visual arrangement of the words in writing and in the pronunciation in speaking, the gap introduced by these forms marks a difference from the norms of spelling and the norms of pronunciation. This sensorial breach, both visual and aural, and the estrangement it generates in the flow of written and spoken language has possibly furred the resistance towards these forms of gender justice in language.

### 3. The asterisk in writing

The asterisk is a special sign (*ein Sonderzeichen*) used at the level of the text and its organization. It is one of the possible signs used for reference in a

footnote or endnote, when additional information needs to be conveyed but is not integrated in the body of the text. It is not foreseen, within the conventional official rules of orthography and language use, as a sign to be used within a word, as it is not a grapheme, a sign or combination of signs that in writing stands for a phoneme or a conceptual distinctive sound unit in a language. In a multimodal context, the asterisk is a placeholder for something unpleasant or unreferenceable (a curse or swearword), as conventionalized in cartoons or graphic novels. Simply put: the asterisk is not a letter.

The asterisk as a mark of inclusion was first used in the early 90s by English-speaking LGBT communities in the form *trans\**, which was described only in 2018 by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as follows:

“*trans\**: originally used to include explicitly both transsexual and transgender, or (now usually) to indicate the inclusion of gender identities such as gender-fluid, agender, etc., alongside transsexual and transgender.” (*OED*, 2018)

In Germany, one of the first uses of “*trans\**” was in a 2010 report about gender-based discrimination at the workplace published by the anti-discrimination office of the federal government (Franzen & Sauer, 2010). The asterisk is seen here as a generic form replacing all compounds that would refer to diverse identities.<sup>109</sup>

According to *Duden*, the reference dictionary for Standard High German, in its edition of August 2020, the asterisk is not acknowledged within the official rules of German orthography;<sup>110</sup> however, its use is getting ever more widespread as a form of inclusion of non-binary gender categories.

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<sup>109</sup> In the original: “Dabei dient der Stern\* als Platzhalter für diverse Komposita.” (Franzen & Sauer, 2010: 7)

<sup>110</sup> “Vom amtlichen Regelwerk nicht abgedeckt sind Schreibweisen wie die folgenden: mit Genderstern (Asterisk): Schüler\*innen [...] Es ist zu beobachten, dass sich die Variante mit Genderstern in der Schreibpraxis immer mehr durchsetzt. Zu finden ist sie besonders in Kontexten, in denen Geschlecht nicht mehr nur als weiblich oder männlich verstanden wird und die Möglichkeit weiterer Kategorien angezeigt werden soll.” [“The official rules do not cover spellings such as the following: with gender star (asterisk): Schüler\*innen [...] It can be observed that the variant with gender star is becoming more and more established in writing practice. It can be found especially in contexts in which gender is no longer understood as only female or male and the possibility of further categories is to be indicated.”]

The handbook on gender-inclusive language, authored by Gabriele Diewald and Anja Steinhauer and edited by the *Duden* publishing house, mentions that the use of the gender asterisk is closely monitored by the German Council for Orthography (*Rechtschreibrat*), as its use is recognized in society as “widespread and legitimate means of striving for gender-equitable written expression.” (Diewald & Steinhauer, 2020, 127)

Thus, what by many is seen as a breach of orthographic rules is indeed intended as such: the irritation makes language users pause and puzzle before the asterisk, to then question why it is used in the middle of a written word and what it is there for. In other words, to make language users more aware of language and its effects.

#### 4. Pronouncing the asterisk – or how a glottal stop becomes a phoneme

The gender asterisk is however not only a stranger in the rules of spelling, but it also further triggers an effect in spoken language that is viewed as somewhat unnatural. When considering the relationship between oral and written language – and we intentionally leave out sign language –, a look at both language history and developmental psychology shows that long before a language is written, it is spoken. Writing is the necessary convention that makes spoken language more permanent and recordable.

In the case of the asterisk, however, it seems that the orthography came first and forced a change in speaking. In other words: a change in writing (graphic, visual) is turning into a change in speaking (aural and phonetic). In examples like *Student\*innen* what happens between the lexeme and the suffix is a glottal stop. This is no stranger to the German language, where a syllable or word beginning with a vowel sound is anticipated by this briefest break (very much responsible for the *staccato* rhythm of the language). A few examples: *bearbeiten* [bə'ʔarbaɪtɪŋ], ‘to work on something, to deal with something’, *enteignen* [ɛnt'ʔaɪgnən], ‘to expropriate’, or a sentence like *Das ist ein Abenteuer* [das'ʔɪst'ʔaɪn'ʔa:bɛntʊɐ], ‘this is an adventure’.

The International Phonetic Alphabet symbol [ʔ] transcribes the glottal stop, a consonant sound in German produced by the constriction and sudden release of the air stream at the glottis. The brief pause produced by the glottal stop,

which in German is called *Knacklaut* (the “crackling sound”), follows a phonological principle and is not marked in writing with a specific sign. Because the syllable is a sound unit and the morpheme is a unit of meaning, they do not always coincide; in fact, the morphological separation between the stem word and the suffix is normally not marked: neither in the pronunciation nor in spelling of the word (for example, *Leh|re|rin*, not *Lehr|er|in*).

Yet the gender asterisk, which began in writing, inverts this when it is “read” or spoken: suddenly, the gender morpheme in the plural is highlighted in speaking, a change that strikes as unnatural. In this phonological context, the pause is unexpected and it causes estrangement and even resistance.

To establish a difference between the plural feminine and the gender inclusive form, which resorts to the same suffix, speakers began to produce a pause before the suffix, a glottal stop. This language sound marks the pronunciation of the gender asterisk, a sign that before this function did not transcribe a language sound. In these gender fair nouns the glottal stop is thus phonemic, i.e. it generates a difference in the meaning of the word (Haider, 2021), visible in the following minimal pair:

1) *Studentinnen* [ʃtuˈdɛntɪnən] vs.

2) *Student\*innen* [ʃtuˈdɛntʔɪnən].

In examples such as these, one can see that the glottal stop is a distinctive unit of speech that separates the meaning of the two words. In other words, a phoneme. It further indicates that the suffix *-innen* in 1) is not the same as the suffix *-innen* in 2) but instead they are homonymous suffixes: in 1) it means the plural feminine, in 2) it means the plural diverse.

It is true that one can introduce a pause before the feminine suffix when one wants to stress the feminine gender of the referent: *Minister-IN* (‘Madam Minister’). But this is a *discursive* stress, different from the syllabic structure of the word: *Mi|nis|te|rin*. So, when the feminine suffix is stressed in sentence prosody, it behaves similarly as in the case of the non-binary *-in*: there is a break before the suffix, to mark and stress that the referent is feminine. In the gender inclusive glottal stop before the suffix *-innen*, though, the pause is intended differently, namely as a gap to force awareness about diverse categories of gender identity. So, the effect of the non-binary form would be the effect of permanent stress of this suffix, which by extension is the stress of the referent,

i.e. an effect of awareness raising to the non-binary gender identity categories. What the defenders of the asterisk wish, in the end, is to force awareness to the fact that identity is an individual construct, not a grammatical category. And they do that by means of language.

These considerations interest primarily linguists. Language users, in their turn, are left with an impression of estrangement in face of this change from the previous widespread use of the generic masculine. In an interview to the German newscast *Tagesthemen* linguist Ewa Trutkowski demonstrates how the systematic use of gender fair forms might lead to a collapse in spoken communication, by making gender through the pervasive use of the glottal stop in the sequence *Jede\*r Professor\*in lobt seine\*n /ihre\*n Student\*in* ('Every professor praises their student').<sup>111</sup> The example takes it to the extreme, and we could contest that the glottal stop before the *-r* in the first determiner (*jede\*r*, 'every') is hardly even possible, because it bypasses the distribution rule of the glottal stop in the language, by occurring before a consonant and not a vowel sound. Nonetheless it is illustrative of how unnatural this pause feels in speech.

## 5. More than words: The public debate on the gender asterisk

The debate on the generalized use of the asterisk to mark diverse gender identities has been quite heated, as generally is the case when language change becomes visible. Linguist Peter Eisenberg is one of the loudest voices defending the generic masculine as the only sensible form to make reading and speaking viable (Eisenberg, 2021). He argues for the generic masculine, claiming that it is widespread and devoid of an exclusive masculine marker, a position which is strongly contested and linguistically argued against by Gabriele Diewald in her essay *Zur Diskussion geschlechtergerechten Sprache* (Diewald, 2018).

Occasionally, taking sides in this debate and acting in consequence may produce questionable results. On August 17, 2021, the German TV station

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<sup>111</sup> A gender-neutral translation could be: 'Every professor praises their students.' (in: *Tagesthemen*, June 9, 2021, available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpqEcD0oKsA> [4'22"], last accessed on November 3, 2022).

## Changing Norms: System and Evolution in Modern European Languages

ZDF, known for openly adopting gender-inclusive language, produced an Instagram post about the advances of the Taliban in Afghanistan, which read as follows:

Die Islamist\*innen ziehen in immer mehr afghanische Städte ein.  
(‘The Islamists are moving into more and more Afghan cities.)

The post and the station were immediately object of protest on social media, fueled by boulevard media such as the *Bild Zeitung* (Fabian & Altrogge, 2021). The outrage about a gender dictatorship was met with condescending irony towards the station, which withdrew the post. Nonetheless, the weekly *Die Zeit* picked it up a month later to explain what was so strange about the word:

Islamist\*innen, okay. Gemeint waren also nicht nur männliche Islamisten und nicht nur weibliche Islamistinnen. Sondern, dafür steht der Genderstern, auch transgeschlechtliche, intergeschlechtliche und nicht binäre Personen mit islamistischer Gesinnung. (Parnack, 2021)

[‘Islamists, okay. This meant not only male Islamists and not only female Islamists. But, as the gender star indicates, also transgender, intergender and non-binary persons with Islamist convictions’].

Whether the Taliban recruit gender diverse fighters for their cause remains to be seen. The comment, however, draws attention to what the asterisk means: the inclusion of all possible gender identities.

The debate about the gender asterisk is widespread, recurrent and polarized. The main arguments for its use concern how people with non-binary gender identities do not feel represented in the generic masculine forms established in language use (very much echoing and widening the claim of second-wave feminists). Another argument for the use of gender-fair language and thus also for the asterisk is that cognitively the reference to the masculine form alone narrows how we see the world: predominantly as masculine and silenced of the presence of diverse identities. A concrete consequence of this is, for example, the response to a job description: if it is formulated in masculine terms only, applications by women and other identities are far less, than when

a gender-neutral form is selected (e.g. *Führungskraft*, or *Lehrperson*, i.e. ‘manager’ and ‘teacher’ or, literally, ‘leading force’ and ‘teaching person’).

Against gendering on language, there are two main arguments: the first is that the use of gender-inclusive forms (like the asterisk) is in fact divisive for society, not just because there are people who use it and others refuse to use it, but because speakers who refuse to use it report feeling patronized by other speakers, as though the refusal of the asterisk would be a sign of not being up to the times. The second main argument is that language runs the danger of collapsing in its communicative efficiency under the weight of accommodating ever new forms and all possible reference scenarios, as seen in the example mentioned by Ewa Trutkowski. In this perspective, gender inclusion is introduced at the cost of communicative efficiency.

This paper does not aim to take position in this debate, which is and will be ongoing. Instead, it wishes to stress the fact that language is both collective and individual. Collectively it is organized, normalized and heatedly discussed. Individually, it is used, spoken, written, not always in consensus with the debates of the moment. And more importantly, it is not a system on its own, oblivious to mind and life. On the contrary, it is deeply related to the perception of the world and reality and to how this reality may affect it.

## **5. Conclusion: Language and the imprint (*Prägung*) of culture**

Language lives because it is used and its change is driven by change in society and culture. What only a few decades ago might be seen as a problem of political correctness must today be considered in the context of cancel culture. The question of how one should speak and write is probably as old as language itself.

Language change is however hardly arbitrary. On the one hand, it goes hand in hand with developments in society. On the other hand, it pushes and challenges the limits of the linguistic system, but it is constrained by the cognitive underpinnings of language itself. In his *Cognitive Semantics*, Leonard Talmy gives multiple examples of how language mirrors the cognitive constructions of our mind. For example, when we say that *the book is on the table*, but not that *the table is under the book*, the choice is consonant with the principles

of perceptual organization in terms of Figure and Ground (Talmy, 2003, vol. 1, 311-345). We could add another observation to this: there is a prevalence of a first, a second and a third person singular and plural across languages, which could be related to agency, empathy and object manipulation. And a further example is modality, which, despite being expressed differently by different languages, rests on a stable arrangement of force-dynamic schemas, by which we understand the physical, the social and the mental world.

Gender identities are certainly not new. What is new is how they are openly debated in the public sphere and how from this debate linguistic change ensues. Between feminine and masculine, the room is open for new forms that acknowledge reality and promote mutual respect and convivial forms of life in a society, of which language is a central part.

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### **3. Empirical Approaches to Gender and Language**

# Feminine grammatical forms as gender-fair language in German: A study of the social gender typicality of role and occupation nouns

Christin Schütze\*, Olga Steriopolu\*\*<sup>112</sup>

## Abstract

We present an experimental study of the interrelation between gender, language and sexuality in the German-speaking society. The study is based on a sociolinguistic survey that we designed for adult native speakers of German. This survey is a versatile and practical tool that can be used to account for various gender and sexuality demographics.

The results illustrate how the social gender typicality of masculine and feminine role and occupation nouns is distributed between the concepts *Frauen* “women” and *Männer* “men.” The grammatically feminine forms receive less male-biased responses, while the generic masculine forms increase typicality rates towards the concept *Männer* “men.” This analysis sheds light on the impact of grammatical language information on gendered representations. The rating reflects the social gender typicality of a particular role or occupation noun which is influenced by grammatical gender (feminine or masculine), being a source of imbalance in the gender typicality values. Thus, the German feminine grammatical forms ending in *-kraft*, *-person* and *-hilfe* (e.g., *Lehrkraft* “teacher,” *Kontaktperson* “contact person,” *Haushaltshilfe* “household help”) better enhance visibility of women compared with their masculine counterparts (e.g., *Lehrer* “teacher,” *Kontakt* “contact person” and *Haushälter* “housekeeper”).

We conclude that grammatically feminine noun forms are more appropriate to use as gender-fair language in German, in contrast to the generic masculine

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forms that are still sometimes employed to refer to women and people of diverse genders. Demographic information on the participants' gender identity and their LGBT\*QIA+ adjacency (*belonging, close, distant*) is another influential factor that affects gender typicality ratings of role and occupation nouns.

This work takes an interdisciplinary approach that will be of interest to sociolinguists, psycholinguists, cognitive linguists and German-language specialists, as well as anyone interested in the social and grammatical facets of gender. Since the study accounts for diverse gender and sexuality demographics, it contributes to the research fields of women's studies, feminist, lavender and queer linguistics, and transgender\* studies. The findings are of importance to members of the general public interested in the interrelated issues of gender, sexuality, linguistic diversity and language attitudes, and specifically in the issues concerning the German-speaking community that strives to achieve meaningful gender equality.

**Keywords:** German; gender-fair; gender-inclusive language; social gender typicality; grammatical gender; social role and occupation nouns.

### 1. Introduction

The German language has three grammatical genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. While the neuter gender is rarely used for human entities (with a few exceptions such as *das Kind* "the child," *das Opfer* "the victim" and *das Mitglied* "the member"), the masculine and feminine genders predominantly occur in close relation to the socio-cultural genders of discourse referents, such that the feminine form *die Lehrerin* "the teacher (fem.);" denotes a female teacher and the masculine form *der Lehrer* "the teacher (masc.);" denotes a male teacher. In addition, the masculine form, such as *der Lehrer* "the teacher (masc.);" has traditionally been used as generic, which means that it can refer to people of any socio-cultural genders. Recently, the usage of the generic masculine form has been the subject of heated debate because it seems to favour male-specific interpretations, rendering the other socio-cultural genders less visible and therefore less important. There are multiple studies on German grammatical gender showing that a generic masculine form is often interpreted as having male connotations (assumptions that a male individual is meant), thus creating a male cognitive dominance or "male bias" in the language (see

Braun et al., 2005 for an overview). As Gygax et al. (2008: 480) observe, the generic use of masculine forms “biases gender representations in a way that is discriminatory to women” (see also Braun et al., 2005 and Wetschanow, 2017). This challenges the intended generic meaning of this form, as it implies the partial or even total exclusion of female and diverse individuals when this form is employed.

A variety of strategies towards gender-inclusive language have been proposed, among them paired forms, such as *Lehrer und Lehrerinnen* “teachers (male referents) and teachers (female referents)”; special orthographic forms, such as *Lehrer\*innen* “teachers (gender-inclusive)”; and gender-neutral alternative forms, such as epicenes, *Lehrkräfte* “teachers (gender-neutral).” Epicenes are nouns that have a single grammatical form to refer to people of any socio-cultural gender (see also Diewald, this volume: 6, 8-9 and Elmiger, this volume: 2, 13). Within a non-heteronormative language policy (which includes more socio-cultural genders than just women and men, i.e. trans\*, inter and non-binary genders), epicenes are ranked highest in Motschenbacher’s (2014: 255) “applicability-oriented” recommendations.

The main goal of this work is to analyse and compare German masculine and feminine nouns, including epicenes, that denote social roles and occupations, in order to determine whether they can induce male and female biases, respectively – and if so, to explore differences between them with regard to their social gender typicality.

## 2. Methodology

We designed and conducted a sociolinguistic online survey for adult (18+) native speakers of German. Advertised on various social media platforms, networks and participants’ lists, the survey elicited ratings of German social role and occupation nouns according to the social gender typicality (a complete list of these nouns with their English translations and typicality ratings received in the present study is provided in *Appendix* at the end of the chapter). Presenting items one by one, it asked the participants to estimate and indicate gender proportions of a given social role or occupation noun between *Frauen* “women” and *Männer* “men.” It thereby measured the typicality for socio-cultural genders of referents as likely representatives of these positions – that is, who typically

has a particular social role or occupation.<sup>113</sup> Each noun's degree of typicality was measured via indexing on a grading scale ranging from the concepts *Frauen* "women" to *Männer* "men." Scalar values were adjustable with a controller that could freely move from one end of the scale to the other in 5% steps (from -100% (only women) up to 100% (only men) in the analysis,<sup>114</sup> with the middle indexing perceived as equally balanced. The rationale for this approach is explained in Scheller-Boltz (2022).<sup>115</sup> The binary concepts *Frauen* "women" and *Männer* "men" reflect stereotypical extremes between which classifications and assignments are socially rooted, not the socio-cultural reality of a multitude of various socio-cultural gender identities.

The instruction particularly asked for the assumed proportion of women and men having a certain social role or occupation, measured via the grading scale.<sup>116</sup> This approach aims to assess ratios from world knowledge to capture actual expectancy of the participants. The design resembles Loughlin's (2021) and differs from Misersky et al.'s (2018) method, which used direct estimates of the real-world percentage distribution of women and men.

### 3. Results

Ninety-nine participants completed the survey. The inclusion criteria were defined as having German as the first or most familiar language, being at least 18 years of age, and having signed the declaration of consent to participate in this study (see Table 1). Only responses from the participants whose surveys were fully completed were taken into account.

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<sup>113</sup> Inferring typicality effects from rating values of presented roles has been successfully adduced by Irmen & Kurovskaja (2010).

<sup>114</sup> The negativity/positivity dichotomy was not visible to the participants but only encoded as response values in the data file and did not therefore affect responses.

<sup>115</sup> According to Scheller-Boltz (2022: 63), people usually derive specific beliefs about a particular person and expect that person to perform certain roles, functions and actions based on certain stereotypes. The categories FEMALE and MALE are dominant for stereotypical assumptions towards human referents. Thus, the heteronormative binarism navigates their perception (ibid.).

<sup>116</sup> It was phrased as follows (English translation): "Please give a rating of the gender proportions you deem accurate. [...] When rating, indicate how the real distribution of genders is in these occupations or roles according to your own estimation. Consider the way it typically is, not the way it ought to be."

Table 1: Inclusion criteria.

Declaration of consent to participate	First or dominant language	Age (year of birth)
“yes”	<i>German</i>	18+

The participants’ demographic information was also collected. Their gender identity could be indicated as “female,” “male,” “diverse,” or “not specified.”<sup>117</sup> The participants were asked to provide their year of birth. The options for reporting their relationship to the LGBT\*QIA+<sup>118</sup> community were “part of the community” (being a “member”), “proximity to the community” (being “close”), “no connection or contact to the community” (being “distant”), and “no answer.”

For the following steps of the analysis, median values of typicality ratings were reported, as the mean value averaged over positive and negative outcomes was not reliably interpretable. Besides, the median was more robust against extreme outliers such as were observed in our data.<sup>119</sup> Another operation applied for the purpose of a multifactorial analysis of variance (MANOVA) transformed each typicality rating value into typicality *direction* (towards the female or male side) and typicality *degree* (the numerical distance from 0 in absolute numbers). A typicality rating value of -40, for example, would result in the categorical variable female direction and the interval degree of 40. For better interpretation, the typicality rating value was transformed into a three-level factor grouped by typically female values (ranging from -100 to -20), typically male values (ranging from +100 to +20), and low values around zero indicating non-specific typicality (-19 to +19, coded balanced). Grammatical gender of the social role and occupation nouns is henceforth referred to as the condition

<sup>117</sup> Following a court case in 2018, the German government was ordered to institute a third gender option, defined as *divers* ‘diverse’ or ‘various’, originally for intersex persons, who may now either be registered without any legal gender or within the category ‘diverse’ in the civil registry. Thus, all legal documents in Germany must now include the three gender options: *m* (*männlich* “male”), *w* (*weiblich* “female”), and *d* (*divers* “diverse”), as well as *keine/ohne Angabe* “not specified.”

<sup>118</sup> The acronym LGBT\*QIA+ is an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*gender, queer, inter and agender individuals. The asterisk highlights the variety of socio-cultural genders and the plus aims to include other non-heterosexual identities.

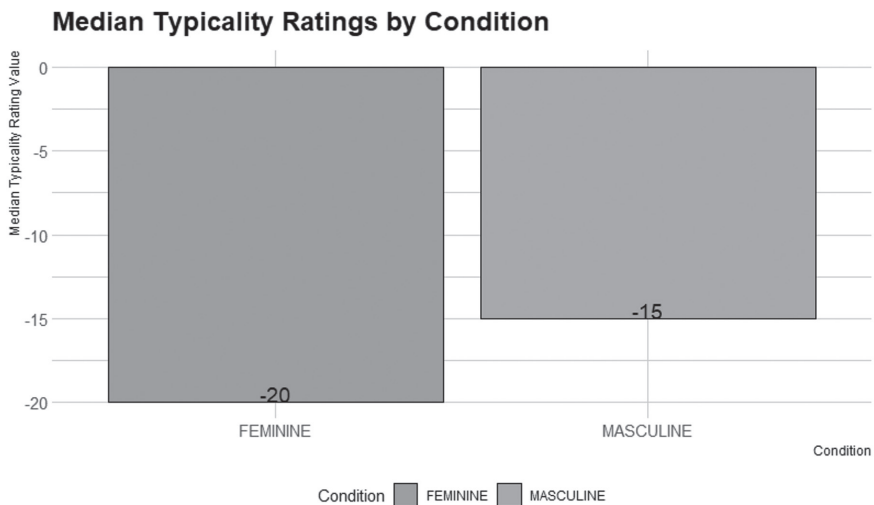
<sup>119</sup> Regarding the measures of central tendency, see, e.g., <https://online.stat.psu.edu/stat200/lesson/2/2.2/2.2.4/2.2.4.1> (last accessed on 21/06/23).]

in which nouns appeared – feminine or masculine – in the survey version. The respective nouns presented in the survey are referred to as items.

### 3.1. Comparison by condition: Typicality for each grammatical gender

The comparison of total typicality ratings for feminine and masculine social role and occupation nouns revealed that, overall, the feminine nouns were rated as more typically female than male. By contrast, the generic masculine nouns were rated as slightly less typically female (Graph 1), similarly to the survey results in Motschenbacher (2010).

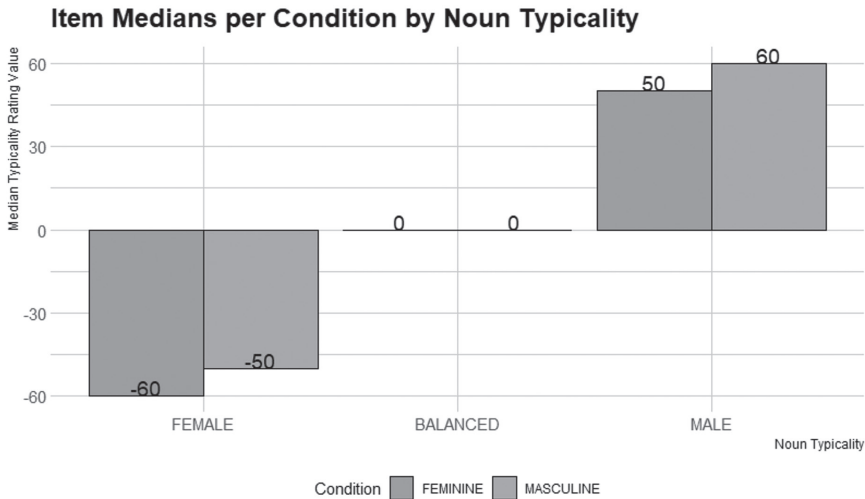
Graph 1: Noun typicality rating values in each condition, for the masculine and feminine social role and occupation nouns, from -100 (Frauen “women”) to +100 (Männer “men”).



A statistical analysis tested whether the difference observed between the two grammatical gender conditions is significant. A t-test performed with Rating Value as the dependent variable became significant (*Mann-Whitney U* = 199386,  $p < .001$ ). The effect size (Rank biserial correlation = 0.122) remained small, however. Accordingly, not much of the variance in responses can be explained by condition (with many other factors making a contribution), but the effect of the grammatical gender of the noun on the received typicality rating is highly significant.

Another major interest was the effect that a noun's gender typicality has on its rating, i.e. its semantic impact. Therefore, rating values for all items were further calculated for received female (-100 to -20), balanced (-19 to +19), or male (+20 to +100) typicality evaluations. These ranks resulted from a post-categorisation of the scalar ratings. Altogether, median rating values for each typicality side on the scale were symmetrical (-50 for typically female, +50 for typically male nouns), but asymmetries surface when they are visualised separately for each condition of grammatical gender (Graph 2). The respective grammatical information – masculine or feminine – in the nouns enhanced typicality assessments when matched (masculine-male or feminine-female), yet slightly reduced perceived male or female typicality when mismatching. For low typicality as indicated by values around zero (balanced), median ratings were clearly centred, without any visible grammatical impact.

Graph 2: Noun typicality rating values in each condition by ranked typicality as FEMALE, BALANCED OR MALE, for the masculine and feminine social role and occupation nouns, ranging from -100 (Frauen “women”) to +100 (Männer “men”).



A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Typicality Degree (absolute Rating Value) and Typicality Direction (Rank, whether in the female, male or balanced range of the scale) as the dependent variables and Condition as the grouping variable became significant for Typicality Direction with  $\chi^2 (1) = 10.389$ ,  $p < .001$  in the non-parametric *Kruskall-Wallis* test, but not for typicality degree. While supporting this significant effect of condition (namely,

grammatical gender) on gender typicality of nouns, the respective rating values as absolute differences from zero were not significantly different. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons for typicality direction by condition showed a negative mean difference of  $W = -4.56$  between the feminine and masculine versions, indicating that typicality degrees were more directed towards female in the feminine condition.

### 3.2. Comparison by item: Typicality for all nouns in each grammatical gender

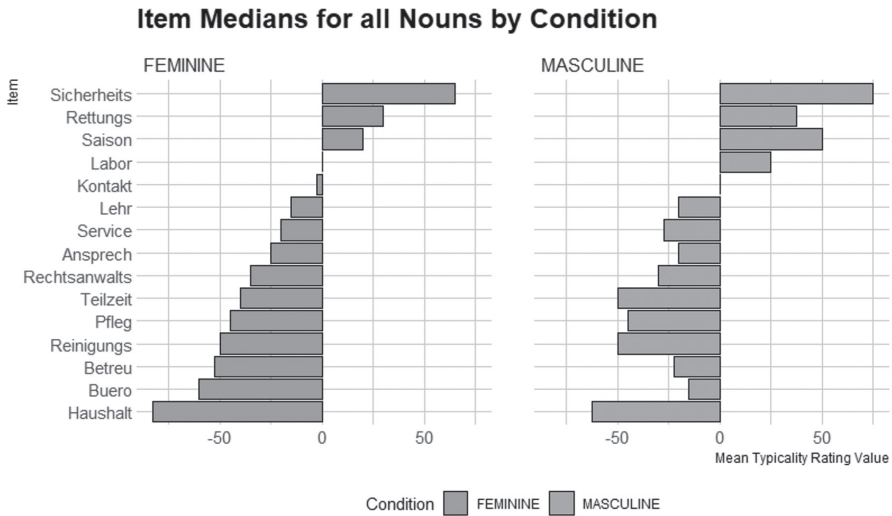
When inspecting the typicality effects across the items tested as social role and occupation nouns, varying degrees of typicality became visible for each noun. Values for each item below illustrate that only about one third of the 15 items were evaluated with male typicality, while the rest received values directed towards the female side, hence the left-skewed results.<sup>120</sup>

The distribution from female- to male-typical reflects a social dimension, knowing or imagining who typically works as a “cleaning help” or “seasonal worker” in the German-speaking society. Typicality spreads out for both grammatically feminine and masculine gender forms (in Graph 3, median typicality values per item are sorted by condition based on the feminine variants with increasing typicality values for each item in this condition), but not regardless of the noun’s grammatical gender, unveiled in direct comparison.

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<sup>120</sup> In languages that read from left to right, the resulting ratings on a scale typically appear left-aligned (Misersky et al., 2014). For example, Misersky et al. (2014: 846) manipulated labels and report that “scale direction is a factor that should be taken into consideration, inasmuch as proportions of women are generally higher [...] when 100% feminine is displayed on the left of the screen, rather than the right.” Our results look accordingly skewed to the left, to FEMALE typicality, as indicated by the more negative numbers in the output. Medians are, however, equal for negative and for positive values separately considered ( $MD = -45$  and  $45$ ), which means that the left and right side of the scale were not treated differently in interpretation.

Graph 3: Noun typicality from highly typically FEMALE (-100, left of the scale) to highly typically MALE (on the right, +100) by condition, in both the masculine and feminine forms, sorted by ascending order of median typicality rating value for feminine nouns.



For example, some social role and occupation nouns on the upper and lower extremes which are rated as highly typically gendered are similarly rated in terms of gender typicality direction in the two grammatical gender conditions, yet they differ in their typicality value degree in the masculine or feminine form. Thus, although *Sicherheitsdienst*<sup>121</sup> (masculine) and *Sicherheitskraft* (feminine) “security service/guard” – the item at the top of each condition section that spreads out to the far right in Graph 3 – denote the same occupation and thus show dominantly male typicality, the grammatical gender of the respective form leads to unequal typicality rating median values (MD = 62.5 when the noun was presented in the feminine vs. MD = 75.0 for the masculine form). Likewise, the leftmost items *Haushälter* (masculine) and *Haushaltshilfe* (feminine)

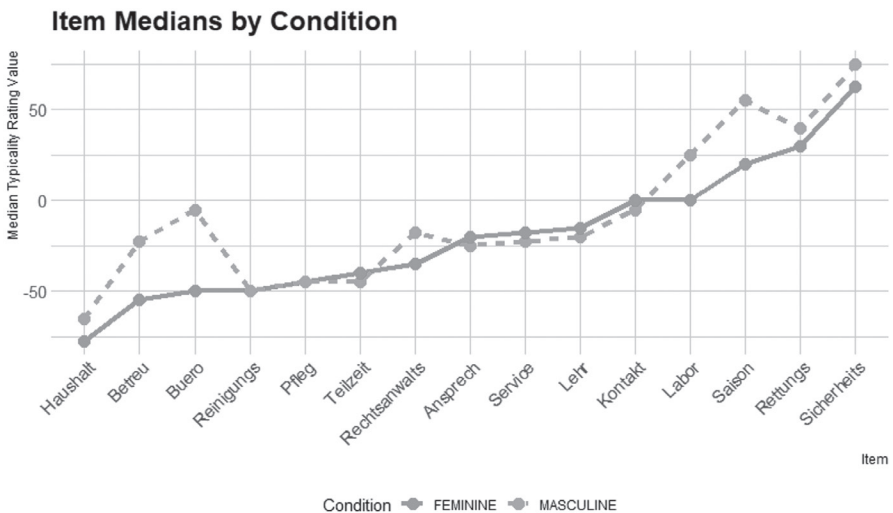
<sup>121</sup> Note that this also denotes a collective singular and therefore can be used as:  
 “Der Sicherheitsdienst hat schlechte Bewertungen.” (meaning “security service”)  
 “The security service has bad reviews.”  
 “Der Sicherheitsdienst hatte Verspätung.” (referring to the employee(s) of the security service)  
 “The security guard(s) was(were) late.”

Thank you very much to Daniel Emlinger, who pointed this out. Schütze (2020) subanalysed different strategies of gender-neutral nominal reference, such as collective singulars used as gender-abstract forms. She recommends this approach to differentiate word formation processes for studies on gendered language.

“housekeeper/household help” signal a strongly female-typical conceptualisation, but receive even lower (i.e. more female-biased) ratings in the feminine form (MD = -77.5 vs. MD = -65.0, compared with the masculine form). Thus, we observe that a grammatical gender category affects typicality ratings for the same occupation, highlighting the need to contrast values for the same-role or occupation item pairs.

The extent to which the two grammatical gender forms are not identical becomes obvious if, for the sake of illustration, the bar chart that displays all social role and occupation nouns in their feminine and masculine grammatical forms is graphically converted to contrast differential effects of the typicality rating (see Graph 4). This line plot shows that even though the distribution of ratings from highly female- to highly male-typical is closely tied to the socially informed meanings of the social roles and occupations, the typicality value differs in the feminine and masculine forms of the noun.

Graph 4: Comparative differences in noun typicality by item for each condition from highly typically FEMALE (-100, left of the scale) to highly typically male (on the right, +100), sorted by increasing median typicality rating value of the feminine forms along with their masculine counterparts, revealing the grammatical gender contrast.



On the extreme ends of the scale, we observe the following in each condition across many items. For feminine gender, the female typicality rate is higher (namely, closer to the “women” extreme), whereas for masculine gender, the female typicality rate is lower (and, by implication, male typicality rate higher). Thus, we observe that grammatical cues influence interpretation, otherwise the values for these social roles and occupations would have been closer for a given item in each condition – irrespective of gender – and hence much more similar in the comparison.

The typicality impact of several social roles and occupations being rated as more female-typical, others as more male-typical, and some as balanced, is present for each noun since they are located at different degrees of gender typicality, but grammatical gender seems to be able to increase or decrease the bias to the one end of the scale. Indicated by differing estimates for the same item, typicality ratings for grammatically feminine nouns often scored lower (towards the female typicality range) than masculine nouns. The masculine nouns are shifted towards the upper end of the scale, the male typicality range (on the right in the positive value range), with reduced female typicality (on the negative left-sided end). Since the turquoise dotted line (masculine forms) in Graph 4 rises above the red line (feminine forms), the masculine nouns lead to their typicality value being more male-oriented (similarly to the survey results in Motschenbacher, 2010: 30).

Contrasting the resulting lines of rating values for the masculine nouns with those for their feminine counterparts shows the extent of the difference in gender typicality induced by the noun’s grammatical gender. However, the ascending order of typicality rating values produces asymmetries of such grammatical gender impact depending on typicality distinction. For some highly female and highly male rated items on the left and right side of the x-axis, respectively, the grammatical gender in which the noun form appeared yielded increased effects of masculine-male and feminine-female correlations, that is, larger distance between lines at the points for an item. Only those of high typicality – female or male – display a clear rating difference induced by a noun form, while differences between the feminine and masculine noun forms where gender typicality is perceived as low seem to be reduced, leading to similar values across conditions. Specifically, those items receiving median rating values centred around zero, for which gender typicality is not on either extreme, are of most interest, such as *Lehrkraft/Lehrer* “teacher (fem./masc.),” *Laborkraft/*

*Laborant* “lab assistant (fem./masc.),” *Kontaktperson/Kontakt* “contact (person) (fem./masc.)” and *Ansprechperson/Ansprechpartner* “reference person (fem./masc.).” Those items in the middle section of the graph that have received low typicality degrees in the middle of the scale, interpreted as balanced gender typicality, show little or no contrast between the feminine and masculine noun forms, resulting in similar ratings between them.

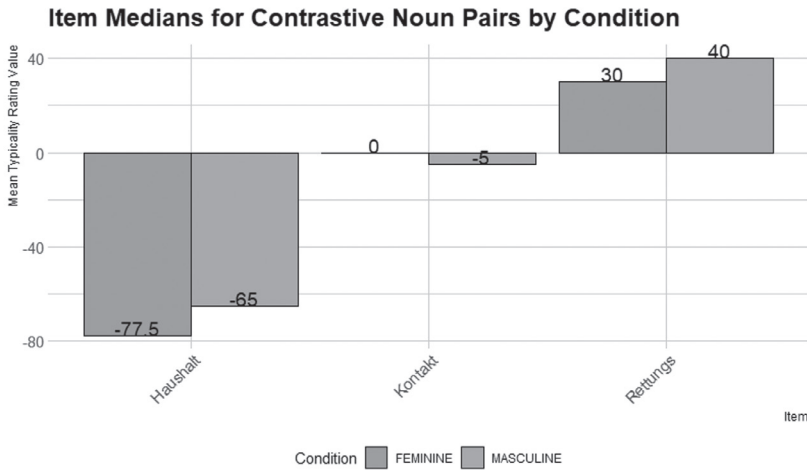
A statistical analysis was run to help determine whether the observed difference in typicality direction and degree of the different items in the respective condition proved this observation to be significant. A multifactorial ANOVA with Item as the independent and the respective Typicality Degree and Direction for it as dependent variables showed significant effects for Typicality Degree (*Kruskall-Wallis*  $\chi^2(14) = 244, p < .001$ ) and Typicality Direction (*Kruskall-Wallis*  $\chi^2(14) = 255, p < .001$ ) with a large effect size ( $\epsilon^2 = 0.181$  and  $0.189$ ). Post-hoc comparisons for this MANOVA with Condition show that every comparison becomes significant except for the balanced items.

Rating differences for the same social roles and occupations that depend on grammatical gender of the noun have illustrated increased female typicality when feminine gender is used and decreased female typicality by masculine gender. This effect is evident for almost all nouns under investigation (outliers discussed in the footnote<sup>122</sup>). It is displayed in Graph 5 for the most contrastive social role and occupation nouns in terms of their typicality. Namely, *Haushaltshilfe* (fem.)/*Haushälter* (masc.) “household help/housekeeper” is of high female typicality, *Rettungskraft* (fem.)/*Rettungshelfer* (masc.) “emergency worker” is of high male typicality, and *Kontaktperson* (fem.)/*Kontakt* (masc.) “contact (person)” of low ergo balanced typicality.

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<sup>122</sup> Some items produced more distant rating values to the extremes. The differential typicality is most outstanding in the pair *Büroangestellter-Bürohilfe* “office worker/assistant (masc./fem.),” with the latter increasing FEMALE typicality by 50 points on the scale. In contrast, a few highly typical items turned out to be similar and less impacted by grammatical gender cues, such as *Pflege-Pflegerkraft* “caregiver (masc./fem.),” for which rating values of high typicality arise that are nevertheless very close to each other. Some domains seem to be independent of grammatical gender, very typical for a gender role. The few deviations of switched items for which the masculine form is rated as more FEMALE-typical than the feminine version concern those of low, balanced typicality.

Graph 5: Differences in noun typicality rating values for the selected items of highly FEMALE, BALANCED, or highly MALE typicality in both conditions, from -100 (Frauen “women”) to +100 (Männer “men”).



Graph 5 illustrates the differences in social meanings that co-occurred with the different female/male typicality rates. Thus, the household domain was rated as highly typically female, but working in security or in emergencies as highly male. The semantic components illuminate the social reality that different social roles and occupations elicit different gender typicality for different grammatical gender forms. But even then, grammatical gender information adds to the differences and intensifies or attenuates biases in that the occupation denoted by the grammatically feminine noun *Rettungskraft* “emergency worker (fem.)” is perceived as less male-typical than the generic masculine noun *Rettungshelfer* “emergency worker (masc.)” (MD = 30 vs. MD = 40 – male bias reduced by ten points on the gender typicality scale). For the highly female-typical occupation of a “household help/housekeeper,” the decrease from the feminine form *Haushaltskraft* “household help/housekeeper (fem.)” to the generic masculine form *Haushälter* (masc.) is evident as well (female bias increased by nearly 15 points from both -80 to -62.5 on the gender typicality scale).<sup>123</sup> For the role of

<sup>123</sup> A remark is in order on the feminine suffixes and the devaluation of occupations taken up by women. In many cases, the masculine and gender-neutral feminine versions for a social role or occupation represent near-synonyms due to the fact that the compounds advertised as alternatives come with an additional semantic nuance of their base forms, i.e. *-kraft* and *-hilfe*. The latter may denote not the profession of a *Büroangestellter* (masc.) “office employee” but a support position for a *Bürohilfe* (fem.) to go along with it. Likewise, a *Servicekraft* (fem.) “service employee” could also be

a “contact (person),” a comparably low-typicality item with more balanced rating values between MD = -5 (masculine form) and MD = 0 (feminine form),<sup>124</sup> the gender typicality difference is much smaller, so typicality here is less able to “override” grammar.

Because a grammatical gender category can be indicated by grammatical suffixes in German, we analysed forms that have the same masculine grammatical suffix and compared them with the corresponding forms with the same feminine grammatical suffix. Following the list of relevant items below, we provide a comparison in typicality degree between masculine nouns with the suffix *-er* (masc.) and feminine nouns ending in *-kraft* (fem.). Only pairs with these specific features among the denotations for social roles and occupations were analysed. We analysed the following seven pairs of such nouns that are listed in Table 2 (see *Appendix* for their respective rating values).

Table 2: Contrastive item pairs with the grammatical suffixes *-kraft* (fem.) and *-er* (masc.).

Noun form	
gender-neutral feminine	masculine
<i>Lehrkraft</i> ‘teacher’	<i>Lehrer</i> ‘teacher’
<i>Pflegekraft</i> ‘care worker’	<i>Pfleger</i> ‘care worker’
<i>Reinigungskraft</i> ‘cleaner’	<i>Reinigungsmitarbeiter</i> ‘cleaner’
<i>Rettungskraft</i> ‘ambulance worker’	<i>Rettungshelfer</i> ‘ambulance worker’
<i>Saisonkraft</i> ‘seasonal worker’	<i>Saisonarbeiter</i> ‘seasonal worker’
<i>Servicekraft</i> ‘service employee’	<i>Servicemitarbeiter</i> ‘service employee’
<i>Teilzeitkraft</i> ‘part-time worker’	<i>Teilzeitbeschäftigter</i> ‘part-time worker’

The contrastive pairs with the masculine suffix *-er* (e.g., *Pfleger*, masc.) and the feminine ending *-kraft* (e.g., *Pflegekraft*, fem.) are shown in Graph 6 below. The comparative difference of median noun typicality ratings over all contrastive pairs of the masculine nouns ending in *-er* and feminine nouns ending in *-kraft* is very small, with -5 points on the rating scale. As illustrated, morphology

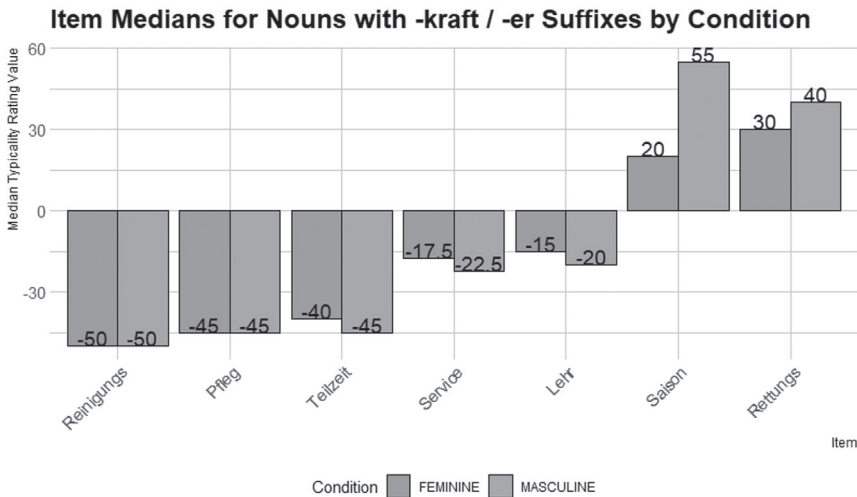
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the term for an untrained and temporary worker, in contrast to a usually fully employed permanent employee *Servicemitarbeiter* (masc.). Therefore, such forms may enhance a less prestigious, more stereotypical interpretation.

<sup>124</sup> Albeit very close, in this case, the gender-typicality relation is even reversed. Strikingly, Kontakt “contact (masc.)” is the only masculine item that lacks morphological cues, such as suffixation.

alone cannot account for differential ratings for the feminine forms in light of the variation that comes with equal median values (the first two in Graph 6) or even items carrying the masculine *-er* suffix that are rated somewhat more female-typical despite the masculine gender. The male bias of the *-er* suffix intensifies only in those items that already transmit a strong male typicality. This asymmetric impact of grammar on typicality bias supports an observation in Rothmund & Scheele (2004: 42) that the masculine bias of male-dominated domains was more pronounced than in female-dominated or gender-equally distributed domains and is also in line with the lexical-semantic analysis of reference of masculine German person nouns in Diewald, this volume: 15.

Graph 6: Differences in noun typicality rating values for the selected item pairs of highly FEMALE, BALANCED, or highly MALE typicality in both conditions with increasing female typicality, from 100 (Frauen “women”) to +100 (Männer “men”).



We also analysed the *-person* “person (fem.)” word-formation strategy, frequently used in German, that can be employed with some of the feminine forms under investigation, such as *Kontaktperson* “contact person (fem.),” *Ansprechperson* “reference person (fem.)” and *Betreuungsperson* “carer/supervisor (fem.)”. Adding this very productive component for a gender-neutral meaning is supposed to make a social role or occupation noun highly generic, and thus to refer to people of any socio-cultural gender identity. After analysing noun typicality ratings for the items formed with *-person*, the result is roughly

balanced typicality for *Kontaktperson* “contact person (fem.),” but increasingly female-typical interpretations for *Ansprechperson* “reference person (fem.),” succeeded by *Betreuungsperson* “carer/supervisor (fem.)” (see Table 3), with the masculine counterparts in the same order. This underlines the typicality impact for a gender-specific role or occupation. For example, being someone to contact is a fairly gender-neutral position, but being someone who provides care is perceived as a typically female position in society. Hence, the latter position might be more expected of a woman, which would have consequences for how work is distributed in society – and which is why “the social sphere, care and health sector is being associated with women” (Scheller-Boltz, 2020: 66). The “neutralising” strategy of this “human suffix” (Klein, 2022: 184) demonstrably does not neutralise gender perception independently of a noun’s typicality.

Table 3: Noun typicality ratings for the feminine nouns formed with “-person” from BALANCED to FEMALE typicality.

Noun Form					
gender-neutral feminine “-person” compounds					
<i>Kontaktperson</i>	>	<i>Ansprechperson</i>	>	<i>Betreuungsperson</i>	
MD = -5		MD = -20.0		MD = -52.5	
‘contact person’		‘reference person’		‘carer/supervisor’	

In essence, we have reported an effect where grammatical category and typicality of nouns interact. Whether a generically intended social role or occupation noun is grammatically masculine or feminine has an impact on typicality. Typicality, in turn, can affect how much of an impact grammatical gender has. The direction and size of the effect seem to depend on the social roles that women and men have in these occupations and may still be informed by (hopefully outdated) stereotypes of work distribution between socio-cultural genders as a binary construct. For nouns of low typicality with a minimal difference, such as “teacher” (*Lehrkraft* (fem.) and *Lehrer* (masc.) with just five points between them), it might be so small because the social roles of teachers are more equally distributed among women and men in this particular occupation nowadays, in contrast to other items towards the extremes, where social roles are more gender-specific and less equally taken over, and thus, grammatical gender of a noun plays a more significant role.

### 3.2. Comparison across demographic variables

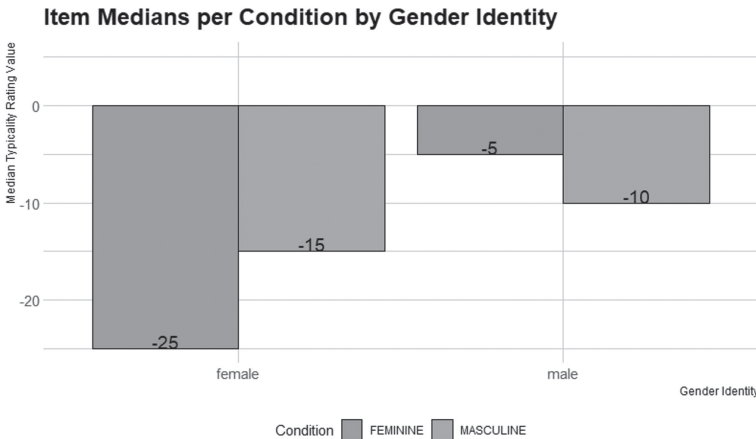
We further compared median typicality ratings across demographic variables, such as the participants’ gender identity (“female,” “male,” “diverse”), their LGBT\*QIA+ community affiliation (“belonging,” “close,” “distant”), and age based on their year of birth.

#### 3.2.1. Gender Identity

Out of the 99 participants who completed the survey, the majority (69) identified as “female,” 28 as “male,” and two as “diverse.” We did not succeed in collecting enough representative data for the diverse category, so only the other two categories, female and male, could be analysed.<sup>125</sup>

Graph 7 displays differential typicality values by the participants’ gender identity and illustrates that noun typicality ratings receive asymmetric values for the female and male participants. It highlights the relation between gender and condition, namely, group differences arise between conditions – that is, when the female and male participants were exposed to either the feminine or masculine noun forms.

Graph 7: Noun typicality ratings for each condition by the participants with female or male gender identity.



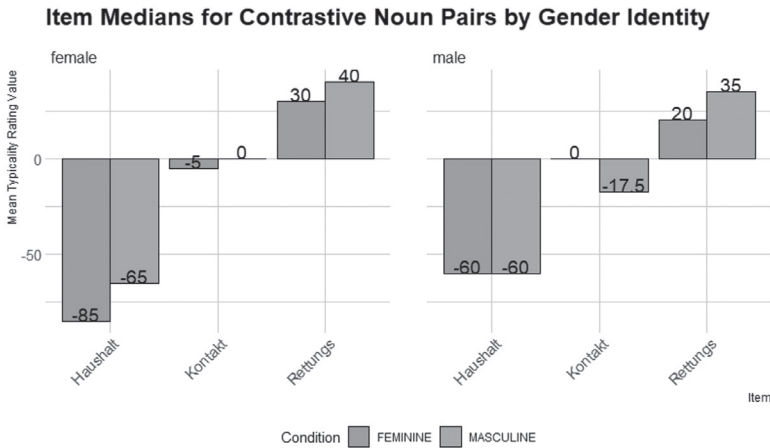
<sup>125</sup> Apart from choosing not to disclose one’s gender, the seeming lack of diversity could point to the four available categories given not covering the spectrum or including the subjects’ gender identity. Unfortunately, the data from two participants identifying as diverse did not enter the analysis due to too many missing responses, i.e. participants who did not complete the survey.

While the noun's grammatical gender made a difference for the participants identifying as female, it hardly affected ratings for those identifying as male. The participants identifying as female gave more female-directed estimates, especially so when nouns were in the feminine condition (in line with the overall by-condition median). Ratings by the male participants were more restrained and did not show as much impact caused by the socio-cultural gender of an occupation. As the female participants were more extreme in their ratings, they seemed to be more sensitive to the information provided by grammatical cues to socio-cultural genders. Because typicality ratings received comparable results in the masculine condition for both gender groups, this effect might be specific for the feminine forms only, for which gender identity interacts with estimates of proportions and typicality as it decreases by 20 points on the typicality scale for the male participants. Moreover, rating values may even switch typicality concepts depending on the participant's socio-cultural gender (here, identifying as male). They were substantiated as significant by inferential statistical analyses confirming that the differences among the female participants, who rated items as lower ergo more female-typical than the male participants, did indeed reach a tendency to significance in a MANOVA (*Kruskal-Wallis*  $\chi^2(1) = 4.933, p = 0.026$ ). Thus, the socio-cultural gender identity affected ratings of typicality depending on the condition in which the items were presented.

The exploratory view (Graph 8) into the item pairs for *Haushaltshilfe/Haushälter* "household help/housekeeper (fem./masc.)" (the leftmost item), *Kontaktperson/Kontakt* "contact (person)" (fem./masc.)" (the middle item) and *Rettungskraft/Rettungshelfer* "emergency worker (fem./masc.)" (the rightmost item) with the typicality ratings they received across the participants' gender identities is informative insofar as it reflects the stronger sensitivity reported above, at least for highly gender-typical items. This means that those identifying as female gave lower ratings for female typicality when an occupation like "household help" was in the feminine version (MD = -85, leftmost item in the left facet of Graph 8), compared with their male peers, whose typicality range remained comparable in this condition (MD = -60 for both). This finding of higher proportions of women rated by the female participants is in line with Misersky et al. (2014: 845), who faced the same issue with unequal sample sizes regarding the socio-cultural gender identity, hence a call for cautious consideration of the differences. It must also be noted that in some low-typicality social roles and

occupations the male participants rated the masculine nouns as more female-typical than their grammatically feminine counterparts, such as the masculine noun *Kontakt* “contact (masc.).”

Graph 8: Noun typicality ratings for the selected items of high and low gender typicality by the participants with female and male gender identities for each condition.



Thus, the analysis of the participants’ socio-cultural gender identities revealed contrary grammatical effects. Since the female and male participants behaved differently in their ratings dependent on condition, this factor crucially influences the interpretation of grammatical gender in the nouns under investigation.

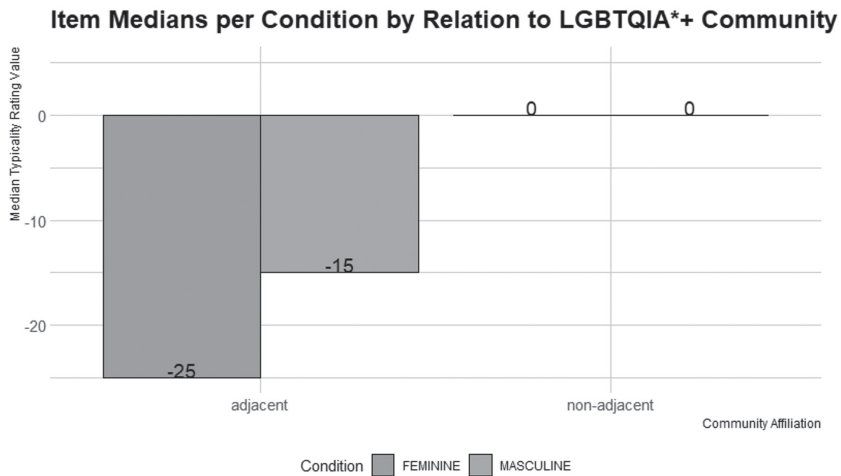
### 3.2.2. LGBT\*QIA+ community affiliation

A relationship to the LGBT\*QIA+ community was mainly reported as “close” (n=46), followed by “distant” (n=24) and “belonging” (n=18) to the community. The summarised community affiliation of the categories “proximity” (being “close”) and “membership” (being “part”) amounts to 65.3% (n=64), which is further subsumed as *adjacent* and *non-adjacent* to the community (Graph 9).

The participants who reported being *adjacent* to the LGBT\*QIA+ community rated the gender typicality of the nouns under investigation as more female-typical (indicated by lower negative medians), unlike the *non-adjacent* participants, for whom typicality was on average more balanced at zero. The results elucidated that the nouns were rated as more typically female by the participants of the *adjacent* group in the grammatically feminine form, when

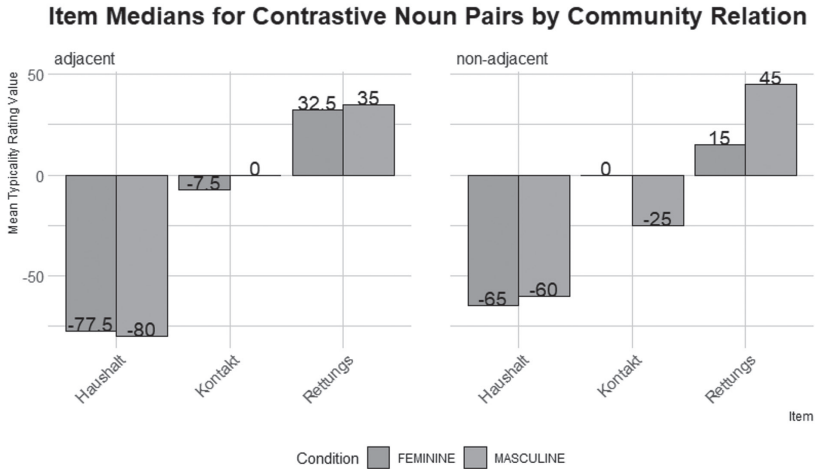
compared with the grammatically masculine form. The *non-adjacent* participants gave similar ratings for both feminine and masculine items (the resulting median values are equal), despite the difference in the grammatical genders. The community affiliation factor shifted the ratings of the *adjacent* participants to indicate about 20 points on the scale towards higher female typicality, compared with the *non-adjacent* participants.

Graph 9: Noun typicality rating values for each condition by the participants adjacent and non-adjacent to the LGBT\*QIA+ community.



A MANOVA with Community Affiliation as grouping variable, and Typicality Direction and Typicality Degree as dependent variables, resulted in a significant effect for Condition: *Kruskall-Wallis*  $\chi^2(1) = 61.708, p < .001$ . The typicality-related variables did not display an effect (*Kruskall-Wallis*  $\chi^2(1) = 0.630, p = 0.427$  n.s. for Direction and *Kruskall-Wallis*  $\chi^2(1) = 2.607, p = 0.106$  n.s. for Degree). The post-hoc pairwise comparisons ( $W = -11.1, p < .001$ ) show that the *non-adjacent* participants gave higher, hence less female-directed, typicality ratings. We suggest that the participants who are *adjacent* to the community may deal with topics related to socio-cultural gender on a daily basis, for which reason they demonstrate a greater awareness of and higher sensitivity to the issues of gender equality and, thus, they may place more emphasis on female visibility to defy a male-as-norm usage in the language. However, the unequal group size of the participants necessitates caution concerning the reported differences.

Graph 10: Noun typicality rating values for the selected items in each condition by the participants adjacent and non-adjacent to the LGBT\*QIA+ community.



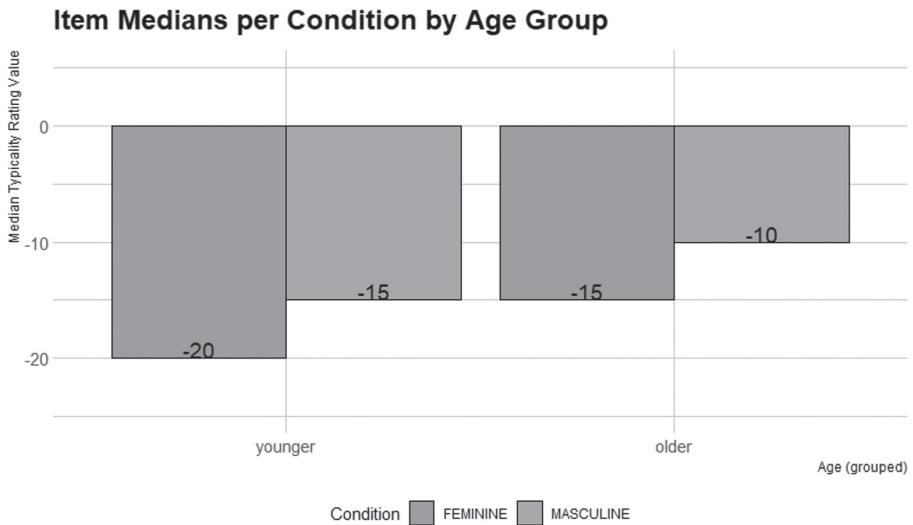
All ratings in the selected contrastive items ranked by typicality (see Graph 10) show greater increments in the *non-adjacent* group, especially so in the item *Rettungskraft/Rettungshelfer* “emergency worker (fem./masc.)”. The *non-adjacent* participants rated the masculine forms as more male-typical, compared with the feminine forms. This tendency of the *non-adjacent* participants to react particularly strongly to masculine gender in highly typically male nouns indicates a male bias. For the *adjacent* participants, ratings of the pairs exhibit a smaller difference between conditions, such that this group came to comparable medians for both noun forms in each typicality rank. This may be interpreted as intense identification with one’s own involvement in the community and concern about anti-discriminatory behaviour for *adjacent* people, possibly even an act of countering female invisibility in certain occupations. In contrast, being *distant* from the LGBT\*QIA+ community, and from their struggles, may lead to a less challenged male default, which finds expression in typicality ratings more influenced by language forms, and presumably to lower awareness of diversity and discrimination issues. Being affected by non-inclusive language because of their gender identity or/and sexuality may lead to marginalised groups deeming language a “medium of discrimination,” which would imply that being a member of such a group comes with certain sensitivity on the part of those who experience discrimination (Scheller-Boltz, 2020: 15). These insights are, however, restricted to the selected item pairs.

3.2.3. Age

The participants' age ranged from 18 to 71 years old. The majority of the participants belonged to the middle-aged adult generation (mean age  $M=35$  years,  $SD=13.8$ ). For the sake of illustration and analysis, the age ranges were grouped into the younger (35 years and below) and older participants (above 35 years), based on the mean age.

Comparing the typicality values of the grammatically feminine and masculine nouns according to the age demographics points to the following tendency (albeit slight) for the feminine forms. The younger participants ( $\leq 35$  years old) gave higher rankings of FEMALE typicality for items, compared with the older participants ( $>35$ ). In other words, the younger participant (mostly in their 20s) were more likely to infer FEMALE typicality for a feminine grammatical form (see Graph 11).

Graph 11: Differences in noun typicality ratings between the younger and older participants by condition (the mean age is 35 years).

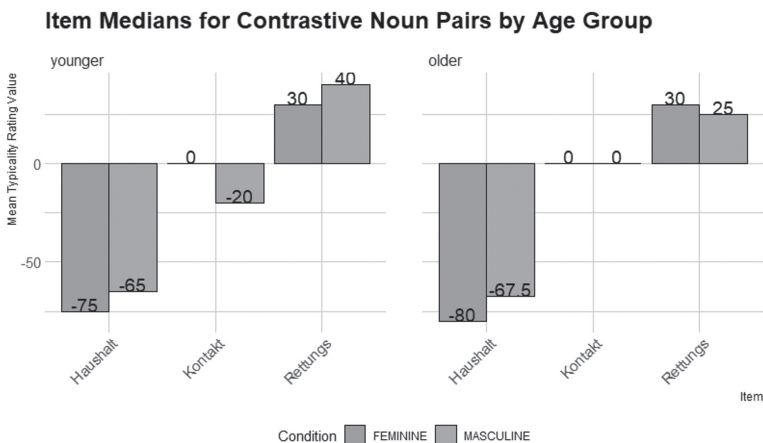


The younger participants rated both conditions more to the FEMALE end, while the older ones rated both conditions as less FEMALE-typical, more MALE. We find that the difference in conditions is that the feminine forms are overall rated as more FEMALE-typical. For the younger participants, these grammatically feminine nouns had a higher FEMALE typicality, compared with the older ones whose typicality values are directed more towards the centre. While the

both participant groups mirrored the increased FEMALE typicality for the feminine forms and less FEMALE-typical masculine forms (this trend is apparent across ages), ratings are shifted towards the FEMALE typicality end with lower median ratings in both conditions for the younger participants. It may be related to higher sensitivity to the feminine grammatical gender and issues of female (in) visibility by the younger participants and such feminine nouns may be seen as the gender-fair alternatives that have recently become a marker for enhanced female inclusivity (see Schütze, 2020 in reference to the hypothesis laid out in Bülow & Harnisch, 2015), yet this theoretical assumption is to be explored in further research (see also Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser, 2016 on research that demonstrates the influence of education, media and political implementations on current standards promoting the use of gender-fair language).

A MANOVA shows that age as a factor does not have a significant effect on the rating values transformed into absolute Typicality Degree and ranked for Typicality Direction (*Kruskal-Wallis*  $\chi^2(1) = 1.535, p = 0.251$ ). **No other interactions in the post-hoc comparisons were close to significant.** Therefore, although age (or more precisely, generation) as an influence on typicality ratings cannot be ruled out, an effect of condition is more probably related to a noun's grammatical form, still leaving many other possible influences on the ratings, such as attitudes towards non-discriminatory language (Bruns & Leiting, 2022) and/or the political views on liberal or conservative sides (Formanowicz et al., 2013).

Graph 12: Differences in noun typicality ratings for the selected items between the younger and older participants per condition.



In the subset of selected items (Graph 12 above), the reported by-condition differences are weaker or even not present. The younger participants' male-specific interpretation of grammatically masculine nouns of highly MALE typicality is striking, for example, *Rettungshelfer* "emergency worker (masc.)," for which the older participants did not present a gender-based increment in ratings. This may point to the recency of the debate that brings enhanced awareness of the masculine non-generic shift in meaning, pushing the formerly dual masculine denotations to its function of male-specific reference.

Finally, the multifactorial statistical analyses of variance in the interplay of grammatical gender (Condition) and typicality – Degree (value) and Direction (rank) – with the demographic aspects of Gender Identity, Community Affiliation and Age factored in, did not give significant interaction effects other than those reported above. Yet, Subject was correlated with typicality and demographic factors by Condition, which became highly significant (*Kruskall-Wallis*  $\chi^2$  (1) = 1007.815,  $p < .001$ ). These results confirm that individual performance by the participants influences how noun forms of different grammatical genders are rated. To this end, we suggest that Subject should be included as a moderating variable in any analyses of gendered language.

## 4. Conclusions and Implications

We have investigated social role and occupation nouns in German, analysing grammatical noun pairs that consist of feminine and masculine nominal forms denoting the same social role or occupation, such as *Lehrkraft* "teacher (feminine)" and *Lehrer* "teacher (masculine)." Such role or occupation nouns enrich our understanding of the interrelation between language grammar and socio-cultural genders insofar as this interrelation cannot be fully captured without considering socio-semantic influences on typicality (cf. "social gender" layer in Diwald, this volume: 3).

We have shown that (i) nouns inherently carry gender-specific stereotype information as indicated by typicality ratings and (ii) grammatical gender of a noun has a significant impact on typicality ratings, as the masculine forms show considerable correspondence with male referents and the feminine forms with female ones. For example, for some items that denote a caretaking or supervising occupation, such as *Betreuungsperson* (feminine)/*Betreuer* (masculine),

and a lab assistant occupation, such as *Laborkraft* (feminine)/*Laborant* (masculine), the difference induced by the grammatical gender category is as high as 20–30 points on the typicality scale between the noun forms. These observations empirically support the claim that language use may strengthen gender stereotypes, as Diewald points out (this volume: 3). Despite comparable meanings, the feminine grammatical forms of various social role and occupation nouns exhibit higher female inclusivity in comparison with the masculine grammatical forms. We therefore propose to use them as a productive strategy for non-discriminatory reference in the German-speaking society.

Our sub-analyses have revealed how the impact of the participants' gender identity, age, and affiliation with the LGBT\*QIA+ community yield different results for gender-specificity of typicality ratings. For example, the female, LGBT\*QIA+-*adjacent*, younger participants in our data sample perform similarly across conditions, but differently from their male, LGBT\*QIA+-*non-adjacent*, older peers. These results point towards a shared perception of gendered language and gender typicality within a specific demographic. Thus, the sensitivity to grammatical gender cues of grammatically feminine nouns was more pronounced among the female, LGBT\*QIA+-*adjacent*, younger participants. We infer that when examining the interrelation between grammatical and socio-cultural genders, it is crucial to take these demographic factors into account, as they can bring tremendous variations within a German-speaking sample.

This research did not succeed in including participants identifying outside the binary genders, despite our active invitations to such target groups. Although we could not account for *diverse* gender identities in this study, the current work contributes to our understanding of queer gender identities under the general umbrella term LGBT\*QIA+. In doing so, this study acknowledges the under-represented socio-cultural gender realities. The speaker variation in our analysis shows that speakers who belong to various demographics interpret language differently. For this reason, the demographic categories, such as gender identity, LGBT\*QIA+ affiliation and age, are crucial factors that must not be ignored when new gender-fair and gender-inclusive language conventions are being discussed by various academic and governmental bodies in the German-speaking society.

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## Appendix

Table 4: A list of stimulus nouns (in alphabetical order) with the English translations and median typicality ratings ranging from -100 (Frauen “women”) to +100 (Männer “men”).

	Item in English translation	Item in German masculine and feminine grammatical genders	Median Typicality Value
1	“reference person”	Ansprechpartner	-25.0
		Ansprechperson	-20.0
2	“carer” / “supervisor”	Betreuer	-22.5
		Betreuungsperson	-55.0
3	“office employee”	Büroangestellter	-5.0

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	“office help”	Bürohilfe	-50.0
4	“housekeeper”	Haushälter	-65.0
	“household help”	Haushaltshilfe	-77.5
5	“contact”	Kontakt	-5.0
	“contact person”	Kontaktperson	0.0
6	“laboratorian”	Laborant	25.0
	“lab assistant”	Laborkraft	0.0
7	“teacher”	Lehrer	-20.0
		Lehrkraft	-15.0
8	“care worker”	Pfleger	-45.0
		Pflegekraft	-45.0
9	“paralegal”	Rechtsanwaltsgehilfe	-17.5
		Rechtsanwaltshilfe	-35.0
10	“cleaner”	Reinigungsmitarbeiter	-50.0
		Reinigungskraft	-50.0
11	“ambulance/emergency worker”	Rettungshelfer	40.0
		Rettungskraft	30.0
12	“seasonal worker”	Saisonarbeiter	55.0
		Saisonkraft	20.0
13	“service employee”	Servicearbeiter	-22.5
		Servicekraft	-17.5
14	“security service/guard”	Sicherheitsdienst	75.0
		Sicherheitskraft	62.5
15	“part-time employee/worker”	Teilzeitbeschäftigter	-45.0
		Teilzeitkraft	-40.0

# ***Autrice, auteure, auteur?* Between social norms, usage and morphological awareness**

Hélène Giraudo & Aurélia Morel

## **Abstract**

We conducted a study on the spontaneous production of feminine counterparts for three categories of job names among native speakers of French. These categories include «stable» job names, which have one established masculine and feminine form, “unstable” job names, which have one established masculine form with multiple feminine forms, and “epicene” job names, which use the same form for both male and female protagonists. We aimed to identify possible sources that explain the linguistic irregularity and instability of some feminine forms, including language use, linguistic competence of native speakers, and sociological profiles such as social gender, age, profession, and territory. Data were collected through a pen and paper questionnaire from 94 participants. The results revealed that one third of the produced feminine forms completely resisted feminization, confirming the presence of a male bias as described in previous literature (e.g. Gygax & Gabriel, 2008). Furthermore, our data clarified that the male bias effect creates a conflict between male social norms and participants awareness of the ongoing political trend to increase the visibility of women in society.

**Keywords:** Job names; gender stereotypes; word production; speaker profile.

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## 1. Introduction

French is a gendered language with two values: masculine and feminine. Noun gender in French can be marked through two morphological operations. The first is inflection, which assigns number, gender, and tense to a word (e.g. *ami*, *amie*, “friend<sub>Masc</sub>, friend<sub>Fem</sub>”). The second is derivation, which involves combining a base with an affix to create a word (e.g. *acteur*, *actrice* “actor, actress”). However, despite this binary system, the masculine form is considered unmarked and is rarely explained morphologically. This prominence of masculine nouns has linguistic and sociological implications, as noted by Michel (2016: 34-35) and in line with Gygas et al. (2021) (see Roché, 1992; Abbou, 2011 for an analysis on French, and Diewald; Elmiger, this volume, for complementary perspectives on grammatical gender and public debate on gender-fair language).

The gender of nouns can also be expressed through semantic context, as is the case with “epicene” nouns. These nouns have invariable forms that can refer to humans of either sex, such as *juge*, *ministre*, *linguiste*, *gynécologue*, *détective*, *professeur* “judge, minister, linguist, gynecologist, detective, professor,” which can be used for both male and female individuals. Consequently, gender is expressed in text and discourse through the use of masculine or feminine pronouns (e.g. *le juge*, *la juge* “the<sub>Masc</sub> judge, the<sub>Fem</sub> judge”), gendered nouns (e.g. *Monsieur le juge*, *Madame le juge* “Mr judge, Ms judge”), or a combination of both (e.g. *Monsieur le juge*, *Madame la juge* “Mr the<sub>Masc</sub> judge, Ms the<sub>Fem</sub> judge”).

When considering nouns related to occupations and social titles, the issue of gender becomes more complex due to psychological and sociolinguistic factors in gender assignment. Some job or role nouns fall into the category of “stable” forms, where both masculine and feminine forms coexist in synchrony (e.g. *serveur* – *serveuse*, “waiter – waitress”). Others can be classified as “unstable,” with multiple feminine forms existing simultaneously (e.g. *auteur* → *autrice*, *auteure* “writer”<sub>Masc</sub> → “writer”<sub>Fem1</sub>, “writer”<sub>Fem2</sub> despite the presence of an attested feminine form in historical usage and the possibility of applying a current morphological rule based on analogy with similar forms, such as the pair *acteur* – *actrice*).

At the text level, when both gender and number features are expressed, the masculine form can serve two distinct syntactic functions: “generic” and

“specific.” In contrast, feminine forms only fulfill the “specific” function. The generic function arises from the grammatical rule that the masculine prevails over the feminine in the plural, regardless of the ratio of males and females. The specific function is inherent to the noun gender.<sup>126</sup>

- (1) a. *le commerçant*<sub>Masc.Sing</sub> *est toujours content durant les fêtes de Noël*  
“the (male) shopkeeper is always happy during Christmas holidays”
- b. *la commerçante*<sub>Fem.Sing</sub> *est toujours contente durant les fêtes de Noël*  
“the (female) shopkeeper is always happy during Christmas holidays”
- c. *les commerçants*<sub>Plu</sub> *sont toujours contents durant les fêtes de Noël*  
“the (males, or male(s) and female(s)) shopkeepers are always happy during Christmas holidays”

The examples in (1) illustrate that while the masculine form in (a) and the feminine form in (b) unambiguously refer to a man and a woman, respectively, the plural form in (c) is generic and defaults to the masculine form to designate either men only or a group of men and women (i.e. a group of people that includes at least one man). Despite guidelines to avoid using the masculine form exclusively in official announcements, it is still commonly used as a generic form in spoken and written language, as highlighted by Gygax et al. (2008: 465) and others (see Diewald, this volume).

## 1. Factors of variation in feminine role nouns

Beyond the historical division of labor based on sex and the political and sociological issues and consequences associated with the evolution of language through the “feminization” or “de-masculinization” of institutions (see Abbou, 2011, 2020; Burr, 2012; Gabriel & Gygax, 2016; Pérez et al., 2019; Yaguello, 2002; Viennot, 2014), the linguistic instability of certain feminine role nouns, particularly job titles, can have multiple origins. Three factors of variation can be identified. Firstly, native speakers of French use multiple forms for “unstable”

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<sup>126</sup> According to *Le Bon Usage* (Grevisse & Goosse, 2007), “[s]i les donneurs ne sont pas du même genre, le receveur se met au genre indifférencié, c’est-à-dire au masculin” “If the donors are not of the same gender, the recipient is in the undifferentiated gender, i.e. the masculine” (p. 555, §442 a.). See also Michel (2016) for other grammatical sources.

feminine nouns when referring to individuals with a specific job or role, in contrast to “stable” and “epicene” forms. In a recent report (2019: 2), the Académie Française, the institution responsible for establishing language rules, has recognized this as a source of “current linguistic instability” and stated that “les tentatives de modification des usages restent hésitantes et incertaines, sans qu’une tendance générale se dégage” (“attempts to modify usage remain hesitant and uncertain, without any clear general trend emerging.”)

Consequently, the Académie Française recommends that “il convient de laisser aux pratiques qui assurent la vitalité de la langue le soin de trancher : elles seules peuvent conférer à des appellations nouvelles la légitimité dont elles manquaient à l’origine” “the decision regarding the use of “stable” feminine forms should be left to the practices that ensure the vitality of the language. Only these practices can confer the legitimacy that new names originally lacked” (2019: 7). The choice of “stable” feminine forms would thus be determined by native speakers in accordance with the morphosyntactic rules of French that govern word formation. However, these rules are not only explicitly stated by the grammar of a language but also form an implicit linguistic competence of native speakers, who possess potential awareness of the systematic correspondences between form and meaning (see Booij, 2018). Let us consider the following pairs of masculine and feminine job nouns in French:

(2) a.	<i>acteur</i>	<i>actrice</i>	“actor <sub>Masc</sub>	actress <sub>Fem</sub> ”
b.	<i>créateur</i>	<i>créatrice</i>	“creator <sub>Masc</sub>	creator <sub>Fem</sub> ”
c.	<i>lecteur</i>	<i>lectrice</i>	“reader <sub>Masc</sub>	reader <sub>Fem</sub> ”
d.	<i>réalisateur</i>	<i>réalisatrice</i>	“director <sub>Masc</sub>	director <sub>Fem</sub> ”
e.	<i>auteur</i>	<i>autrice</i>	“author <sub>Masc</sub>	author <sub>Fem</sub> ”
(3) a.	<i>vendeur</i>	<i>vendeuse</i>	“seller <sub>Masc</sub>	seller <sub>Fem</sub> ”
b.	<i>coiffeur</i>	<i>coiffeuse</i>	“hairdresser <sub>Masc</sub>	hairdresser <sub>Fem</sub> ”
c.	<i>blanchisseur</i>	<i>blanchisseuse</i>	“lauderer <sub>Masc</sub>	laundress <sub>Fem</sub> ”
d.	<i>éleveur</i>	<i>éleveuse</i>	“breeder <sub>Masc</sub>	breeder <sub>Fem</sub> ”
e.	<i>professeur</i>	<i>professeuse</i>	“professor <sub>Masc</sub>	professor <sub>Fem</sub> ”

The left and the right columns are related by systematic form-meaning relationships: In general, masculine words ending in *-(a)teur*, have corresponding feminine forms ending in *-(a)trice* or *-euse* and all these words share the

meaning “someone whose job consists in V.” Still, while examples (a.), (b.), (c.), (d.) in (2) and (3) demonstrate relative stability in language use, example (e.) does not. This highlights a second level of variation: the linguistic competence of native speakers, which is influenced by their awareness of morphological construction rules. From a linguistic perspective, the suffix *-eur* in French is used to form nouns that designate human agents. Following Fradin (2003), all the lexemes listed in (1) adhere to a construction rule in which the formation of a nominal lexeme derived from the suffix *-eur* requires a verb base with an agentive argument structure. In other words, the verb base must imply the existence of an agent in order to take the suffix *-eur*. The natural ability of native speakers to construct word forms in accordance with the general morphological rules of a language stems from their morphological awareness. Carlisle (2000) defines morphological awareness as the cognitive ability to perceive word structure and manipulate the smallest units of meaning in language. In theory, a language should consist of well-formed and stable words, with no incorrectly formed words. However, as noted by Le Draoulec & Péri-Woodley (2022), many “incorrectly” formed words are attested in dictionaries and language use, despite the violation of the rule, suggesting that social and institutional contexts influence language use.<sup>127</sup>

Abbou also indicates that “[s]ome irregularities appear between the uses of different writers and sometimes within the use of the same writer” (2011: 56), illustrating the cognitive dissonance between a native speaker’s natural linguistic competence (supported by morphological awareness) and their difficulty in feminizing certain nouns (such as *écrivaine* for example, see Le Draoulec & Péri-Woodley, 2016) to increase visibility of women in text and discourse. Taking a usage-based approach, which views language as an embodied and social behavior (Bybee & Beckner, 2010; Tomasello, 2003; Ellis, 2002), we can highlight the role of usage in shaping the mental representations stored in long-term memory through general cognitive mechanisms (exemplar-based, rational, associative learning).

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<sup>127</sup> Michel Roché (cited by Le Draoulec & Péri-Woodley, 2022: 212) mentions the example of *bougeoir* “candlestick” and *glissière* “slider” (*-oir* selecting in principle verbal bases and *-ier* nominal bases, we should say *\*bougier* and *\*glissoire*); or *romantisme* “romanticism,” which does not respect the integrity of the formants (we should say – and it has been said – *romanticisme*, like *catholicisme* “catholicism,” since *romanticisme* is to *romantique* “romantic” what that *catholicisme* is to *catholique* “catholic”).

As a result, given the recent phenomenon of feminization in text and discourse, it is not surprising to observe that the normative use of the masculine form leads to irregularities in speakers' use and perception of feminine forms. Considering the influence of the social world and political factors in the process of language feminization, we identified a third potential factor of variation: the speakers' sociological profile, including social gender, age, profession, and territory, which can potentially influence the mental representations and cognitive processing of feminine nouns.

## 2. The cognitive processing of the gender of role nouns

Studies addressing both the grammatical and social aspects of gender processing have emerged recently, particularly in French with the work of Houdebine (1998) and the review by Greco (2014). Despite attempts to reconsider traditional conceptions of grammatical gender in line with underlying beliefs and representations (as seen in Michel's 2016 PhD thesis), the speaker's behavioral dimension from a psychological perspective has remained somewhat peripheral. In the field of psycholinguistics, some researchers have taken up the challenge of exploring grammatical gender as a fundamental aspect of our cognitive system. Drawing from cognitive theories of reading comprehension (e.g. Van Dijk & Kinstch, 1983), these researchers have conducted numerous behavioral studies to examine how noun gender, stored in long-term memory, influences sentence processing and serves as an inferencing modifier in constructing mental representations of text. Specifically, at the text level, readers combine their world knowledge (derived from previous reading experiences) with the information provided in the text itself during online sentence processing. This process is explored in models such as Kinstch's construction-integration model (1988).

However, when the gender of a noun is not morphologically marked (as is the case with plural and singular forms in languages like French or English), research has shown several key findings:

1. Readers cannot suppress the activation of gender stereotypes associated with social role nouns. For example, in a text containing the role noun "surgeon," the default interpretation tends to be masculine, leading to the dominance of masculine interpretations in both online and offline text processing

- (Reynolds, Garnham & Oakhill, 2006).
2. The specific meaning of masculine forms precedes the generic interpretation. When a role term like *singers*<sub>NeutralStereotype</sub> is paired with a kinship term like *brother*<sub>Masc</sub> or *sister*<sub>Fem</sub> the male-specific meaning overrides both the generic and female interpretations (Gygax & Gabriel, 2008).
  3. The male interpretation bias persists even when participants are explicitly instructed to consider alternative meanings. It is more difficult for participants to link masculine forms to female referents compared to male referents (Gygax et al., 2012).
  4. The use of gender-fair forms, which symmetrically and equally treat women and men (e.g. *joggeurs et joggeuses* “joggers<sub>Masc</sub> and joggers<sub>Fem</sub>” or contracted forms *joggeur.euses* “joggers<sub>Masc.Fem</sub>”), increases participants’ perception of women in role nouns compared to the masculine form alone (Tibblin et al., 2022).
  5. When gender-neutral word forms, such as *musicians* are compared to gendered role names like *engineers*, pairs like *David-musicians*, *Lea-musicians* are less sensitive to the male interpretation bias than pairs like *David-engineers*, *Lea-engineers* (Kim et al., 2022).

These findings suggest a strong interaction between word perception and social representations of role nouns. They support the hypothesis that the specific meaning of masculine forms prevails over the feminine and generic interpretations in a durable manner at the text and word levels, with early activation as the default value. Thus, when processing texts, readers automatically process the gender of role nouns and incorporate their gender stereotypicality into their mental representation of the text.

Taken together, these findings highlight the prevalence of the specific meaning of masculine forms and the “male bias” in mental representations of gender (see Gygax et al., 2021 for a review). They also emphasize the political dimensions of gender representation in language (see Burnett & Pozniak, 2021 for further discussion). Therefore, during the process of text comprehension, readers inherently and automatically process the gender of role nouns and incorporate their associated gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypicality refers to the extent to which readers believe or expect a certain role to be held by either a woman or a man (Gabriel et al., 2008). This gender stereotypicality becomes an integral part of readers’ mental representation of the text.

### 3. Producing feminine job nouns in a word association experiment

While previous psycholinguistic studies on grammatical gender have predominantly examined word perception and the relationship between the generic function of the masculine form and the male bias (e.g. Gygax & Gabriel, 2008; Lévy et al., 2014; Gygax et al., 2019), our current study aims to investigate the spontaneous production of feminine forms of job nouns in association with their masculine counterparts. Specifically, we focus on the written production of feminine job nouns, which are derived from a list of masculine job nouns classified into three categories: a. “stable” nouns, b. “unstable” nouns, and c. “epicene” nouns.

- a. The “stable” category includes nouns for which the feminine counterpart is well attested in synchrony, e.g. *ouvrier* – *ouvrière* “worker<sub>Masc</sub> – worker<sub>Fem1</sub>.”
- b. The “unstable” category includes nouns for which more than one feminine form is attested in synchrony or for which the masculine form is sometimes used for woman protagonists, but which are not epicene forms, e.g. *auteur* – *autrice* – *auteure* – *auteur* “writer<sub>Masc</sub> – writer<sub>Fem1</sub> – writer<sub>Fem2</sub> – writer<sub>Masc</sub>.”
- c. The “epicene” category includes nouns that do not have a lexical gender, e.g. *juge* – *juge* “judge<sub>Epicene</sub>.”

French speakers with diverse sociological profiles (i.e. varying in social gender, age, profession, and territory) were asked to handwrite the feminine counterparts of each masculine job name provided in the given list. For example, when given the word *boulangier* “baker,” participants were expected to provide the corresponding role noun for a woman. Written productions were collected through a paper questionnaire. The pen-and-paper format was chosen to minimize experimental constraints and approximate a natural language situation.

The expected findings were as follows. Firstly, in line with previous results found in the experimental literature, which are linked to the effects of frequency of use (Bybee, 2006), we expected to observe a strong variation in the productions within the unstable category, with a high percentage of masculine forms (i.e. male bias). Secondly, we expected to observe an effect of the social profile of the participants on their word productions, with a reduced male bias among women and younger participants. The social construction of reality of the

participants under 30 years old, influenced by their social network experiences and growing awareness of gender fluidity issues (Elder-Vass, 2012), could make them more sensitive to the political aspects of language feminization and consequently, their mental representations could be less gender dependent.

### 3.1. Method

#### 3.1.1. Participants

Ninety-nine individuals participated in this study. The recruitment was conducted in undergraduate classes and within our private circle. Five participants who had a native language other than French were excluded from the analysis. The data of the remaining 94 participants were analyzed.

The age range of the participants was 18 to 79 years ( $M = 35.5$  years,  $SD = 17.1$  years). Within our sample, 67 participants identified themselves as having grown up in an urban environment, while 28 participants grew up in a rural area. Participation in the study was voluntary and not rewarded. To highlight a generational difference and for practical reasons, we excluded participants over the age of 30 and under the age of 39, as individuals in this age range typically enter the workforce. Tables 1 and 2 present additional sociological data describing our sample.

Table 1: Distribution of participants according to their main occupation by gender.

	Students	Employees/Retirees	Total
Women	37	28	65
Men	11	18	29
total	48	46	94

Table 2: Distribution of the sample according to their highest academic level

Participants	Social gender	Mean age	Aca. level	Territory
< 30 years	or 38 women	26.6 years	Baccalaurate inf.: 32.9%	or Urban: 67.9%

Participants	Social gender	Mean age	Aca. level	Territory
<b>N=53</b>	15 men	SD 2.9	Bachelor: 56.6%	Rural: 32.1%
incl. 79.2% of students		Range: 18-20 years	MA/PhD: 11.3%	
<b>&gt;30 years</b>	27 women	51.2 years	Baccalau- reate inf.: 19.5%	or Urban: 71.2%
<b>N= 41</b>	14 men	SD 12.1		Rural: 28.8%
<b>100% employees</b>		Range: 39-79 years	Bachelor: 19.5%	
incl. 14.6% of retirees			MA/PhD: 61%	

### 3.1.2. Materials

The experiment involved a written list of 68 singular masculine occupational/job nouns. These masculine nouns were selected from the French lexical database LEXIQUE (<http://www.lexique.org>, developed by New et al., 2001) based on two criteria: their frequency of use, ensuring that these nouns were relatively common and familiar ( $M = 20.87$  occurrences per million,  $SD = 42.97$ ), and the three aforementioned categories (i.e. stable, unstable, or epicene). The average length of these words was 8.7 letters ( $SD = 1.6$ ).

We obtained the following categories: (a) 20 words classified as “stable” masculine-feminine forms, where the masculine has only one feminine counterpart attested in usage and dictionaries for several years (e.g. *ouvrier – ouvrière* “worker<sub>Masc</sub> – worker<sub>Fem1</sub>”, *coiffeur – coiffeuse*, “hairstresser<sub>Masc</sub> – hairstresser<sub>Fem</sub>”), (b) 18 masculine words classified as “unstable” masculine-feminine forms, where the masculine can be associated with several feminine forms attested in usage and/or dictionaries (e.g. *auteur – autrice – auteure* “author<sub>Masc</sub> – author<sub>Fem1</sub> – author<sub>Fem2</sub>”), and (c) 30 epicene occupational names, where the same form can refer to a man or a woman (e.g. *judge, doctor, artist*). The complete list of this linguistic material, along with its characteristics, is given in Appendix A.1.

### 3.1.3. Procedure

Before the start of the experiment, participants were provided with oral information regarding the conditions of participation and data collection. Subsequently, an informed consent form was provided to ensure that participants were willingly and fully consenting to take part in the study.

Following a brief questionnaire to gather sociological data such as age, gender, level of education, place of residence, and mother tongue, participants were given written instructions. The instructions emphasized the importance of producing the feminine equivalent of a list of singular masculine occupational names in a spontaneous manner, without revising or correcting their responses. They were informed that there was no time limit, that multiple answers were acceptable, and that leaving a blank response was also an option if they did not know or did not wish to provide an answer. Once the experiment began, there was no further intervention or interaction with the experimenters or other participants.

## 3.2. Results

A descriptive analysis was conducted on the written responses provided by the 99 participants. However, five participants who were not native speakers of French were excluded from this analysis.<sup>128</sup>

For each masculine form, we have documented the type and number of occurrences of the produced feminine forms (referred to as *Fem forms*: attested forms and unattested forms) and the number of times no answer was given (referred to as *Number of no answer*, i.e. blank cells).<sup>129</sup>

Additionally, we calculated three proportions for each category: % *fem. prods* (% of feminine noun productions), % *identic.* (% of forms identical to the masculine ones), and % *blank cells* (% of blank cells). All values (Numbers and %) were calculated based on the total number of participants (i.e. 94). The production data for each of the three categories of nouns (unstable, stable, epicene) are presented in Tables 3.a, 3.b, and 3.c, respectively.

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<sup>128</sup> However, we note here that it would be interesting in another study to compare the data of the non-native speakers with those of the native speakers of French. The productions of these five people alone were indeed more related to a morphosyntactic and phonological logic than to a logic of use.

<sup>129</sup> Unattested forms in dictionaries are preceded by an asterisk.

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### 3.2.1. Descriptive analysis of the unstable category (i.e. more than one possible feminine form)

Table 3.a: Production data in the unstable category.

Masc. forms (N = 18)	Fem. Forms (Nb. of occ.)		Nb. of no answer	% fem prods	% identic.	% blank cells
<b>écrivain</b>	écrivaine (81)	écrivain (13)	0	86.2	13.8	0
<b>proviseur</b>	proviseure (72)	proviseur (11)	0	77.4	11.7	0
		directrice (1)				
<b>chevalier</b>	chevalière (53)	chevalier (27)	12	64.6	32.9	12.8
		princesse (1)				
		gente dame (1)				
<b>ingénieur</b>	ingénieure (74)		1	81.7	16.1	1.5
	ingénieuse (5)					
<b>plombier</b>	plombière (73)	plombier (15)	6	83.0	17.0	6.4
<b>poète</b>	poète/ poétesse (53)		1	53.8	43.0	1.5
<b>maire</b>	mairesse (47)	maire (47)	0	50.0	50.0	0
		la maire (1)				
<b>matelot</b>	matelotte (19)	matelot (45)	16	39.7	57.7	17
	matelote (12)					
	*matelonne (2)					
<b>chef</b>	cheffe (71)	chef (18)	0	79.1	19.1	0
	cheftaine (2)	directeur (1)				
	chefette (1)					
	chefesse (1)					
<b>enquêteur</b>	enquête/ trice (69)		0	100.0	0	0
	enquêteuse/ enquêteuse (12)					
	enquête/ trice (10)					
	enquête/ teure (2)					
	*enquête/ trisse (1)					
<b>commis</b>	commise (62)	commis (28)	4	66	28.9	4.3

Masc. forms (N = 18)	Fem. Forms (Nb. of occ.)		Nb. of no answer	% fem prods	% identic.	% blank cells
<b>carreleur</b>	carreleuse (75)	carreleur (15)	3	83.5	16.5	3.2
	*carreleure (1)					
<b>chercheur</b>	chercheuse (82)	chercheur (5)	0	94.7	5.3	0
	chercheure (8)					
<b>professeur</b>	professeure (70)	professeur (23)	0	74.5	24.5	0
		chercheur (1)				
<b>soldat</b>	soldate (27)	soldat (63)	5	29.2	70.4	5.3
<b>auteur</b>	autrice (53)	auteur (14)	0	85.1	14.9	0
	auteure (28)	écrivaine (1)				
<b>gendarme</b>	gendarmette (23)	gendarme (70)	1	24.7	74.2	1.5
	*gendarmesse (1)					
<b>préfet</b>	préfète (37)	préfet (25)	1	67.7	26.9	1.5
	préfette (32)	sous préfet (1)				
<b>sapeur- pompier</b>	sapeur-pompière (9)	sapeur-pompier (62)	6	26.1	70.4	6.4
	sapeuse-pompier (11)					
	sapeuse-pompière (4)					
	sapeure-pompier (2)					
<b>maçon</b>	maçonne (51)	maçon (31)	7	62.1	35.6	7.4
	maçone (2)					
	maçonnière (1)					
	maçone (2)					
<b>Means (SD)</b>			<b>3.2 (4.45)</b>	<b>66.5 (22.6)</b>	<b>31.4 (22.5)</b>	<b>1.9 (5.7)</b>

A descriptive analysis of the “unstable” nouns (refer to Table 3.a), which are defined as occupation names with an attested masculine form but more than one feminine form in use, reveals the following:

Firstly, 31.4% of the produced forms (tokens) resisted feminization, meaning that the masculine form was maintained for their feminine counterpart. In other words, despite being native speakers with morphological knowledge and skills, many participants considered these masculine forms to be exclusively

masculine, disregarding their morphological awareness that should have led them to produce nouns constructed with the correct feminine suffix. Out of the 18 job names, 11 had over 25% of identical forms for both genders: *chevalier*, *poète*, *maire*, *matelot*, *commis*, *soldat*, *gendarme*, *préfet*, *sapeur-pompier*, *maçon* “knight, poet, mayor, sailor, clerk, soldier, policeman, prefect, firefighter, mason.” Interestingly, these 11 job names do not always refer to prestigious positions. For example, *matelot*, *commis*, *soldat*, and *maçon* are rarely classified at the top of the professional hierarchy, reflecting the internalized history of division of labor where certain tasks were traditionally assigned exclusively to men due to physical or social constraints.

However, among these forms, *poète*, *maire*, *chef*, and *gendarme* induced both many feminine forms (*poète*, *maire*, *chefe*, *gendarme*) and identical forms (*poète*, *maire*). Some participants may have considered these forms to be epicene. Unlike other masculine names, these word forms are morphologically simple (not constructed with a base + a suffix). Therefore, in this particular experimental context, participants did not apply the derivational strategy based on the analysis of the morphological structure of the masculine forms. Instead, they chose the epicene option, possibly influenced by analogy with the 30 other epicene forms present in the experimental list.

Secondly, 66.5% of the produced words in the «unstable» category corresponded to words marked by a feminine suffix, more or less conforming to the morphological construction and spelling rules of French. For example, the name *chef* “chief” elicited four different feminine forms with different spellings: *cheffe*, *cheftaine*, *chefette*, *chefe*. Similarly, *enquêteur* “investigator” resulted in different feminine forms: *enquête*, *\*enquêtrice*, *\*enquêtrise*, *enquêteuse*, *enquêteure*, with three suffixes (mainly *-rice*, *-euse* and *-eure*) varying in spellings. This multiplicity of forms reflects the uncertainty and unease among participants, who seemed to experience an internal conflict between the male social norm, the frequency of use in language, and their morphological awareness.

Thirdly, 2% of the masculine forms generated no response (i.e. empty cell). This was particularly the case for the masculine nouns *chevalier* and *matelot*, for which 12 and 16 participants, respectively, left an empty cell. This lack of answer is very difficult to interpret properly: does it mean that they simply don't know or that they consider these job names as exclusively masculine? If so, they would have reported the masculine form. On the other hand, the existence of the attested forms *chevalière* (which traditionally designates a “signet ring”)

and *matelote* (which refers to a cooking recipe) may have hindered the production of these forms as counterparts to the masculine ones.

Finally, we identified some atypical productions used to designate the feminine counterpart of masculine role names: *princesse* “princess” and *gente dame* “nice lady” for *chevalier* “knight”; *chercheur* “researcher” for *professeur* “professor”; *sous-préfet* “sub-prefect<sub>Masc</sub>” and *sous-préfète* “sub-prefect<sub>Masc</sub>” for *préfet* “prefect.” The use of these forms reflects the lack of mental representation of these feminine forms, as well as the influence of gendered social representations inherited from a history that goes beyond the division of labor to encompass the broader roles of men and women in society.

3.2.2. *Descriptive analysis of the unstable category (i.e. more than one possible feminine form)*

This category consisted of 30 masculine job names. In Table 3b, we chose to only present those that showed variation in word production (as the stable category included items that generated 100% of the expected feminine form). We obtained a set of crucial data for a total of 11 masculine forms.

Table 3.b: Linguistic data of the stable category.

Masc. forms (N = 11)	Fem. Forms (Nb. of occ.)		Nb. of no answer	% fem prods	% identic.	% no answer
<b>aviateur</b>	aviatrice (88)	aviateur (3)	2	94.7	3.3	2.1
	aviateuse (1)					
<b>banquier</b>			1	96.8	2.1	1.1
<b>commerçant</b>			0	94.7	5.3	0
<b>directeur</b>	directrice (92)	directeur (2)	0	97.9	2.1	0
<b>éditeur</b>	éditrice	éditeur (2)	0	97.9	2.1	0
	*éditeuse					
	éditeuse (1)					
<b>éleveur</b>	éleveuse (86)	éleveur (7)	0	91.5	7.4	0
	*éleveuse (1)					
<b>enseignant</b>	enseignante (93)	professeuse (1)	0	98.9	0	0
<b>expert</b>	experte (89)	expert (4)	0	94.7	4.2	0
	*expertrice (1)					

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Masc. forms (N = 11)	Fem. Forms (Nb. of occ.)		Nb. of no answer	% fem prods	% identic.	% no answer
<b>facteur</b>	factrice (88)	facteur (5)	1	94.6	5.4	1.1
	facteure (1)					
<b>mécanicien</b>	mécanicienne (92)	mécanicien (2)	0	97.9	2.1	0
<b>pharmacien</b>	pharmacienne (92)	pharmacien (2)	0	97.9	2.1	0
<b>Means (SD)</b>			<b>0.3 (0.6)</b>	<b>97.8 (2.6)</b>	<b>2.2 (0.7)</b>	<b>0.4 (0.7)</b>

In the “stable” category of nouns (refer to Table 3.b), where the masculine and feminine forms are morphologically marked by a specific suffix and correspond to attested words in dictionaries and everyday use, we observe that 2.2% of the productions still resist to feminization. This resistance persists despite the high frequency of use in language (we only selected familiar and frequent words in our material, see Appendix A.1) and the regular morphological construction of the corresponding feminine forms based on rules or analogy. For example, the job names *éleveur* “breeder” and *facteur* “postman” show this resistance to produce *éleveuse* “breeder<sub>Fem</sub>” and *factrice* “postmistress,” respectively, despite the existence of numerous words constructed following the same morphological rule (e.g. *vendeur* – *vendeuse* “seller<sub>Masc</sub> – seller<sub>Fem</sub>,” *livreur* – *livreuse* “delivery man – delivery woman,” *acheteur* – *acheteuse* “buyer<sub>Masc</sub> – buyer<sub>Fem</sub>,” *acteur* – *actrice* “actor – actress,” *instituteur* – *institutrice* “teacher<sub>Masc</sub> – teacher<sub>Fem</sub>,” *conducteur* – *conductrice* “driver<sub>Masc</sub> – driver<sub>Fem</sub>”, etc.). Furthermore, in 2.2% of cases, no answer was given, limited to the words *aviateur* “aviator,” *banquier* “banker<sub>Masc</sub>,” and *facteur* “postman.” Given that these words belong to the stable category (attested, regular, and frequent feminine words) and their internal morphological complexity, it is difficult to explain this lack of response, except in terms of a conflict between internalized social norms and language use that some participants experienced while filling out our questionnaire.

### 3.2.3. Descriptive analysis of the epicene category (i.e. the same word form designates both genders)

This category contained 30 items and as we did for the stable category, we only analyzed those which gave rise to unexpected answers (i.e. forms other than epicene, or failure to answer). Table 3.c presents the observed data from 11 epicenes.

Table 3.c: Linguistic data of the epicene category.

Epicene forms (N=11)	Fem. Forms (Nb. of occ.)		Nb. of no answer	% fem prods	% identic.	% no answer
mécène	mécène (82)		11	1.2	98.8	11.7
	*mécènesse (1)					
journaliste	journaliste (90)		4	0	100.0	4.3
ministre	ministre (89)		5	0	100.0	5.3
capitaine	capitaine (91)		3	0	100.0	3.2
dentiste	dentiste (93)	orthodontiste (1)	0	0	98.9	0
politologue	politologue (91)		3	0	100.0	3.2
vidéaste	vidéaste (93)		1	0	100.0	1.5
podologue	podologue (93)		1	0	100.0	1.5
acrobate	acrobate (92)		2	0	100.0	2.1
linguiste	linguiste (92)		2	0	100.0	2.1
médecin	médecin (87)	doctoresse (1)	0	2.1	92.5	0
	médecine (5)	doctoresse en médecine (1)				
architecte	architecte (91)					
	architectrice (3)					
<b>Means (SD)</b>			<b>2.7 (3.2)</b>	<b>2.6 (7.1)</b>	<b>99.1 (2.2)</b>	<b>0.4 (0.7)</b>

Among the 30 epicene forms (refer to Table 3.c), we observe that three words (*mécène* “sponsor,” *médecin* “doctor,” *architecte* “architect”) led 2.6% of our participants to produce feminized forms by adding a feminine suffix: *mécènesse*, *médecine*, *architectrice*. Additionally, nine words resulted in a lack of response from 2.7% of the participants: *mécène*, *journaliste* “journalist,” *capitaine* “captain,” *dentiste* “dentist,” *politologue* “political scientist,” *vidéaste* “videographer,” *podologue* “chiropodist,” *acrobate* “acrobat,” *linguiste* “linguist.” The production of feminized forms may be attributed to the nature of the production task itself, combined with the influence of the lexicon, which could have prompted some participants to create word forms with a feminine suffix. Firstly, *mécène* might have been unfamiliar to some participants, leading them to apply a morphological rule to produce *mécènesse* by analogy with other similar forms ending in -e, such as *rude* – *rudesse* “harsh – harshness,”

*juste* – *justesse* “just – accuracy,” *robuste* – *robustesse* “robust – robustness.” Secondly, the forms *médecine* and *architectrice* actually exist in both language use and dictionaries.

Consequently, the existence of *médecine* and *architectrice* with different meanings could rather act as a barrier to its usage in referring to “a woman practicing medicine” or “architecture.” Moreover, the production of both *médecine* and *architectrice* may have been influenced by the availability of (1) a feminine noun that designates a field of study focused on “the study, treatment, and prevention of diseases” in the case of *médecine* and (2) a feminine adjective meaning “that builds in architecture” in the case of *architectrice*. In this latter case, where the adjective *architectrice* is unusual (according to the *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé, TLFi*), we can alternatively propose that it has been constructed on the noun *architect* through a semantic-formal analogy with *décoratrice* “decorator” (or *conservatrice* “conservator, curator,” *manipulatrice* “manipulator,” *factrice* “postwoman,” *observatrice* “observeress”), despite an inappropriate theme category. That is, *décoratrice* is constructed on the verbal base *décorer* “decorate,” while *architectrice* includes a nominal base *architecte* “decorator.” Alternatively, it may have been formed based on the general rule in French where the feminine form is built on the masculine form, aligning with stereotypical knowledge.

Finally, nine items have resulted in a lack of response from some participants. These words (i.e. *mécène*, *journaliste* “journalist,” *capitaine* “captain,” *dentiste* “dentist,” *politologue* “political scientist,” *vidéaste* “videographer,” *podologue* “chiropractist,” *acrobate* “acrobat,” *linguiste* “linguist”) correspond in majority to prestigious professions, and a possible explanation could be an irresolvable conflict between male social norms and the current need to feminize language. Participants may have chosen to consider these words as epicene but preferred to leave the box empty.

### 3.2.4. *Effects of sociological data in feminine word production*

In the present experiment, we collected sociological profiles of our participants based on four dimensions (i.e. social gender, age) as we anticipated observing an effect of these profiles on the production of feminine words, with a reduced male bias in women and younger participants. Table 3.d presents the observed data, considering social gender and age.

Table 3.d: Proportions (in %) of observed answers in the three categories of job names, classified by social gender (i.e. men or woman) and age (i.e. under and greater than 30 years old).

		Age < 30, N = 53	Age > 30, N = 41	Total
<b>Women</b>	Epicene	.97	.98	.97
	Unstable	.64	.74	.68
	Stable	.96	.99	.97
<b>Men</b>	Epicene	.98	.97	.98
	Unstable	.62	.64	.65
	Stable	.97	.96	.98
<b>Total</b>	Epicene	.97	.98	
	Unstable	.64	.72	
	Stable	.96	.99	

A Chi-square test was conducted on the data for the two manipulated variables, Social Gender and Age. However, none of the observed values reached significance (in all cases,  $\chi^2 < 0$ ). Therefore, contrary to our second hypothesis, we did not find a significant effect of either social gender or age on our participants.

### 3.3. Discussion

In this study, we examined the spontaneous word productions of feminine counterparts of masculine job names in French. The job names were categorized as stable, unstable, or epicene. Participants were recruited based on various sociological profiles, including social gender, and age. We had two main expectations: 1) to observe a male bias in the unstable category, reflecting a conflict between male social norms and language use, and 2) to find an effect of social profiles, with reduced variation in feminine productions in the unstable category among women and younger participants, given their hypothesized greater sensitivity to the current debate on feminization.

We analyzed the productions of 94 participants. The data related to the “unstable” category revealed that one third of the produced forms resisted feminization completely. In many cases, participants chose to reproduce the masculine form in their answers, indicating that certain forms are still considered exclusively masculine despite the morphological awareness of native speakers.

Additionally, we did not find any significant effect of participants' social profiles on their productions, suggesting that resistance to the feminization of professional terms persists throughout the population in France, regardless of their sociological profile. Prestigious jobs either led to the retention of the masculine form to designate a female protagonist or resulted in participants providing no answer. Consequently, our data demonstrate two behaviors: 1) a strong male bias effect, leading speakers to prefer the masculine form over the feminine, and 2) a conflict between male social norms and participants' awareness of the current political/cultural trend to increase the visibility of women in society.

When examining the production of feminine forms in the stable category, our data revealed a very marginal proportion (2.2%) where some participants still preferred to use the masculine form. Similarly, in the epicene category, a small proportion of observed answers (2.7%) resulted in no response (i.e. empty cells). This indicates that even in cases of well-attested and familiar words (in both usage and dictionaries), a male bias persists among native French speakers. Collectively, these data suggest that despite almost 40 years of political initiatives in favor of feminizing profession and role names in French (starting with a commission dedicated to the "vocabulary concerning the activities of women," directed by the writer Benoîte Groult in 1984, see Houdebine-Gravaud, 1998; Burr, 2003), certain male social norms still persist in the minds and language behaviors of some speakers.

In this study, we acknowledge some biases that may have influenced the written productions, particularly the lack of counterbalancing the order of presentation, which could have had an effect from one word to another. For example, the positioning of *auteur* «author» close to *aviateur* "aviator" may have influenced the productions. Additionally, we can question how the production task itself may have influenced participants, potentially leading them to produce morphologically marked feminine forms (e.g. *médecin* "doctor" – *médecine* "medicine"), perhaps because the noun designating the profession is readily available in their lexicon (in the example provided: *médecine*).

Their productions also reveal the application of the general rule according to which feminine forms are built based on male forms by adding a final -e (a graphical mark without phonological consequence, like for example in the case of *auteure*, *chercheure*, *professeure*) or a feminine suffix (e.g. \**mécenesse*).

Finally, although we utilized the LEXIQUE database to determine the frequency of occurrence of French words and the familiarity of the selected nouns,

we did not explicitly verify whether the words were known to the participants. It is therefore possible, albeit unlikely, that the lack of responses to certain items (i.e. empty cells) could be explained in this manner.

The richness of this data necessitates additional qualitative and quantitative analyses, which will be conducted in future research. In particular, more detailed analyses of the interaction between sociological profiles and written productions should be undertaken to determine whether any of these dimensions or other factors could have influenced the observed variations. Linguistic analyses will also be pursued to further examine the morphological structure of certain neologisms (i.e. the type of constructions and the number of morphological operations involved) or to study the distributional characteristics of the produced forms within a French corpus (e.g. web usage, attested lexical frequency, number of phonological and orthographic neighbors of the forms, etc.).

#### **4. General Discussion**

The psycholinguistic literature postulates the existence of a masculine bias that influences the mental representations of referents, disadvantaging feminine names in the titles of professions, roles, and titles. We had put forward a hypothesis along similar lines. Production and perception of feminine nouns, respectively, have been found to generate significantly different morphological variations and longer reaction times (see Gyga et al., 2021 for a review).

The results of our study demonstrate that despite an inherent morphological awareness in all French speakers, difficulties arise when they are asked to produce the feminine counterparts of masculine occupational nouns (31.4% of the produced forms (tokens) resisted to feminization in the “unstable” category; 2.2% in the “stable” category while in the “epicene” category 2.7% of the response cells remained empty). Moreover, contrary to our second hypothesis, we didn’t find any significant effect of the sociological profile of our participants on their productions. Neither their age range (30<age>30 years old) nor their social gender (masculine, feminine) revealed any significant effects, suggesting that in our experiment these social characteristics were not sensitive to the precise context in which we tested the production of feminine nouns from masculine ones.

Taken together, our results shed light on the linguistic and political issues surrounding certain job names whose feminine forms remain unstable, both in usage and in dictionaries. One third of the responses we observed in our study indicated resistance to producing a feminine counterpart for masculine job names, with variations among speakers that appear to be independent of their social profiles.

Our findings align with previous research, and our next objective is to collect data on the lexical accessibility of masculine, feminine, and epicene forms using psycholinguistic paradigms and tasks (e.g. masked priming in association with a semantic decision task) that allow us to record reaction times. The need to gather experimental data on the lexical accessibility of this specific category of words arose from the work of Gygax and colleagues. These initial production and perception data open up a new research avenue in psycholinguistics, particularly emphasizing a scientific literature that addresses contemporary social struggles.

Recent debates in the socio-political sphere illustrate the increasing interest in research on the impact of gendered language and the necessity for a more neutral and inclusive language. However, there is little to no experimental psychological work that directly addresses these sociolinguistic movements in the Francophone sphere. To precisely establish the impact of language on mental representations, it would be relevant to conduct further studies on both lexical and semantic representations. This work is part of a long-term project and requires further exploration. It would be pertinent, for example, to examine whether other sociodemographic profiles have an effect on gender perception. Additionally, extending the research on the specific topic of title names, roles, and professions to other gendered languages with gender and number inflections would be interesting. Beatty-Martínez & Dussias (2019) investigated this issue using physiological measures and demonstrated that knowledge of one gendered language (e.g. Spanish) influences the brain's perception and linguistic expectations, even in a second language with less or no gender marking (e.g. English). Therefore, future research could examine the excitatory or inhibitory nature of the connections linking lexical representations.

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## Appendix

*A.1 Grammatical class, frequency and length of masculine words in the three categories of job names and their attested feminine counterparts (found in dictionaries or on Google)*

Category	Word	Grammatical class	Word frequency	Number of letters	Attested feminine forms
Stable	<i>Agriculteur</i> 'farmer'	NAME	1.06	11	agricultrice
	<i>Animateur</i> 'animator'	NAME	2.72	9	animatrice
	<i>Aviateur</i> 'aviator'	NAME	3.09	8	aviatrice
	<i>Avocat</i> 'lawyer'	NAME	112.69	6	avocate
	<i>Banquier</i> 'banker'	NAME	6.38	8	banquière
	<i>Boulangier</i> 'baker'	NAME	3.00	9	boulangère
	<i>Caissier</i> 'cashier'	NAME	4.32	8	caissière
	<i>Commerçant</i> 'trader'	NAME	4.34	10	commerçante
	<i>Couturier</i> 'dressmaker'	NAME	3.52	9	couturière
	<i>Danseur</i> 'dancer'	NAME	23.05	7	danseuse
	<i>Directeur</i> 'director'	NAME	64.71	9	directrice
	<i>Éditeur</i> 'publisher'	NAME	8.50	7	éditrice
	<i>Éleveur</i> 'breeder'	NAME	1.82	7	éleveuse
	<i>Enseignant</i> 'teacher'	NAME	3.94	10	enseignante
	<i>Expert</i> 'expert'	NAME	20.14	6	experte
	<i>Facteur</i> 'postman'	NAME	12.26	7	factrice
<i>Infirmier</i> 'nurse'	NAME	39.56	9	infirmière	

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	<i>Mécanicien</i> 'mechanic'	NAME	5.81	10	mécanicienne
	<i>Pâtissier</i> 'pastry chef'	NAME	2.37	9	pâtissière
	<i>Pharmacien</i> 'pharmacist'	NAME	3.71	10	pharmacienne
<b>Unstable</b>	<i>Auteur</i> 'author'	NAME	23.52	6	auteure autrice
	<i>Carreleur</i> 'tiler'	NAME	0.14	9	carreleure carreleuse
	<i>Chef</i> 'chief'	NAME	205.26	4	cheffe
	<i>Chercheur</i> 'researcher'	NAME	5.74	9	chercheure chercheuse
	<i>Chevalier</i> 'knight'	NAME	15.91	9	chevalière
	<i>Commis</i> 'clerk, kitchen help'	NAME		2.99	6 commis
	<i>Écrivain</i> 'writer'	NAME	24.57	8	écrivaine
	<i>Enquêteur</i> 'investigator'	NAME	4.06	9	enquêteurice enquêteuse
	<i>Ingénieur</i> 'engineer'	NAME	21.12	9	ingénieure
	<i>Maçon</i> 'mason'	NAME	3.79	5	maçonne
	<i>Maire</i> 'mayor'	NAME	28.17	5	mairresse
	<i>Matelot</i> 'sailor'	NAME	7.04	7	matelote
	<i>Plombier</i> 'plumber'	NAME	5.85	8	plombière
	<i>Préfet</i> 'prefect'	NAME	7.56	6	préfète
	<i>Poète</i> 'poet'	NAME	22.65	5	poétesse
	<i>Professeur</i> 'professor'	NAME	98.55	10	professeure
	<i>Provisseur</i> 'principal'	NAME	4.45	9	provisseure
	<i>Soldat</i> 'soldier'	NAME	107.92	6	soldate
<b>Epicene</b>	<i>Acrobate</i> 'acrobat'	NAME	2.34	8	acrobate
	<i>Architecte</i> 'architect'	NAME	9.98	10	architecte
	<i>Artiste</i> 'artist'	NAME	40.78	7	artiste
	<i>Astronaute</i> 'astronaut'	NAME	6.45	10	astronaute
	<i>Capitaine</i> 'captain'	NAME	152.69	9	capitaine
	<i>Cineaste</i> 'filmmaker'	NAME	3.56	8	cinéaste
	<i>Comptable</i> 'accountant'	NAME	7.15	9	comptable
	<i>Cycliste</i> 'cyclist'	NAME	1.08	8	cycliste
	<i>Dentiste</i> 'dentist'	NAME	15.40	8	dentiste
	<i>Détective</i> 'detective'	NAME	24.61	9	détective
	<i>Diplomate</i> 'diplomat'	NAME	3.75	9	diplomate
	<i>Gendarme</i> 'constable'	NAME	13.67	8	gendarme
	<i>Gymnaste</i> 'gymnast'	NAME	0.35	8	gymnaste
	<i>Interprète</i> 'interpreter'	NAME	4.81	10	interprète
	<i>Journaliste</i> 'journalist'	NAME	35.29	11	journaliste

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Juge 'judge'	NAME	66.45	4	juge
Juriste 'jurist'	NAME	2.57	7	juriste
Libraire 'bookseller'	NAME	2.10	8	libraire
Linguiste 'linguist'	NAME	0.50	9	linguiste
Mécène 'sponsor, patron'	NAME	0.82	6	mécène
Médecin 'doctor, physician'	NAME	140.19	7	médecin
Ministre 'minister'	NAME	41.41	8	ministre
Peintre 'painter'	NAME	17.02	7	peintre
Pianiste 'pianist'	NAME	5.75	8	pianiste
Podologue 'chiroprapist'	NAME	0.05	9	podologue
Thérapeute 'therapist'	NAME	3.67	10	thérapeute
Urgentiste 'emergency doctor'	NAME	0.25	10	urgentiste
Vidéaste 'videographer'	NAME	0.08	8	vidéaste
Zoologue 'zoologist'	NAME	0.02	8	zoologue

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### *A.2 Observed feminine productions in the three categories of job names*

Category	Masculine forms	Feminine productions	Grammatical class	Word Frequency
<b>Stable</b>	Agriculteur	agricultrice	NAME	1.06
	Animateur	animatrice	NOUN	2.62
	Aviateur	aviatrice	NOUN	3.09
		*aviatrisse	Unattested	NA
		*aviateuse	Unattested	NA
	Avocat	avocate	NOUN	112.69
	Banquier	banquière	NOUN	6.38
	Boulangier	boulangère	NOUN	3
	Caissier	caissière	NOUN	4.32
	Commerçant	commerçante	NOUN	4.34
	Couturier	couturière	NOUN	3.52
	Danseur	danseuse	NOUN	23.05
	Directeur	directrice	NOUN/ADJ	64.71
	Éditeur	éditrice	NOUN/ADJ	8.5
		*éditeure	Unattested	NA
		éditeuse	NOUN	NA
	Éleveur	éleveuse	NOUN	1.82
		*éleveure	Unattested	NA

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		élevatrice	ADJ	NA
Enseignant		enseignante	NOUN	3.94
		professeure	NOUN	98.55
Expert		experte	ADJ	7.66
		*expertrice	Unattested	NA
Facteur		factrice	NOUN	12.26
		*facteure	Unattested	NA
Infirmier		infirmière	NOUN	39.56
Mécanicien		mécanicienne	NOUN	5.81
Pâtissier		pâtissière	NOUN	2.37
Pharmacien				
		pharmacienne	NOUN	3.71
<hr/>				
<b>Unstable</b>	Auteur	autrice	NOUN	NA
		auteure	NOUN	23.52
		*auteuse	Unattested	NA
		écrivaine	NOUN	24.57
Carreleur		carreleuse	NOUN	NA
		*carreleure	Unattested	NA
Chef		cheffe	NOUN	NA
		chefesse	NOUN	NA
		directeur	NOUN	64.71
Chercheur		chercheuse	NOUN	5.74
		chercheure	NOUN	NA
Chevalier		chevalière	NOUN	0.47
		princesse	NOUN	98.9
		gente dame	NOUN	NA
Commis		commise	VERB	47.45
Écrivain		écrivaine	NOUN	24.57
		*écrivainne	Unattested	NA
Enquêteur		enquêteurice	NOUN	NA
		enquêteuse	NOUN	4.06
		*enquêteurisse	Unattested	NA
Ingénieur		ingénieure	NOUN	NA
		ingénieuse	ADJ.	3.55
Maçon		maçonne	NOUN	3.79
		maçonnière	ADJ	NA
		*maçone	Unattested	NA
Maire		mairesse	NOUN	28.17
		la maire	ART+NOUN	NA
Matelot		matelote	NOUN	0.04
		matelotte	NOUN	NA

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		*matelonne	NOUN	NA
Plombier		plombière	NOUN	NA
Préfet		*préfette	Unattested	NA
		préfète	NOUN	NA
		sous préfète	NOUN	NA
Poète		poétesse	NOUN	22.65
Professeur		professoressa	NOUN	NA
		chercheur	NOUN	5.74
Provisaur		provisaur	NOUN	NA
		directrice	NOUN	64.71
Soldat		soldate	NOUN	107.92
<hr/>				
<b>Epicene</b>	Acrobate	acrobate	NOUN	2.34
	Architecte	architecte	NOUN	9.98
	Artiste	artiste	NOUN	40.78
	Astronaute	astronaute	NOUN	6.45
	Capitaine	capitaine	NOUN	152.69
	Cineaste	cinéaste	NOUN	3.56
	Comptable	comptable	NOUN	7.15
	Cycliste	cycliste	NOUN	1.08
	Dentiste	dentiste	NOUN	15.40
		orthodontiste	NOUN	NA
	Déetective	déetective	NOUN	24.61
	Diplomate	diplomate	NOUN	3.75
	Gendarme	gendarme	NOUN	13.67
		gendarmette	NOUN	NA
		*gendarmesse	Unattested	NA
	Gymnaste	gymnaste	NOUN	0.35
	Interprète	interprète	NOUN	4.81
	Journaliste	journaliste	NOUN	35.29
	Juge	juger	NOUN	66.45
	Juriste	juriste	NOUN	2.57
	Libraire	libraire	NOUN	2.10
	Linguiste	linguiste	NOUN	0.50
	Mécène	mécène	NOUN	0.82
		mécènesse	NOUN	NA
	Médecin	médecin	NOUN	140.19
		doctoresse en		
		médecine	NOUN	NA
	doctoresse	NOUN	233.86	
	Ministre	ministre	NOUN	41.41
	Peintre	peintre	NOUN	17.02

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Pianiste	pianiste	NOUN	5.75
	*pianniste	Unattested	NA
Podologue	podologue	NOUN	0.05
Thérapeute	thérapeute	NOUN	3.67
Urgentiste	urgentiste	NOUN	0.25
Vidéaste	vidéaste	NOUN	0.08
Zoologue	zoologue	NOUN	0.02

*Frequencies and lengths of the produced words are reported from the French lexical database LEXIQUE (New et al., 2001)*

*N.A.: no data available in LEXIQUE*

# Semantic gender agreement: French versus Germanic languages

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## Abstract

It is quite commonly known that personal pronouns referring to animate nouns may show semantic instead of grammatical gender agreement. While extensively studied for Germanic languages (e.g., Dutch, German), pronominal agreement did not receive much attention for French. Yet, French grammars indicate that semantic agreement on pronouns is an option, and studies on partitive constructions show that speakers of French may accept semantic agreement in these constructions. Therefore, the goal of the present study is to explore whether speakers of French use semantic agreement on personal pronouns and, in a next step, compare this to what previous studies showed about pronominal agreement in the Germanic languages, and Dutch and German in particular. The results of a sentence completion task with 32 native speakers show that semantic agreement is indeed the preferred option, although semantic agreement seems to be mediated by topicality and individuation.

**Keywords:** Gender agreement; pronouns; semantic gender; French; Germanic.

## Introduction

It is quite commonly known that personal pronouns referring to animate nouns may show semantic instead of grammatical agreement (cf. Corbett, 1991). This is for instance the case in Dutch, as the example in (1) illustrates:<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Following the Leipzig Glossing Rules, inherent grammatical gender values are indicated through brackets (e.g., victim(n) when the noun 'victim' bears neuter grammatical gender, as is the case for Dutch *slachtoffer*). Gender values received through agreement are marked by a period

- (1) a. *Peter is het jong-ste slachtoffer.*  
 Peter is DET.N young-SUP victim(N)
- b. *Hij/?Het is mijn oom.*  
 3SG.M/3SG.N is my uncle  
 ‘Peter is the youngest victim. He is my uncle.’

Sentence (1a) contains the neuter animate noun *het slachtoffer* ‘the victim’. The pronoun referring to this noun in (1b) could either take the neuter form *het*, agreeing with the neuter grammatical gender of *slachtoffer*, or the masculine form *hij*, in accordance with the biological sex of its referent, a male. Speakers of Dutch often prefer the pronoun to match the biological sex of its referent, that is, semantic agreement, as noted for instance by Audring (2009).

In French, a similar competition between grammatical and semantic agreement arises with the feminine noun *victime* ‘victim’ when referring to a male, as in (2):

- (2) a. *Pierre est la plus jeune victime.*  
 Peter is DET.F SUP young victim(F)
- b. *?Il/?Elle est en réanimation.*  
 3SG.M/3SG.F is in reanimation  
 ‘Peter is the youngest victim. He is being reanimated.’

Theoretically, the pronoun in (2b) could either grammatically agree with the feminine gender of the noun *victime*, thus displaying the form *elle*, or take the masculine form *il*, in accordance with the biological sex of its referent, a male. Traditionally, prescriptive and didactic pedagogic grammars of French dictate the use of grammatical agreement. Thus, in example (3), the feminine pronoun *elle* should be used to refer to the feminine noun *victime* ‘victim’, even though this noun may refer to a male (example taken from Vlугter et al., 2008: 189):

- (3) *Il y avait une victime. Elle était gravement blessé-e.*  
 3SG there was one.F victim(F) She was severely wounded.F  
 ‘There was one victim. She was severely wounded.’

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(e.g., DET.N for a neuter determiner).

However, the 1976 volume *Tolérances grammaticales* (Haby, 1976) already allows semantic agreement on personal pronouns, as shown by the example in (4) (taken from the official *Arrêté*, cf. Haby, 1976):

- (4) a. *Le français nous est enseigné par une dame.*  
 DET.M French to.us is taught by INDF.F lady(F)
- b. *Nous aimons beaucoup ce professeur.*  
 we love much DEM.M teacher(M)
- c. *Mais il (elle) va nous quitter.*  
 but 3SG.M (3SG.F) will us leave
- ‘French is taught to us by a lady. We really love this teacher. But she will leave us.’

Although the antecedent of the pronoun *il* in (4c) is the masculine noun *professeur* (4b), it is an option to use the feminine form *elle*, according to the *Tolérances*, as the real-world referent is a female (4a). The recent *Grande Grammaire du Français* (Abeillé & Godard, 2021) also indicates that if a noun’s gender does not correspond to its referent’s sex, semantic agreement on the pronoun is possible, as shown in (5) with the feminine noun *majesté* ‘majesty’ referring to a male (example taken from Abeillé & Godard, 2021):

- (5) *Sa Majesté dit qu’ il vous recevra.*  
 POSS.F majesty(F) says that he you.PL will.receive
- ‘His majesty says that he will receive you.’

A similar remark is made by the famous – and usually considered prescriptive – grammar *Le Bon Usage* (Grevisse & Goosse, 2001). Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether native speakers of French would actually adopt semantic agreement or stick to grammatical agreement on personal pronouns, since, to the best of my knowledge, there have not been any studies on this specific topic yet.

By contrast, several studies investigated pronominal agreement in Germanic, mainly focussing on Dutch and German (e.g., Audring, 2009; Braun & Haig, 2010; de Vos, 2014; Kraaikamp, 2017; de Vogelaeer et al., 2020). These studies show that the likelihood of semantic agreement depends on several factors. For French, semantic gender agreement has only been investigated

for partitive constructions (e.g., *the youngest of these students*) (cf. Sleeman & Ihsane, 2016; Westveer, 2021; Westveer et al., 2021). These studies show that speakers of French sometimes accept semantic agreement in partitives.

The goal of the present paper is to investigate whether native speakers of French opt for grammatical or semantic agreement on pronouns, and, in a next step, compare this to what we know about pronominal agreement in the Germanic languages, Dutch and German in specific. To this end, I designed a sentence completion task, which was completed by 32 native speakers of French. In the next section, I start off by discussing what we know about pronominal agreement in Germanic, before turning to the situation in French. Section 2 elaborates on the methodological details of the sentence completion task, of which the results are presented in section 3. In section 4, I further discuss these results, compare them to the data reported in studies on Dutch and German, and show how they contribute to our existing knowledge of pronominal agreement.

## 1. Pronominal gender agreement

Pronominal gender agreement has received considerable attention for Germanic languages, with Dutch and German in particular (e.g., Audring, 2009; Braun & Haig, 2010; Audring, 2013; de Vos, 2014; Kraaikamp, 2017; de Vogelaeer et al., 2020; Redl, 2021). These studies show that several factors play a role in determining the possibility of semantic agreement on pronouns, of which the most important ones will be presented in what follows. In a next step, I discuss whether the same factors may be relevant for pronominal agreement in French.

### 1.1 Hybrid agreement in Germanic languages

As I mentioned in the introduction, pronouns may display either semantic or grammatical agreement, a phenomenon that occurs in many languages (cf. Corbett, 1991, 2006). Several studies have shown that the likelihood of semantic agreement depends on different factors. The most prominent one concerns the specific agreement context involved. In Dutch, for instance, semantic agreement is very frequent on personal pronouns, as exemplified in (6):

- (6) Ik zie het meisje. ??Het/Zij leest een boek.  
 I see DET.N girl.DIM(N) 3SG.N/3SG.F reads a book  
 'I see the girl. She reads a book.'

Although the pronoun in (6) refers to the neuter noun *meisje*, most speakers of Dutch would use the feminine pronoun *zij*, in accordance with its referent's biological sex (cf. Haeseryn et al., 1997). The same is true for relative pronouns. Grammar rules state that the relative pronoun should agree with the neuter grammatical gender of the noun *meisje* in (7), but in practice many speakers unconsciously use the common-gender pronoun *die*, again a case of semantic agreement (cf. Audring, 2006, 2009; Kraaikamp, 2017):

- (7) het meisje dat/?die daar loopt  
 DET.N girl.DIM(N) REL.N/REL.C there walks  
 'the girl who walks over there'

With different types of pronouns – being examples of agreement outside the nominal domain – semantic agreement is very common in Dutch, as these examples illustrate. On modifiers within the nominal domain, however, semantic agreement is usually excluded, as illustrated by the examples in (8):

- (8) a. het/\*de mooi-e meisje  
 DET.N/DET.C beautiful-DEF girl.DIM(N)  
 b. een mooi/\*mooi-e meisje  
 INDF beautiful.N/beautiful-C girl.DIM(N)

Both the definite determiner (8a) and the attributive adjective in (8b) take the neuter form, in accordance with the grammatical gender of the noun *meisje*. Semantic agreement is not accepted.

Research on several languages has shown that similar patterns arise cross-linguistically. Based on such typological data, Corbett (1979, 1991) formulated the Agreement Hierarchy in (9) to formalise the behaviour of different agreement contexts regarding the likelihood of semantic agreement:

- (9) Agreement Hierarchy  
 Personal pronoun > relative pronoun > predicate > attributive

The more to the left an agreement context is situated on the hierarchy in (9), the likelier it is to show semantic agreement. Besides, the hierarchy is implicational: a language that allows for semantic agreement on relative pronouns will also do so for personal pronouns.

Another factor that mediates the possibility of semantic agreement concerns individuation, that is, the referent's degree of animacy or specificity (cf. Dahl, 2000). Agreement based on semantic information is more likely for referents that are highly individuated. Based on evidence from Dutch, Audring (2009) proposes the Individuation Hierarchy in (10) (Audring, 2009: 124):

(10) Individuation Hierarchy

Human > animal > bound object/abstract > specific mass > unspecific mass/  
/abstract

The more to the left, the likelier it is to use a masculine pronoun in Dutch, irrespective of a noun's grammatical gender. Alternatively, a feminine pronoun is used with animate referents of female sex. The example in (11), involving the neuter noun *boek* 'book', illustrates the influence of individuation (example from Audring, 2006: 95):

- (11) a. *Moet je nog [...] informatie over dat boek hebben?*  
 need you still information about DEM.N book.N have  
 'Do you still need to have information about that book?'  
 b. *Dan moet 'k 'm nog niet gaan inleveren.*  
 then need I 3SG.M yet not go return  
 'In that case, I should not yet return it.'

Although the noun *boek* is grammatically neuter – which becomes clear from the demonstrative's neuter form *dat* in (11a) – the pronoun *'m* in (11b) is masculine, since the referent of *boek* is highly individuated, a bound object, which makes the use of the masculine form more likely. This is also considered a case of semantic agreement, as the degree of individuation – a semantic property of the noun – determines agreement, not grammatical gender.

Finally, other referent-related factors may play a role in the likelihood of semantic agreement. For German, Braun & Haig (2010) show that the age of the referent of the neuter noun *Mädchen* 'girl' influences a speaker's choice for

either grammatical or semantic pronominal agreement. In case *Mädchen* refers to an older girl, speakers prefer the feminine pronoun *sie*; if the girl is younger, the neuter form *es* is more frequent.

## 1.2 What about French?

If we now turn to French, the first aspect to notice is that 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns in French only have a feminine and a masculine form (*elle* and *il*, respectively); in the standard language, at any rate, there is no neuter form equivalent to Dutch *het* or German *es*.<sup>131</sup> This means that the possibilities of semantic agreement are restricted in two ways. First, semantic agreement may only arise when a masculine noun refers to a female (such as *ce professeur* in the example from the *Tolérances grammaticales* in 2b), or a feminine noun to a male, as in (12):<sup>132</sup>

- (12) *Je vois une sentinelle. Elle/Il a une longue barbe.*  
 I see a.F guard(F) 3SG.F/3SG.M has a.F long.F beard(F)  
 'I see a guard. He has a long beard.'

Second, due to the absence of neuter gender in French, the referent's degree of individuation may only limitedly affect the possibility of semantic agreement, as even for mass nouns, either the masculine or the feminine pronoun should be used. Nevertheless, individuation could play a small role with respect to the difference between human and non-human referents, the latter – while less individuated – probably being less prone to semantic agreement. In a paper on the avoidance of gender ambiguous pronouns in French, Fukumura et al. (2022) indeed report an effect of individuation. In example (13), it is unclear whether the masculine pronoun *il* (13b) refers to *Max* or to *Luc* (13a), as both are males:

<sup>131</sup> From a morphological point of view, French differs from German (and Dutch) with respect to the derivation of feminine forms from masculine ones. While German has one very productive feminisation strategy (i.e., *-in* suffixation, as in *der Student – die Student-in* 'the student(m) – 'the student-f', the situation is more complex in French. See Elmiger (this volume: 111-126) for a discussion.

<sup>132</sup> In present-day French, the number of cases for which no feminine noun form exists is very limited. For most traditionally masculine nouns, a feminine variant has made its way into usage, following the ongoing debates on gender equal representation of females and males in language (cf. Cerquiglini, 2018; Westveer et al., 2018), but see Giraudo & Morel (this volume: 183-206), who discuss several factors that influence the use of feminine noun forms.

- (13) a. *Max et Luc ont le même âge.*  
 Max and Luc have the same age
- b. *C'est lui le plus grand.*  
 It.is him the most tall  
 'Max and Luc have the same age. He is the tallest.'

Fukumura et al. (2022) show that in such cases of ambiguity, native speakers of French often avoid the use of a pronoun because, for example, it is unclear to whom the pronoun *il* in (13b) refers. Yet, they observe that with inanimate referents, speakers are significantly less likely to avoid the use of an ambiguous pronoun, even though the same sort of unclarity arises, as illustrated in (14):

- (14) a. *On achète du pain et du café.*  
 we buys DET.M bread(M) and DET.M coffee(M)
- b. *Il est très cher.*  
 He is very expensive.M  
 'We buy bread and coffee. It is very expensive.'

This difference between human (13) and inanimate (14) referents, as observed by Fukumura et al. (2022), can be considered an effect of individuation.

In terms of agreement contexts, only personal pronouns may give rise to semantic agreement, as French relative pronouns do not generally encode gender, at least when referring to humans.<sup>133</sup> This is shown in (15) where the relative pronoun *que* is used, irrespective of the gender of its antecedent, masculine *génie* 'genius' in (15a) or feminine *victime* 'victim' in (15b):

- (15) a. *le génie que je connais*  
 DEF.M genius(M) REL.OBJ I know  
 'the genius that I know'

<sup>133</sup> Gender is only encoded on the relative pronoun forms *lequel/laquelle/lesquels/lesquelles*, which combine with a preposition to replace prepositional phrases. However, the use of these pronouns is in many cases traditionally restricted to non-human referents (except for *parmi* 'among', cf. Vlugter et al., 2008); for human referents, the relative pronoun *qui* (preceded by a preposition) is used.

- b. *la*      *victime*      *que*      *je*      *connais*  
 DEF.F      victim(F)      REL.OBJ      I      know  
 ‘the victim that I know’

Despite the limited attention paid to semantic agreement in French, some studies investigated the acceptability of semantic agreement in partitive constructions (cf. Sleeman & Ihsane, 2016; Westveer, 2021; Westveer et al., 2021), and so-called closest-conjunct agreement on determiners and attributive adjectives (cf. Abeillé et al., 2018).

Partitive constructions, in which a subset Y is selected from a larger set X, may give rise to semantic agreement when the set refers to a mixed group of females and males. The example in (16), in which the subset is introduced by a superlative (a superlative partitive, here about a female student), illustrates this:

- (16) *la/?le*      *plus*      *jeune*      *des*      *nouv-eau-x*      *étudiant-s*  
 DEF.F/DEF.M      COMP      young      of.DEF.PL      new-M-PL      student(M)-PL  
 ‘the youngest of the new students’

The set nominal *nouveaux étudiants* in (16) can refer to a mixed group of female and male students, but is grammatically masculine. If the superlative refers to a female student from this larger group, the superlative’s determiner could not only show grammatical agreement with the gender of *étudiants*, resulting in the masculine form *le*, but also semantic agreement with the biological sex of its referent, which leads to the feminine form *la*. Westveer et al. (2021) show that native speakers of French prefer semantic agreement of the superlative in (16) when referring to a female.

Instead, if the subset of the partitive is introduced by a quantifier (a quantified partitive), semantic agreement is judged considerably less acceptable, as shown in (17) (cf. Westveer et al., 2021):

- (17) *?une/un*      *des*      *nouv-eau-x*      *étudiant-s*  
 one.F/one.M      of.DEF.PL      new-M-PL      student(M)-PL  
 ‘one of the new students’

Westveer (2021), building on Sleeman & Ihsane (2016), argues that this contrast in the acceptability of semantic agreement depends on a difference

in syntactic structure between quantified and superlative partitives, whereby in the former construction presents a more local agreement environment, that is, a shorter relative distance between the agreement target and its controller, leaving less space for the insertion of semantic information.

Furthermore, studies on partitives show that the specific type of human noun used also influences the acceptance of semantic agreement: semantic agreement is judged more acceptable with nouns that have both a masculine and a feminine form (e.g., *un étudiant – une étudiante* ‘a.M student(M) – a.F student(F)’) than with the nouns that only have a masculine or feminine form (e.g., *la victime* ‘the.F victim(F)’) (cf. Sleeman & Ihsane, 2016; Westveer, 2021; Westveer et al., 2021).<sup>134</sup>

Other studies investigated closest-conjunct agreement (*accord de proximité*) in French, which may also be considered a case of variability in gender agreement. In French, predicative or attributive adjectives which modify two coordinated nouns that differ in gender should show masculine agreement according to normative French grammars (e.g., *Le Bon Usage*, Grevisse & Goosse, 2001). This state of affairs is traditionally referred to by the expression *le masculin l’emporte sur le féminin* ‘masculine overrules feminine’ (cf. Michel, 2016; Viennot, 2017). An example is presented in (18a):

- (18) a. *le chanteur et la chanteuse présent-s*  
DEF.M singer(M) and DEF.F singer(F) present.M-PL
- b. *le chanteur et la chanteuse présent-e-s*  
DEF.M singer(M) and DEF.F singer(F) present-F-PL  
 ‘the (male) singer and the (female) singer present’

Based on a corpus study of a large sample of – both formal and less formal – written texts, Abeillé et al. (2018) show that closest-conjunct agreement is nevertheless used relatively often in present-day French. Thus, the adjective may also show feminine agreement, if the feminine noun is linearly closer to the adjective, as illustrated in (18b).

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<sup>134</sup> Westveer (2021) also investigates the acceptability of semantic agreement in partitive constructions for German. The results of his study show that the same factors as in French appear to influence the acceptability of semantic agreement, although speakers of German seem to be more acceptant towards semantic agreement in general.

The present paper aims at exploring gender agreement on French personal pronouns to find out whether native speakers choose semantic or grammatical agreement. This is reflected in the first research question:

RQ1 Do native speakers of French opt for grammatical or semantic gender agreement on personal pronouns?

Following on what we know from the studies on agreement in partitive constructions cited above, I expect that most speakers will use semantic agreement on pronouns, as predicted by the Agreement Hierarchy, since pronouns present a less local agreement environment than partitive constructions, the latter usually considered to be complex nominal constructions (cf. Westveer, 2021, and references therein).

In addition, I check for two additional factors whether they may have an impact on the choice for semantic agreement. First, I investigate the effect of topicality / subjecthood, illustrated by the examples in (19-20):

- (19) a. *Cette vedette très connue était instituteur.*  
DEM.F star(F) very known.F was teacher(M)  
 b. *Il/Elle était très populaire.*  
He/She was very popular  
 ‘This well-known star was a teacher. He/She was very popular.’

- (20) a. *Max était une vedette très connue.*  
Max was a.F star(F) very known.F  
 b. *Il/Elle était très populaire.*  
He/She was very popular  
 ‘Max was a well-known star. He/She was very popular.’

In (19a), the feminine epicene noun *vedette* is in subject position, while the masculine bare noun *instituteur* – indicating the referent’s sex – is the nominal predicate. Instead, in (20a), *vedette* is the nominal predicate, whereas the proper noun *Max* – indicating the referent’s sex – is now the subject. Therefore, in terms of information structure, there is a difference between (19a) and (20a): in (19a), feminine *vedette* is the topic of the sentence, whereas in (20a), the topic is the proper noun *Max* (referring to a male). As is commonly known,

pronominal agreement is influenced by topicality, in that a pronoun usually takes the topic of the preceding sentence as its antecedent (cf. van Kampen & Pinto, 2008; Kaiser, 2011). In terms of agreement, this means that in (19b), agreement with the feminine grammatical gender of *vedette* is considerably more likely than in (20b).

Second, I look at possible differences between human and animal referents, partly following up on the observed influence of the factor of individuation (cf. Audring, 2009). These two aspects – human vs. non-human referents, and topicality – translate to the second research question:

RQ2 Do the factors topicality and individuation – specifically the difference between humans and animals – influence a speaker's choice for either grammatical or semantic agreement?

Based on the evidence from Germanic languages, I expect that speakers of French will be more likely to opt for semantic agreement with human than with animal referents. Furthermore, I expect a stronger preference for semantic agreement when the noun indicating the referent's sex is in topic position. In the next section, I present the methodology I adopt to answer these questions.

## 2. Methodology

The goal of this study is to explore whether native speakers of French choose grammatical or semantic agreement on personal pronouns, and to compare this to what we know from previous work on Dutch and German. To this end, I conducted an online sentence completion task via Qualtrics, in which the participants were asked to complete sentences by selecting a personal pronoun they judged to be the most appropriate. Besides the sentence completion task, the questionnaire contained one additional background question on the participant's native language(s), to ensure that all participants were native speakers of French.

Potential participants were reached through personal contacts via e-mail. In total, 33 speakers filled in the questionnaire; one participant had to be excluded for not having French as mother tongue. The remaining 32 participants were

all native speakers of French, with two participants reporting to be bilingual. All participants consented to take part in the experiment.<sup>135</sup>

The test sentences involved five different nouns, which are listed in Table 1. Three of these nouns were human nouns, while the remaining two referred to animals, to check for differences between human and animal nouns.

Table 1 – nouns used in the experiment.

Human nouns	Animal nouns
<i>la personne</i> 'the.F person(F)' <i>la vedette</i> 'the.F star(F)' <i>la victime</i> 'the.F victim(F)'	<i>la souris</i> 'the.F mouse(F)' <i>le léopard</i> 'the.M leopard(M)'

All human nouns were taken from the set of human nouns that only have a feminine form, but can refer to both females and males, often called 'epicenes', as the number of human nouns that only have a masculine form has become very limited in today's French (cf. footnote 132), whereas a similar tendency has not been observed yet for the feminine-only nouns.

In total, the sentence completion task consisted of 21 sentences, including ten filler items that involved the same nouns, but a distinct syntactic construction in the form of partitives. There were nine test sentences in which the participants had to choose the appropriate form of a personal pronoun, as exemplified in (21):

(21) *La personne la plus âgée que je connais était instituteur pendant une grande partie de sa vie. \_\_\_\_ (Il / Elle) habite tout près de chez moi.*

'The oldest person I know was a teacher for the majority of his life. He/She lives very close to me.'

In order to check the possible influence of topicality, the test included three sentences in which the epicene noun was in topic position, as in (21) with *personne*, and five sentences where the topic position was filled by a proper noun, for instance *Vianney* in (22):

<sup>135</sup> The experiment received approval from the Faculty of Humanities' Ethics Committee of the University of Amsterdam (file 2021-FGW\_OTHR-14080).

(22) *Vianney est une vedette peu connue aux Pays-Bas. Pourtant, \_\_\_\_ (Il / Elle) est très populaire en France.*

‘Vianney is a relatively unknown star in the Netherlands. Yet, he/she is very popular in France.’

One test sentence, involving the animal noun *léopard* ‘leopard’, had a slightly different structure, in which neither the epicene noun *léopard*, nor a proper noun were in topic position. Instead, the referent’s intended sex – female – was pointed at by including the verb *allaiter* ‘to lactate’, as shown in (23):

(23) *Quand j’ai visité le zoo hier, j’ai vu un léopard. \_\_\_\_ (Il / Elle) était en train d’allaiter ses petits.*

‘When I visited the zoo yesterday, I saw a leopard. He/She was feeding her cubs.’

Finally, there were two control sentences that did not present a mismatch between the noun’s grammatical gender and its referent’s biological sex, as shown in (24):

(24) *Jeannette est la personne la plus âgée que je connais. \_\_\_\_ (Il / Elle) habite tout près de chez moi.*

‘Jeannette is the oldest person I know. He/She lives very close to me.’

Appendix A lists the full set of test sentences and fillers.

All data were collected in a spreadsheet and then statistically analysed in R (R Development Core Team, 2018). I ran a mixed-effects model using the *glmer*-function from the *lmerTest* package (Kuznetsova et al., 2017). The dependent variable was agreement type, that is, the participant’s choice for either grammatical (coded as 0) or semantic agreement (coded as 1). The model included random slopes per participant. Due to the limited number of test sentences, I could not carry out statistical analyses to determine the influence of the other factors taken into account, that is, the difference between human and animal referents, and the influence of topicality. Instead, I performed a qualitative analysis of the results.

### 3. Results

Table 2 reports for each individual test sentence the participants' choice for either grammatical or semantic agreement. Except for sentences (H-I), which involve the masculine noun *léopard* 'leopard', the pronoun *elle* represents semantic agreement.

Table 2 – pronoun choice per test item<sup>136</sup>.

Sentence	Human / animal	Topic	Pronoun choice
A	human	epicene	il (94%) elle (6%)
B	human	epicene	il (76%) elle (24%)
C	human	epicene	il (73%) elle (27%)
D	human	proper noun	il (91%) elle (9%)
E	human	proper noun	il (100%) elle (0%)
F	human	proper noun	il (100%) elle (0%)
G	animal	proper noun	il (82%) elle (18%)

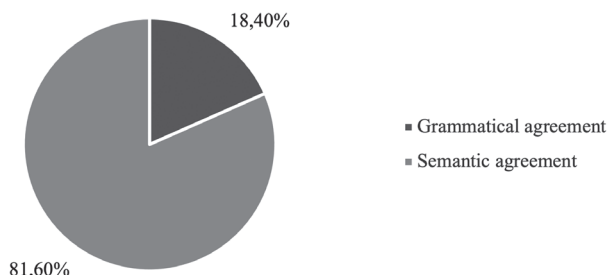
<sup>136</sup> The epicene noun is marked in bold face in Table 2, while the noun/element that indicates the referent's biological sex is underlined.

<sup>137</sup> One may argue that Mickey Mouse may be subject of personification and, therefore, not

Sentence		Human / animal	Topic	Pronoun choice
H	Antoinette était le léopard le plus connu du zoo de Paris. Malheureusement, ___ vient de mourir.	animal	proper noun	il (18%) elle (82%)
I	Quand j'ai visité le zoo hier, j'ai vu un léopard. ___ était en train d'allaiter ses petits.	animal	n/a	il (58%) elle (42%)

First, let us look at the participants' general preferences: Do they opt for grammatical or semantic agreement on personal pronouns? Figure 1 presents an overview of the results:

Figure 1 – General overview.



As Figure 1 shows, the results show a strong preference for semantic over grammatical agreement. The statistical analysis corroborates this effect ( $t$ -value = 23.585), which indicates that our participants usually opt for semantic agreement on personal pronouns, even if that results in a clash between the form of the pronoun and the grammatical gender of the noun it refers to.

Next, Figure 2 illustrates the potential influence of topicality – that is, is the topic position filled by one of the test nouns (e.g., *vedette* ‘star’) or by a proper noun (e.g., *Vianney*):

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considered a real animal. The results for sentence G seem to confirm this, as they pattern with those of the human nouns.

Figure 2 – Influence of topicality.

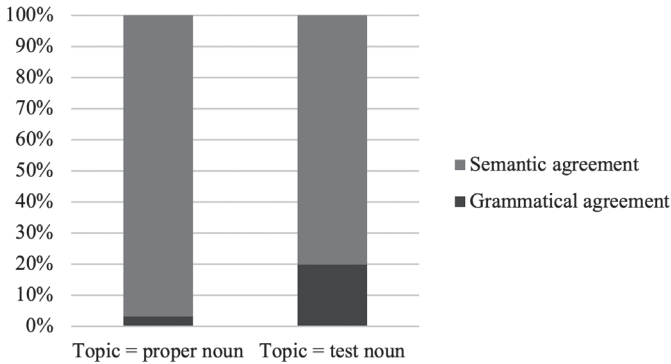
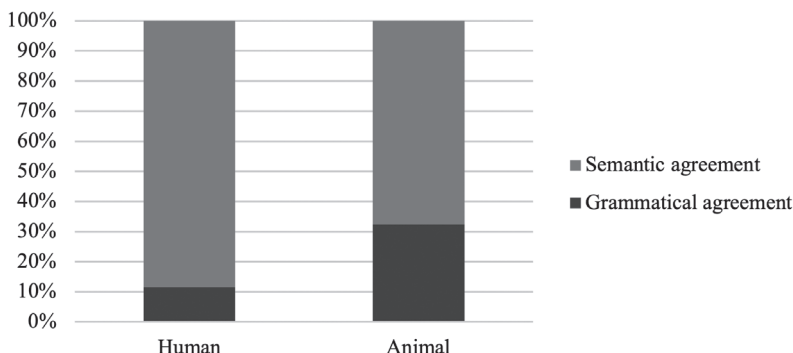


Figure 2 shows that there is an influence of topicality on the choice between either grammatical or semantic agreement. When the test noun occurs in topic position, the participants are more likely to use grammatical agreement on the pronoun than when a proper noun is used in topic position.

The percentages on the individual sentences reported in Table 2 partly confirm the effect of topicality: in general, the percentages for semantic agreement are lower for sentences A-C – where the epicene noun is in topic position – than for sentences D-F – where the topic position is filled by a proper noun – except for sentence A, which shows a strong preference for semantic agreement too. When we turn to the sentences involving animal nouns (G-I), we see a clear difference between the sentences containing a proper noun in topic position (G-H), and the sentence displaying a different composition, involving the use of the verb *allaiter* (I). This difference again confirms the influence of topicality.

Finally, we turn to the question whether there is a difference between human and animal denoting nouns, as well as an influence of topicality. The participants' choices for either grammatical or semantic agreement with both human and non-human referents are summarised in Figure 3:

Figure 3 – Human nouns versus animal nouns.



As Figure 3 suggests, indeed, there appears to be a difference between human and non-human denoting nouns with respect to the preference for either grammatical or semantic agreement. The participants selected grammatical agreement more often with non-human than with human nouns.

Considering the distinction between human and animal nouns, Table 2 shows that when looking at the individual cases, the differences between these two noun types are more nuanced. While semantic agreement is strongly preferred with the human noun *victime* (A + F), as well as with the nouns *personne* and *vedette* when combined with a proper noun in topic position (D-E), this also holds for the animal noun *souris* (G).

In sum, the results show that semantic agreement is generally preferred on personal pronouns in French. In the next section, I discuss how these results interact with what we know from existing work on semantic agreement in French, Dutch, and German.

#### 4. Discussion

In order to be able to compare French to Dutch and German with respect to semantic agreement on pronouns, this paper addressed the following research questions:

- RQ1 Do native speakers of French opt for grammatical or semantic gender agreement on personal pronouns?

RQ2 Do the factors topicality and individuation – specifically the difference between humans and animals – influence a speaker’s choice for either grammatical or semantic agreement?

The results suggest that speakers of French predominantly choose semantic agreement on pronouns referring to animate nouns. As such, the situation for French seems to correspond to what earlier studies reported for several Germanic languages, where semantic agreement on pronouns is very common (e.g., Audring, 2009; Kraaikamp, 2017, on Dutch, Braun & Haig, 2010, on German, or de Vogelaer et al., 2020, on Dutch and German). Furthermore, the two additional factors taken into account, topicality and individuation, also seem to influence pronominal agreement, as I discuss in what follows.

#### 4.1 Factors influencing pronominal agreement

That speakers of French often choose semantic agreement on pronouns is both expected and unexpected. On the one hand, given the traditional conception of French as a grammatical gender language, it might seem surprising that speakers nevertheless opt for semantic agreement. On the other hand, the massive choice for semantic agreement may be seen as exemplary of existing language variation, since the 1976’s *Tolérances grammaticales* (cf. example 4) already accepted semantic agreement on pronouns as an alternative. This tendency is also witnessed by Abeillé et al. (2018), who report a relatively frequent use of closest conjunct agreement (*accord de proximité*) in both formal and less formal written texts. As such, it contradicts the supposed supremacy of the masculine gender in French that is captured by the traditional grammar expression *le masculin l’emporte sur le féminin* and shows that gender agreement in French may display variation in several respects.

From a comparative perspective, it is also rather unsurprising to observe a preference for semantic agreement on pronouns, not only considering the studies on semantic agreement in Dutch and German (e.g., Audring, 2009; Kraaikamp, 2017; de Vogelaer et al., 2020), but also from a typological point of view, as shown by the work of Corbett (1979, 1991, 2006) and his Agreement Hierarchy based on typological data (recall example 9), which states that semantic agreement is very likely with pronouns.

If we compare the present findings to existing work on agreement in participatives (cf. Sleeman & Ihsane, 2016; Westveer, 2021; Westveer et al., 2021),

we can observe both differences and similarities. As discussed in Section 1.2, speakers of French appear to be rather acceptant towards semantic agreement, particularly for superlative partitives. Overall, however, semantic agreement seems to be less acceptable for partitives than for personal pronouns, but this difference may be explained considering the fact that we deal here with two different syntactic constellations: partitive constructions – which are complex nominal constructions – versus pronominal agreement – which is less local. This pattern is also confirmed by the reported differences between quantified and superlative partitives.

From this perspective, Corbett’s (1979) Agreement Hierarchy may explain the differences between partitives and personal pronouns. In their study on agreement in French partitive constructions, Sleeman & Ihsane (2016) propose an extended version of the Agreement Hierarchy, including both quantified and superlative partitives. This extended hierarchy, as shown in (25), is further supported by other work on partitives (Westveer, 2021; Westveer et al., 2021):

(25) Extended Agreement Hierarchy

Personal pronoun > relative pronoun > superlative partitive > quantified partitive  
> predicate > attributive

Thus, the specific agreement context appears to be a relevant factor in the likelihood of semantic agreement, which confirms the findings of previous studies investigating languages other than French (cf. Corbett, 1991; Audring, 2009; Kraaikamp, 2017).

Another factor I have taken into account is topicality (cf. van Kampen & Pinto, 2008; Kaiser, 2011). As was already expected, semantic agreement is strongly preferred when the sentence preceding the one with the pronoun contains a proper noun in topic position, as in (26). Instead, if the topic position is filled by an epicene noun, such as *personne* ‘person’ in (27), the preference toward semantic agreement seems to be lower:

(26) *Jean est la personne la plus âgée que je connais.*  
 Jean is the.F person(F) the.F COMP old.F that I know  
*Il/Elle habite tout près de chez moi.*  
 He/She lives very close of by me  
 ‘Jean is the oldest person I know. He/She lives very close to me.’

- (27) *La personne la plus âgée que je connais était*  
 the.F person(F) the.F COMP old.F that I know was  
*institutrice pendant une grande partie de sa vie.*  
 teacher(M) during a large part of his life  
*Il/Elle habite tout près de chez moi.*  
 He/She lives very close of by me  
 ‘The oldest person I know was a teacher for the majority of his life. He/She lives very close to me.’

It may be argued that the referent’s biological sex is more foregrounded when a non-ambiguous proper noun is used in topic position. In case a proper noun is absent and an epicene noun is used in topic position, instead, the reference is less specific and, therefore, the referent’s sex may be less accentuated. In addition, when a common noun – e.g., a profession noun such as *chanteur* ‘singer(M)’ – is used to indicate the referent’s sex, as in (27), the accent may be on the function a person holds, rather than on the person itself, which could also explain the greater acceptance of grammatical agreement in those cases. Yet, further research – specifically involving psycholinguistic experiments – is necessary to shed more light on these issues.

The results of the present study also point towards a difference between human and animal nouns, which may be considered an effect of individuation. Speakers of French show a stronger preference of semantic agreement for pronouns that refer to human nouns than for pronouns referring to animal nouns. Although these findings are only based on a very limited sample of nouns – three human nouns and two animal nouns – there seems to be an effect of individuation, as we would expect based on the existing studies on pronominal agreement in Germanic languages. As I discussed in section 1.1, Audring (2009) shows that the choice for either semantic or grammatical agreement on pronouns in Dutch can be captured by the Individuation Hierarchy, repeated in (28) for convenience (Audring, 2009: 124):

- (28) Individuation Hierarchy  
 Human > animal > bound object/abstract > specific mass > unspecific mass/  
 /abstract

Since humans are located further to the left of the Individuation Hierarchy than animals, semantic agreement is more likely for human than for animal referents, which is confirmed by the results from French. In addition, it corresponds to the observation of Fukumura et al. (2022), who report an effect of individuation on the avoidance of gender ambiguous pronouns in French. Further research should reveal whether such an effect also holds for larger samples of nouns that involve individuation differences.

Although the results of the present study thus appear to show an effect of individuation, one should keep in mind the differences between the gender systems of French and languages such as Dutch or German. In German and Dutch, individuation particularly plays a role in discriminating between neuter pronouns, on the one hand, and masculine and feminine (common) pronouns, on the other hand – a distinction that is not relevant for French given the absence of neuter gender. This difference also makes the alternation between semantic and grammatical agreement for pronouns less prominent for French and, therefore, an issue of more limited scope than in the Germanic languages. Besides, the phenomenon is limited to personal pronouns in French, whereas in Dutch and German, relative pronouns are involved too.

Obviously, further factors are known to influence gender agreement, specifically for pronouns. For instance, Braun & Haig (2010) show that for speakers of German, the age of the referent is also a relevant factor in choosing for either grammatical or semantic agreement on pronouns. As their study shows, biological sex has a higher relevance – and thus leads to more semantic agreement – when the referents are older (e.g., children under the age of 12, versus near-adult teenagers). Including such additional factors would have exceeded the scope of the current study, which is still exploratory in nature given the lack of earlier work on French pronominal agreement. Nevertheless, the present study tells us that the choice between grammatical and semantic agreement also plays a role in pronominal agreement in French, which paves the way for further studies on this topic; follow-up work could then also take into account additional factors potentially influencing pronominal agreement, next to the factors individuation and topicality touched upon in this study. Another issue that could be included in future work is the possible influence of participant related factors, such as a participant's age or sex, which I did not take into account within the present study due to its rather exploratory nature.

## 4.2 Gender agreement and inclusive language

The ongoing discussions on a more inclusive language may have an impact on the pronominal system, as well as, in the long run, on the agreement system. Especially the discussion around a more neutral language – also addressing those that do not identify as male or female – already triggered the creation of novel pronoun forms and agreement strategies, such as the novel gender-neutral pronoun *hen* in Swedish (cf. Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015), singular use of *they* in English (cf. Bradley, 2020), or the new pronoun *iel* in French, which recently has been integrated into the online version of the *Petit Robert* dictionary too (cf. Bimbenet, 2021).

The integration of the new pronoun forms challenge the existing agreement systems, as illustrated by French *iel* in (29):

- (29) a. *iel*     *est*     *fatigué / intelligent.*  
           they    is     tired.M / intelligent.M
- b. *iel*     *est*     *fatiguée / intelligente.*  
           they    is     tired.F / intelligent.F
- c. *iel*     *est*     *faitgué-e / intelligent-e.*  
           they    is     tired.M.F / intelligent.M.F
- d. *iel*     *est*     *fatiguæ / intelligenx.*  
           they    is     tired.NEUT / intelligent.NEUT  
           ‘They is tired / intelligent.’

Since the French gender agreement system does only distinguish between masculine and feminine forms, it is unclear how agreement with a neo-pronoun such as *iel*, which is neither masculine nor feminine, should operate. One option would be to use either the traditional masculine or feminine forms, as in (29a-b), whereby the masculine is often argued to also express genericity.<sup>138</sup> An alternative would be so-called ‘inclusive writing’, for instance by using the *point médian* as in (29c), which allows for including both the masculine and the feminine forms. Finally, novel morphological agreement forms have been proposed, such as the -æ or -x suffixes in (29d) (cf. Alpheratz, 2018). However, the latter

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<sup>138</sup> The supposed genericity is a vividly debated topic and several psycholinguistic studies question the generic status of the masculine, reporting a male bias with masculine-gendered items that are intended to function as generics (cf. Braun et al., 1998; Ulrich et al., 2004; Brauer & Landry, 2008; Gyax et al., 2012; Misersky et al., 2013).

two strategies are more easily applied in written languages, as it is not clear how such forms should be pronounced. Yet, in spoken language, the actual ending of at least adjectives is less relevant, since in most cases there is no audible difference between the masculine and the feminine forms, for instance with *populaire* [pɔpɥlɛʁ] ‘popular’, but also with *joli* [ʒɔli] ‘beautiful’. At present, it cannot be said whether the novel pronouns will widely spread within the French language, nor what agreement strategy speakers will use with these forms. Future studies may be able to further take on these questions, but Delaborde et al. (this volume: 229-253) already show that the acceptability of forms varies between speakers, as well as between specific forms. For instance, the novel pronoun *iel* turns out to be less accepted than forms using the *point médian*.<sup>139</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper aimed at investigating the likelihood of semantic agreement on personal pronouns in French in comparison to the Germanic languages Dutch and German, for which there exists a vast body of literature on the topic. The results of a sentence completion task, filled in by 32 native speakers of French, showed that semantic agreement is often preferred on personal pronouns, which corresponds to what earlier studies reported for Germanic languages. As such, personal pronouns appeared to partly differ from other types of agreement contexts, such as partitives, for which other studies reported acceptability of semantic agreement to a lesser degree. These findings are in line with the Agreement Hierarchy that is based on cross-linguistic observations. Apart from the influence of topicality, which was already expected, semantic agreement seemed to be more preferable with human than with animal referents, thus pointing towards an influence of individuation, which had also been observed in studies on Dutch. Further research on this topic is necessary to confirm the results, but the present study presents a first step in the investigation of pronominal agreement in French.

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<sup>139</sup> See Diwald (this volume: 89-110) and Abrantes (this volume: 147-156) for a discussion of gender-fair language in German.

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## Appendix A: sentences experiment

### Test sentences

La seule victime de l'accident d'avion d'hier était chanteur pendant une grande partie de sa vie. ___ visitait souvent le restaurant où je travaille.
La personne la plus âgée que je connais était instituteur pendant une grande partie de sa vie. ___ habite tout près de chez moi.
Cette vedette très connue était instituteur avant son début de carrière. ___ est très populaire en France.
Quand j'ai visité le zoo hier, j'ai vu un léopard. ___ était en train d'allaiter ses petits.
Antoinette était le léopard le plus connu du zoo de Paris. Malheureusement, ___ vient de mourir.
Grâce aux dessins animés, Mickey Mouse est une souris connue partout dans le monde. ___ a beaucoup de fans.
Vianney est une vedette peu connue aux Pays-Bas. Pourtant, ___ est très populaire en France.
Jean est la personne la plus âgée que je connais. ___ habite tout près de chez moi.
Monsieur Dupont était la seule victime de l'accident d'avion d'hier. ___ visitait souvent le restaurant où je travaille.

### Control sentences

Jeannette est la personne la plus âgée que je connais. Il/Elle habite tout près de chez moi.

Grâce aux dessins animés, Minnie Mouse est une souris connue partout dans le monde. Il/Elle a beaucoup de fans.

### Fillers

Monsieur Dupont était un/une des nombreuses victimes de l'accident d'avion d'avant-hier.

Madame Dupont était un/une des nombreuses victimes de l'accident d'avion d'avant-hier.

Le plus âgé / La plus âgée des personnes que je connais s'appelle Jean.

Le plus âgé / La plus âgée des personnes que je connais s'appelle Jeannette.

Un/Une des vedettes les plus connues en France est Vianney.

Un/Une des vedettes les plus connues en France est Zazie.

Le plus connu / La plus connue de tous les léopards du zoo de Paris est Antoinette.

Le plus connu / La plus connue de tous les léopards du zoo de Paris est Rémy.

Un / Une des souris les plus connues est Mickey Mouse.

Un / Une des souris les plus connues est Minnie Mouse.

# Use and perception of inclusive language: A polarizing issue?

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## Abstract

In French, the feminization process of the names of professions, titles, grades and functions has evolved in stages and nowadays goes beyond the specific issue of occupation names. More widely, it concerns the heterogeneous linguistic processes that enable the inclusion of any person in the language. It can involve forms that carry the mark of gender such as nouns, pronouns, determiners, adjectives and past participles, as well as rules of agreement such as proximity agreement or majority agreement. In France, the controversy about what is commonly referred to as inclusive writing has risen sharply since 2017 and still generates strong reactions on both sides. We propose a statistical study based on an online survey about inclusive language practices and their degree of acceptability to observe the implantation (or not) of new practices in the French language. We present the results of this study by cross-referencing this data with the socio-demographic profile of the 992 respondents of the questionnaire. This study shows that some forms of inclusive language are more accepted and/or used than others. The forms that are accepted and used are nevertheless divisive according to sociological and/or political affiliation. According to this study, inclusive forms of language are actually being used, yet some of these language practices remain controversial.

**Keywords:** Inclusive language; linguistic practices; acceptability; sociolinguistics.

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## 1. Introduction

The attention devoted to gender and language is by no means new.<sup>140</sup> Aside from discussions on the place of women in language in past decades and even centuries, there has been a significant shift in the late 20<sup>th</sup>-early 21<sup>st</sup> century, in Western countries. First with a renewed focus on the importance of acknowledging the presence of women in discourse – resulting for instance, in English, in the use of new constructions such as *congressperson* instead of *congressman*. A second wave of what could be called *gender-aware language changes* followed, with a focus on the limited representativeness of binary gender. This second wave resulted in the coining of various new forms such as the well-known Swedish third gender pronoun *hen* (see e.g. Gustafsson Sendén, Bäck & Lindqvist, 2015; Gustafsson Sendén, Renström & Lindqvist, 2021), or the use of English *they* in the singular. Both waves of language change triggered a fair amount of backlash and controversy. Interestingly, part of the backlash following from the second wave (or third wave, as it is sometimes called, see e.g. Snyder, 2008) draws on acceptance of the previous language change to argue against gender-inclusive language.

In this paper, we investigate the perception of constructions resulting from these two waves, with an online questionnaire which was answered by 992 speakers of French. In Section 2, we provide historical background and an overview of gender-inclusive language in French. In Section 3, we present our methodology and the layout of our questionnaire. In Section 4, we describe and discuss our results, before concluding in Section 5.

## 2. Historical background

In French, attempts at feminization and inclusive language have gone through different periods, raising key questions and generating widespread debates, including within the linguist community.

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<sup>140</sup> Grammatical gender (the fact that French *soleil* “sun” is masculine while German *Sonne* “sun” is feminine, for instance) only partially overlaps with lexical and sociolinguistic genders (Elmiger, 2015). Languages which do mark gender typically oppose masculine and feminine, or animate and inanimate (Corbett, 2014: 124).

## 2.1. From “feminization” to inclusive language

While these efforts to make French more gender-fair can be seen as characteristic of modern times, since similar tendencies are found in most Modern European languages (with research on the subject first in English, see e.g. Lakoff, 1975; Boel, 1976; Moulton et al., 1978; MacKay & Fulkerson, 1979, then in other European languages, e.g. Houdebine-Gravaud, 1977, 1979 or Yaguello, 1978 for French, Trömel-Plötz, 1978 for German), a first “feminization” of French took place in the Middle Ages (Viennot, 2006), with the introduction of feminine forms such as *auteure*, *authoress* ‘authoress’ or *chanteresse* ‘singer.f’ and *inventeure* ‘inventress’. The consultation of texts from that period seems to show that the frequency of these forms was very low (Fagard & Le Tallec, 2019); it was sufficient for them not to go unnoticed, however. During the Renaissance, several authors expressed their concern and claimed that only masculine forms should be used for prestigious social roles:

1. *Je dirai plutôt que Mademoiselle de Gournay est poète que poétesse, et philosophe que philosopheesse.*

“I would rather say that Mademoiselle de Gournay is a poet than a poetess, and a philosopher than a philosopheress”<sup>141</sup> (Chapelain, 1634; our translation)

2. *Il faut dire que cette femme est poète, est philosophe, est médecin, est auteur, est peintre ; et non poétesse, philosopheesse, médecine, autrice, peintresse, etc.*

“It must be said that this woman is a poet, a philosopher, a doctor, an author, a painter; not a poetess, a philosopheress, a doctress, an authoress, a paintress, etc.” (Boisregard, 1689; our translation)

There was a general movement highlighting the importance of men in language, as a “natural consequence” of their (also natural) importance in society – i.e. of their social superiority. As a result, Standard French became somewhat

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<sup>141</sup> *Poetess* (a loanword from French) is attested in English since the 16<sup>th</sup> c., and recorded in Modern English dictionaries. This is not the case for all the terms we use to translate examples (6-7). Thus, *paintress* and *authoress* are present in both the COHA corpus (Davies, 2010) and in the Merriam-Webster dictionary; *philosopheress* is attested in the COHA corpus (1897, 1920) but not to be found in the Merriam-Webster; finally, *doctress* is attested – and recorded, but with a different meaning (“a woman in some cultures who is believed to have magic powers and to be able to cure illness,” according to the Merriam-Webster). Here and in the following, we use feminine forms in the English gloss only when they are attested either in corpora or in dictionaries. Additionally, when the meaning of an X-ess form is ‘wife of the X’, as in *rectoress*, we refrain from using the term.

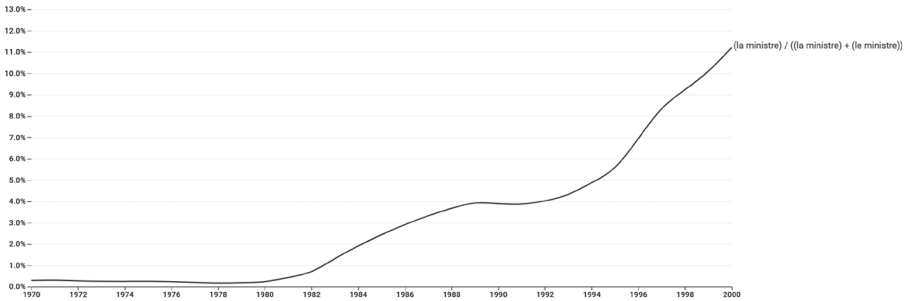
oblivious to the explicit mention of women, both lexically (as in (1) and (2) above) and grammatically, as grammarians expressed the need to impose masculine agreement for constructions referring to men or unknown referents (Houdebine, 2016), independently of the presence of women, eventually coining the phrase “the masculine overpowers the feminine” (in French *le masculin l'emporte sur le féminin*, cf. Fagard & Le Tallec, 2022: 13). Much as in other European languages, social emancipation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – and later, esp. during and after the two world wars – has led to lexical innovations and a widening of the use of feminine forms for the names of professions, for instance *avocatesse* ‘lawyer.F’ and *doctoresse* ‘doctor.F’, as illustrated for the latter in Graph 1.

Graph 1: Frequency of *docteur* ‘doctor, physician’ (singular + plural) and emergence of *doctoresse* ‘doctor.F, physician.F’ (singular + plural) and *docteure* ‘doctor.F, physician.F’ (singular + plural) in the French 2019 Google Books corpus in the Ngram Viewer (Michel *et al.*, 2011) [the frequency of the feminine forms is increased a hundred-fold for the sake of readability].



Official support for the use of feminine forms, however, came much later. In 1984, the government appointed a temporary committee to provide feminine forms for all professions, titles and functions, with permanent committees appointed later on (see Moron-Puech, Saris & Bouvattier, 2022: 174). This resulted in a series of recommendations for non-discriminatory language use, for instance the use of the feminine form of the determiner to refer to a woman secretary of state: *la ministre* ‘the.F secretary of state’ – rather than *le ministre* ‘the.M secretary of state’, which is still used by some speakers even for a woman secretary of state. This linguistic and societal shift is illustrated by the increased frequency of *la ministre* in the past decades, as shown in Graph 2.

Graph 2: Relative frequency of *la ministre* vs *le ministre* (i.e. share of all uses of *le* + *la ministre*) in the French 2019 Google Books corpus in the Ngram Viewer [1970-2000].



In French, the first attempts at gender-fair language were efforts to explicitly refer to women as such. This implies the use of (morphologically or lexically) feminine forms for women, rather than the use of the generic masculine, i.e. of a (morphologically or lexically) masculine form to refer to men and/or women. This evolution is still ongoing: for a number of nouns or noun phrases, the use of masculine forms to refer to women is still common or even preferred, as in (1) – cf. Cerquiglini (2019). However, it is no longer obvious that one should use a masculine form for a woman, as in (2). Indeed, there has been much debate over whether one should use *écrivain* ‘writer.M’ or *écrivaine* ‘writer.F’ in this case (Naudier, 2010: 5).

1. *Mon médecin est enceinte* ‘my.GM physician.GM is pregnant.F’<sup>142</sup>
2. *C’est le meilleur écrivain de sa génération* ‘It is the.M best.M writer.M of his|her generation’

The shift toward more broadly gender-inclusive language, taking into account not only women but also non-binary persons, was initiated approximately two decades later, in the early 2000s. The aim was to go beyond the inclusion of women in discourse, by either including explicitly the reference to non-binary

<sup>142</sup> In this paper, we use the following glosses: m for masculine, f for feminine, nb for non-binary, combined wherever necessary (e.g. *étudiant.e.s* ‘students.f|m’ means that *étudiant.e.s* refers to male or female students, *étudiandes* ‘students.f|m|nb’ that *étudiandes* refers to male, female or non-binary students). When the use of the masculine is explicitly intended to refer to both men and women, we use the gloss GM for “generic masculine” – a widely debated use which is however still standard, for at least part of the speakers of French.

persons, or leaving gender implicit. At the same time, other evolutions in use aimed to remedy some issues which were raised concerning the first attempts at a gender-fair language.

Indeed, while the explicit inclusion of women with gender-marked nouns was seen as a first step towards a better representation of women in language, some authors have pointed out that it was insufficient as a remedy to “language sexism.” Michard (1999: 91), for instance, highlighted the limitations and complexities of antisexist language practices, which implied a global transformation of discourse: lexicon, syntax, morphological gender. This called for a complex discourse transformation toward an antisexist, nondiscriminatory, and therefore inclusive discourse, which gradually emerged in the 1990s (Abbou, 2013: 4).

Such attempts at a global transformation of discourse have evolved in stages, and include touching on heterogeneous linguistic processes that enable more or less to include everyone in language, not only women but also non-binary or transgender people.

### 2.2. Inclusive French

French is a gender-rich language (cross-linguistically a common feature, cf. Corbett, 2005). In French, as in other Romance languages (Freitag, this volume: 58), gender is commonly marked on nouns (1), pronouns (2), determiners (3), adjectives (4), and participles (5).

1. *agente* ‘agent.F’ / *agent* ‘agent.M’ vs *juge* ‘judge.F|M’
2. *elle* ‘she’ / *il* ‘he’
3. *la juge* ‘the.F judge’ / *le juge* ‘the.M judge’ vs *les juges* ‘the.F|M judges.F|M’
4. *belle* ‘pretty.F’ / *beau* ‘pretty.M’ vs *magnifique* ‘magnificent.F|M’
5. *découverte* ‘found.F’ / *découvert* ‘found.M’

In the last decades, efforts toward gender fairness in language have resulted in the creation of a variety of new forms and constructions, in order to ensure that women are included explicitly and, more recently, to make it possible to refer to non-binary or transgender people. Table 1 below provides illustrations of these endeavors on the part of French speakers, with the use of new forms or constructions. These constructions are not considered to be Standard French, but some are already included in recent editions of dictionaries.

Table 1: examples of inclusive forms in French.

	French inclusive form	Standard equivalent form
1	<i>un/e</i> 'a.F M'	<i>une</i> 'a.F', <i>un</i> 'a.M'
2	<i>étudiant-e</i> 'student.F M'	<i>étudiante</i> 'student.F', <i>étudiant</i> 'student.M'
3	<i>chacun-e</i> 'each one.F M'	<i>chacune</i> 'each one.F', <i>chacun</i> 'each one.M'
4	<i>arrivé.e.s</i> 'arrived.F M.PL'	<i>arrivées</i> 'arrived.F.PL', <i>arrivés</i> 'arrived.M.PL'
5	<i>blond(e)</i> 'blond.F M'	<i>blonde</i> 'blond.F', <i>blond</i> 'blond.M'
6	<i>participantE</i> 'participant.F M'	<i>participante</i> 'participant.F', <i>participant</i> 'participant.M'
7	<i>quelqu'unx</i> 'someone.F M NB'	<i>quelqu'une</i> 'someone.F', <i>quelqu'un</i> 'someone.M'
8	<i>obligæ</i> 'forced.F M NB'	<i>obligée</i> 'forced.F', <i>obligé</i> 'forced.M'
9	<i>iel, al, ellui</i> 'PRO.F M NB'	<i>elle</i> 'PRO.F', <i>il</i> 'PRO.M', <i>lui</i> 'PRO.DAT.F M'
10	<i>agriculteurice</i> 'farmer.F M NB'	<i>agricultrice</i> 'farmer.F', <i>agriculteur</i> 'farmer.M'
11	<i>utilisataire</i> 'user.F M NB'	<i>utilisatrice</i> 'user.F', <i>utilisateur</i> 'user.M'

As illustrated by the glosses in Table 1, this innovative morphology may be used for determiners, adjectives, nominal verb forms, nouns and pronouns; it features the use of typography to combine nominal suffixes (1-6), of new endings (7-8, 10-11) and of completely new forms (9). From a referential perspective, some of these forms may have feminine and/or masculine referents (1-6), while others may have, in addition, non-binary referents (7-11). These language practices can also bear on agreement rules such as proximity agreement or majority agreement as contenders of the masculine grammatical agreement rule that can be found in grammars since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Fagard & Le Tallec, 2022).

### 2.3. Key issues

These efforts toward the use of morphologically feminine forms (be it on the noun or on the noun phrase as a whole) have not gone without resistance. For instance, in 2014, the *Académie française*<sup>143</sup> publicly expressed its concerns about what it denounced as a “tendency to impose, sometimes against the will

<sup>143</sup> Available on the website of the Académie.

of the concerned individuals, forms such as *professeure*, *recteure*, *sapeuse-pomprière*, *auteure*, *ingénieure*, *procureure*, or *chercheure* [i.e. *professor.F*, *rector.F*, *firewoman*, *authoress*, *engineer.F*, *district attorney.F*, *researcher.F*], which are contrary to the ordinary rules of derivation and constitute, according to it, true barbarisms”<sup>144</sup>.

This backlash against the explicit morphological marking of feminine referents comes about at the same time as a new trend towards more gender-fair language use. Indeed, the early 2000s have seen the emergence of new linguistic forms, commonly referred to as inclusive language or inclusive writing, first in anarchist circles (Abbou, 2017: 54) and later in other politicized circles. Such forms have initially been created on the basis of existing patterns, for example with the use of parentheses to mark the feminine on the model of singular or plural of a noun or adjective as in *étudiant(s)* ‘student.sg(PL)’. But concerns about the fairness of a given form have recurrently led to the emergence of new ones, and recent years have thus seen the emergence of a variety of forms, each with its own limitations (Table 2).

Table 2: Options for fair gender use and their perceived drawbacks.

Variant	gloss	perceived limitation
<i>étudiant(e)</i>	<i>student.F M</i>	<i>parentheses</i> may convey the idea of optionality and thus be seen as backgrounding women
<i>étudiantE</i>	<i>student.F M</i>	<i>capitalization</i> can be perceived as giving women more importance than men
<i>étudiant/e</i>	<i>student.F M</i>	the <i>slash</i> , sign of division in mathematics, might not convey the intended idea of equality
<i>étudiant-e</i>	<i>student.F M</i>	the <i>hyphen</i> and the <i>period</i> are polysemous
<i>étudiant.e</i>	<i>student.F M</i>	
<i>étudiant·e</i>	<i>student.F M</i>	the <i>middot</i> is not included in most keyboards

<sup>144</sup> Original citation: “Elle rejette un esprit de système qui tend à imposer, parfois contre le vœu des intéressées, des formes telles que *professeure*, *recteure*, *sapeuse-pomprière*, *auteure*, *ingénieure*, *procureure*, etc., pour ne rien dire de *chercheure*, qui sont contraires aux règles ordinaires de dérivation et constituent de véritables barbarismes.”

Beyond these limitations, and the problem of the oralization of these forms (Knisely, 2020), they have been criticized for still implying a binary vision of gender, in line with what has been called second-wave feminism (Snyder, 2008). This has prompted some language users to promote a new series of “inclusive” solutions such as étudiante ‘student.F|M|NB’, which may refer not only to people identifying as male or female, or specifically to persons identifying as non-binary (Renström, Lindqvist & Gustafsson Sendén, 2022), in line with third-wave feminist ideas.

#### 2.4. A social debate and a debate among linguists

Strong reactions to inclusive language were quick to appear. As early as 1993, Belgian grammarians André Goosse and Marc Wilmet declared that inclusive forms involving typographic characters were unreadable, thus going against an essential function of language. In France, the debate over what is commonly referred to as inclusive writing (*French écriture inclusive*) has gained importance since 2017 with the publication of a textbook which used inclusive writing (Le Callennec, 2017). Inclusive writing has been denounced as a “mortal danger for the French language<sup>145</sup>” (Académie française 2017), criticized by members of the government (Abbou et al., 2018) and by a collective of linguists (collective, *Marianne*, 2020). Other linguists have declared themselves in favor of debates on the topic (collective, *Ballast*, 2017) or of inclusive writing itself (collective, *Médiapart*, 2020).

Unsurprisingly, the debate rages on social networks. For example, a French university published on its Facebook group a message prohibiting the use of inclusive writing under penalty of exclusion from the group<sup>146</sup>. But social networks are also a support for the expression of inclusive writing in the rarest and most diverse forms, especially on Twitter.

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<sup>145</sup> Original citation: *Devant cette aberration “inclusive,” la langue française se trouve désormais en péril mortel, ce dont notre nation est dès aujourd’hui comptable devant les générations futures*, “unanimous” statement from the Académie française, published on October 26, 2017 (“With this “inclusive” aberration, the French language is now in mortal danger, for which our nation is accountable today to future generations,” our translation).

<sup>146</sup> “Since October 8, 2020, inclusive writing is prohibited on the group. Its use will lead to exclusion from the group.” (original citation: *Depuis le 8 octobre 2020, l’écriture inclusive est interdite sur le groupe. Son utilisation entraînera l’exclusion du groupe*).

The topic of inclusive writing generates strong reactions. Our objective is therefore to propose a study of inclusive language practices and their degree of acceptability in order to observe the adoption of new practices (or not) by the French speakers of metropolitan France. To answer these questions, possible solutions are, for example, to observe corpora or to make surveys. Existing surveys are, to the best of our knowledge, limited in size (Giusti & Zanoli, 2022) or more politically than linguistically oriented (cf. the survey mentioned in Abbou, 2023). In this study, we aim to shed light and provide objective data on the following issues:

- Whether inclusive forms are recognized, accepted and used;
- Whether there is a difference in acceptability between inclusive forms and other non-standard forms;
- Whether the acceptability of inclusive forms is dependent on socio-cultural characteristics (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021; Bradley,) and/or other factors such as the adherence to a traditional, binary view of gender.

We designed a questionnaire to gain insights on these issues; this questionnaire is presented in the following section.

### 3. Methodology

We conducted an experiment in order to gain insights into the issues of acceptability and frequency of use of a subset of constructions in French. Our initial hypothesis was that inclusive writing is slowly entering the standard of some language users, while still remaining highly polarizing. This hypothesis could be broken down as follows:

- H1 the acceptability of inclusive language is not uniform across participants
- H2 the acceptability of inclusive language is not uniform across constructions
- H3 the acceptability of inclusive language is comparable to or possibly higher than that of other non-standard constructions (e.g. forms considered as errors by prescriptive grammars, or perceived as such by non-linguist speakers).

We thus expected to see a high degree of variability in the stated tolerance of participants with regard to these forms, both across participants and across items.

### 3.1. Corpus

To conduct this experiment and test our hypotheses, we first selected a number of relevant constructions, with the help of existing resources. As a first step, we established a list of inclusive constructions mentioned in the literature (e.g. Abbou et al., 2018; Elmiger et al., 2019; Klinkenberg, 2021: 8). We then systematically looked up these constructions in a large corpus of informal Modern French (frTenTen, via Sketch Engine; Kilgarriff, 2008). We also compiled all uses of these constructions on social networks and in our own email inboxes. The result was a corpus of several dozen constructions including new non-standard forms of pronouns, adjectives, verbs and nouns, in context. We excluded non-attested and nonce constructions, and kept constructions that were attested at least twice in the resulting corpus.

We then tweaked the context of appearance of these forms to obtain comparable examples regarding length. We also sometimes modified the semantic context when it was too ideologically marked.<sup>147</sup> In a second step, we selected items which are non-standard. Some were chosen because grammars of French explicitly state that they are errors, for instance *malgré que*<sup>148</sup>. We included others which seem to be frequently perceived as errors by language users, for instance *ognon* “onion,” a variation on the traditional spelling *oignon* introduced by the (still much debated, see e.g. Humphries, 2019<sup>149</sup>) spelling reform of 1990 (Jejcic, 2008: 211).

The forms we selected for testing are listed in Section 3.2. We focus mainly on *inclusive forms* (IF), which are new typological and morphological devices created or adapted to refer (also) to non-binary people. We also included *gendered forms* (GF), testing for the acceptability of (more or less) new feminine

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<sup>147</sup> For instance, we did not use the expression *la manif pour toustes* (“demonstration for all. F|M|NB”) because it ironically refers to *le mariage pour tous* (“marriage for all.GM”), a collective at the origin of protests against same-sex marriage.

<sup>148</sup> The *Académie française* recommends avoiding the use of the conjunctive *malgré que* in the sense of *although* and recommends instead the use of *malgré*.

<sup>149</sup> This reform is nevertheless still debated: <https://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/declaration-de-lacademie-francaise-sur-la-reforme-de-lorthographe>.

forms, of masculine forms referring to women, and of constructions referring to both men and women, in order to determine whether *inclusive forms* were more divisive than *gendered forms*. Some constructions are ambiguous and could be interpreted either as referring to women and men indiscriminately, or as inclusive. In the first part of the questionnaire, we also included *non-standard forms* (NSF) with no link to gender. In the list of examples provided below, we specify after each example, in parentheses, the type of form it is intended to test for.

### 3.2. Framework: a descriptive approach

As linguists, we naturally have a descriptive – not prescriptive – approach. We aim to describe the use of gender-fair language, and determine the sociolinguistic factors which have a bearing on the language practices of lay language users (Paveau, 2007: 94-101). In order to do this, we focus here on spelling (Gardin & Delamotte-Legrand, 2006; Mortamet, 2018), among other issues related to inclusive writing.

This survey was publicly launched on social networks (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram mainly) from November 18 to 25, 2021. We received 992 responses, 802 of which were fully completed surveys.

### 3.3. Questionnaire composition: acceptability, usage et perception

The questionnaire consisted of five different sections, described in Table 3. These sections bore respectively on (1) *acceptability*, (2) *use*, (3) *context of use*, (4) *perception* and (5) *personal data*.

Table 3: Questionnaire layout.

	issues	items #
(1)	acceptability of <i>gendered and inclusive constructions</i> vs. <i>other non-standard constructions</i>	1-12
(2)	use of <i>gendered and inclusive constructions</i>	13-25
(3)	context of use of <i>gendered and inclusive constructions</i>	26-35
(4)	perception of <i>gendered and inclusive constructions</i>	36-42
(5)	personal data	43 ff.

Sections (1-3) are a three series of test sentences (35 in total) designed to test the perception of individual constructions. As explained in Section 3.1, we designed these sentences by tweaking examples found in our corpus. These sentences are listed below (after each example, the category of the form tested is given in parentheses to refer to the classification provided in Section 3.1).

(1) *Test-sentences, series 1: Acceptability of gendered and inclusive constructions*

This first series of sentences, listed below, was intended to test for the acceptability of a number of inclusive, gendered and non-standard forms and constructions. We included 12 sentences: six NSF, three GF and three IF items. The order of presentation was the same for all participants, and was designed to avoid making it too obvious from the start that our study bears on inclusive writing, as this is a polarizing issue. The respondents were asked to choose at least one answer among the following: “I am shocked by this / This is incorrect / This seems acceptable / I don’t know” (French *Cela me choque / Cela n’est pas correct / Cela me paraît acceptable / Je ne sais pas*).

For each item, we provide below the expected construction in Standard French.

Table 4: Series 1 – questionnaire items 1-12.

	<i>Test sentence (test item in bold)</i>	Gloss	Item type	Expected (in Standard French)
1	<i>Il est venu après qu’on <b>ait fini</b>.</i>	‘He came after we were done’	NSF	<i>a</i> [have.IND.3SG], vs <i>ait</i> [have.SUBJ.3SG]
2	<i><b>La professeure</b> est arrivée dans le collège à la rentrée.</i>	‘The teacher arrived at the middle school at the beginning of the school year.’	GF	<i>la professeure</i> or <i>la professeur</i>
3	<i>Tu as réussi à <b>uploader</b> tes photos ?</i>	‘Did you manage to upload your pictures?’	NSF	<i>télécharger</i>

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	<i>Test sentence (test item in bold)</i>	Gloss	Item type	Expected (in Standard French)
4	<i>J'adore cette <b>écrivaine</b> québécoise.</i>	'I love this writer from Québec.'	GF	<i>cet écrivain</i> 'this.GM writer. GM', <i>cette écrivaine</i> 'this.F writer.F' <sup>150</sup>
5	<i>Je ne digère pas les <b>ognons</b> crus.</i>	'I can't digest raw onions.'	NSF	<i>oignons</i> 'onion.PL'
6	<i><b>Le médecin</b> est enceinte de 8 mois.</i>	'The doctor is 8 months pregnant.'	GF	<i>la médecin</i> 'the.F doctor. GM' or <i>le médecin</i> 'the.GM doctor.GM'; also attested: % <i>la médecine</i> 'the.F doctor.F'
7	<i>Bonjour à <b>toustes</b> et bienvenue.</i>	'Good morning to all and welcome.'	IF	<i>tous</i> 'all.GM' or <i>toutes et tous</i> 'all.F.PL and all.M.PL')
8	<i>Les clients parlent peu, <b>malgré</b> <b>que</b> plusieurs se connaissent.</i>	'The customers don't talk much, although many of them know each other.'	NSF	<i>bien que</i> 'although' or <i>malgré le fait que</i> 'despite the fact that')
9	<i>Prenez 30 secondes pour laisser un message aux <b>créateurices</b>.</i>	'Take 30 seconds to leave a message for the creators.'	IF	<i>créateurs</i> 'creator.GM.PL' or <i>créateurs et créatrices</i> 'creator.M.PL and creator.F.PL')
10	<i><b>Elle pensait pas</b> à lui en disant ça.</i>	'She wasn't thinking of him when she said that.'	NSF	<i>Elle ne pensait pas</i> 'she NEG thought not')
11	<i>Il est <b>sur Paris</b> toute la semaine.</i>	'He's in Paris all week.'	NSF	<i>à Paris</i> 'in Paris')
12	<i><b>Les étudiant·e·s</b> préparent les examens.</i>	'The students are preparing for the exams.'	IF	<i>Les étudiants</i> 'the. GM.PL student.GM.PL' or <i>Les étudiantes et les étudiants</i> 'the.M F.PL student.F.PL and the.M F. PL student.M.PL')

<sup>150</sup> Modern dictionaries vary in the way they account for the form *écrivaine*. A good example is the online *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, which notes in the entry *écrivain* that "the feminine form *écrivaine* is also found." The *Robert* dictionary already mentions, in its 2002 edition, the existence of *écrivaine* (s.v. *écrivain*: Elle est écrivain (parfois écrivaine) "She is a writer.GM (sometimes writer.F)").

## (2) Test-sentences, series 2: Use of gendered and inclusive constructions

The second series of sentences, listed below, aimed to gather insights on whether respondents actually used a number of inclusive or gendered forms and constructions. We included 13 sentences: four GF and nine IF items. The order of presentation was the same for all participants, and was designed to keep the focus off of IF items as long as possible. For each item, we provide below a gloss specifying its gender associations.

For each item in bold, respondents were asked whether and with what frequency they used these constructions, by choosing one answer among the following: “I use this form / I could use this form / I do not use this form / I do not know this form” (French *J'utilise cette forme / Je pourrais utiliser cette forme / Je n'utilise pas cette forme / Je ne connais pas cette forme*).

Table 5: Series 2 – questionnaire items 13-25.

	<i>Test sentence (test item in bold)</i>	Gloss	Item type	Expected (in Standard French)
13	<i>J'adore cette <b>autrice</b>, ses romans sont vraiment géniaux.</i>	'I love this author, her novels are really great.'	GF	<i>autrice</i> : author.F
14	<i>Avant d'être <b>lancé-e</b>, vérifiez que vous correspondiez aux critères.</i>	'Before you get started, make sure you fit the criteria.'	IF	<i>lancé-e</i> : launched.F M NB
15	<i>La <b>maire</b> a été réélue haut la main.</i>	'The mayor was re-elected with flying colors.'	GF	<i>maire</i> : mayor.F
16	<i>Bonjour à <b>touste</b> et bienvenue.</i>	'Hello to all and welcome.'	IF	<i>touste</i> : all.F M NB
17	<i>Ma nouvelle <b>cheffe</b> doit arriver le mois prochain.</i>	'My new chief is due to arrive next month.'	GF	<i>cheffe</i> : boss.F
18	<i>Chaque <b>candidat(e)</b> devra remplir un formulaire.</i>	'Each candidate will have to fill out a form.'	IF	<i>candidat(e)</i> : candidate. F M NB
19	<i><b>Iel</b> est encore en retard.</i>	'They is late again.'	IF	<i>iel</i> : PRO.F M NB.3SG

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	<i>Test sentence (test item in bold)</i>	Gloss	Item type	Expected (in Standard French)
20	<i>Ce message s'adresse à l'ensemble des <b>participant-e-s</b>.</i>	'This message is addressed to all participants.'	IF	<i>participant-e-s</i> : participant. F M NB.PL
21	<i>On cherche <b>quelqu'unx</b>.</i>	'We are looking for someone.'	IF	<i>quelqu'unx</i> : someone. F M NB
22	<i>Soyez les <b>bienvenu.e.s</b> dans notre équipe !</i>	'Welcome to our team!'	IF	<i>bienvenu.e.s</i> : welcome. F M NB
23	<i>Il nous manque quelques <b>collaborateurices</b> pour être au complet.</i>	'We are missing some collaborators to be complete.'	IF	<i>collaborateurices</i> : collaborator.F M NB.PL
24	<i>Ici tout le monde vous considère comme des <b>égaux.ales</b>.</i>	'Here everyone considers you as equals.'	IF	<i>égaux.ales</i> : equal.F M NB. PL
25	<i>Chaque <b>utilisataire</b> doit se conformer aux conditions d'utilisation.</i>	'Each user must comply with the term of use.'	IF	<i>utilisataire</i> : user.F M NB

### (3) Test-sentences, series 3: Context of use of gendered and inclusive constructions

The third series of sentences, listed below, aimed to gather insights on the role of context for the use or non-use of inclusive or gendered forms and constructions. We included ten sentences: one GF and nine IF items. The order of presentation was the same for all participants. For each item, we provide below a gloss specifying its gender associations (see footnote 141).

For each sentence, respondents were asked to say whether they used the item in bold, in two contexts: with friends, with colleagues, with neither or with both.

Table 6: Series 3 – questionnaire items 26-35.

	<i>Test sentence (test item in bold)</i>	Gloss	Item type	Expected (in Standard French)	Test item
26	<i>Vous êtes <b>invitéEs</b> à répondre.</i>	'You are invited to answer.'	IF	<i>invités</i> (invited. GM.PL)	<i>invitéEs</i> : invited. F M NB.PL
27	<i>Un.e employé.e n'est pas qu'une ressource.</i>	'An employee is not just a resource.'	IF	<i>Un employé</i> (a.GM employee. GM)	<i>Un.e employé.e</i> : a.F M NB employee.F M NB
28	<i>Vous n'êtes pas <b>obligé(e)s</b> de venir.</i>	'You are not required to attend.'	IF	<i>obligés</i> (required.GM.PL)	<i>obligé(e)s</i> : required.F M NB. SG PL
29	<i>Une fois <b>lancé-e</b> il est facile de continuer.</i>	'Once launched, it is easy to continue.'	IF	<i>lancé</i> (launched. GM)	<i>lancé-e</i> : launched.F M NB
30	<i>Camille ne viendra pas, <b>iel</b> ne nous a pas répondu.</i>	'Camille won't come, they hasn't replied to us.'	IF	<i>il</i> (he) or <i>elle</i> (she)	<i>iel</i> : PRO. F M NB.3SG
31	<i>Tu peux inviter l'ensemble des <b>collaborateur- rices</b> pour la réunion.</i>	'You can invite all the staff for the meeting.'	IF	<i>collaborateurs</i> (collaborator. GM.PL)	<i>collaboratrices</i> : collaborator. F M NB.PL
32	<i>Dominique, tu es <b>belleau</b> et légitime.</i>	'Dominique, you are beautiful and legitimate.'	IF	<i>beau</i> (pretty.M) or <i>belle</i> (pretty.F)	<i>belleau</i> : pretty. F M NB
33	<i>Tu es légitime et tu n'es pas <b>seulx</b>.</i>	'You are legitimate and you are not alone.'	IF	<i>seul</i> (alone.M) or <i>seule</i> (alone.F)	<i>seulx</i> : alone. F M NB
34	<i>J'espère que vous êtes <b>content.e.s</b>.</i>	'I hope you are happy.'	IF	<i>contents</i> (happy. GM.PL)	<i>content.e.s</i> : happy.F M NB. SG PL
35	<i>J'espère que vous êtes <b>contents et contentes</b>.</i>	'I hope you are happy.'	GF	<i>contents</i> (happy. GM.PL)	<i>contents et contentes</i> : happy.M.PL and happy.F.PL

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### (4) Series 4: Perception of gendered and inclusive constructions

The fourth section of the questionnaire consists of a series of six test sentences on inclusive writing, and an open question. These sentences start out with a common header, the different endings corresponding to different possible perceptions of inclusive writing (Table 7; see Table 9 in the Appendix for the original version of the test sentences). For each sentence, respondents were asked to state how much they agreed or disagreed with it, by choosing one option in a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 7: Series 4 – questionnaire items 36-41.

	Common header	end of sentence	multiple choice options
36	<i>According to you, inclusive writing...</i>	<i>... is a natural progress in the history of humanity.</i>	<i>Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree</i>
37		<i>... enables women to be on the same level as men.</i>	
38		<i>... is a way to refer to people who do not recognize themselves in a binary gender.</i>	
39		<i>... makes the reading more burdensome.</i>	
40		<i>... complicates the learning of French.</i>	
41		<i>... is a deformation of the French language.</i>	

There was an additional open question on the same issue:

Table 8: Series 4 – questionnaire item 42.

	Open question	Translation
42	<i>Auriez-vous une autre opinion à partager au sujet de l'écriture inclusive ?</i>	'Would you have another opinion to share about inclusive writing?'

(5) *Series 5: personal data*

For ethical reasons, we limited our personal questions to socio-demographic information, and made these questions optional. Questions in this section of the questionnaire bore on gender, age, socio-professional category and political opinions. They were asked at the end of the survey so that they would not influence the responses. We asked open-ended questions to avoid suggesting a list of genders or political opinions. The processing time for this type of answer is longer, but it allowed us to obtain answers with fewer preconceived notions and without pre-categorization. For the age, we proposed age ranges of five years.<sup>151</sup> Finally, two additional questions were asked in order to distinguish linguists from non-linguists and native French from others.

3.3.1. *Statistical analysis*

After closing the survey and gathering the data, we proceeded to a statistical analysis. We used generalized linear models (Hastie & Pregibon, 1992) implemented in R (R Core Team, 2022) for responses which yielded discrete variables (either ordinal or categorical). These models made it possible to determine whether sociological factors play a role in the acceptability and use of the items.

For the statistical analysis, we grouped responses as follows:

- Gender: Female / Male / other, response. [ $Part_F=368$ ,  $Part_M=277$ ,  $Part_O=76$ ].
- Political views: Liberal / other response. [ $Part_L=586$ ,  $Part_{NL}=102$ ].
- Age: under 15, 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, 75 and more.
- Item: GF (N=7)/IF (N=22)/NSF (N=6)/Likert scale (N=6)/ Open question(N=1).

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<sup>151</sup> We also included a question on the participants' socio-professional category, following the nomenclature of the French National Institute of Statistics and Economics Studies (INSEE PCS-2003). In this paper, we do not use the resulting information.

## 4. Results: Acceptability, language use and perception

### 4.1. Acceptability and language use: the impact of sociological criteria

As far as acceptability and language use are concerned, there is a clear difference between issues of gender representation (GF and IF, see Section 4.1.1) and other issues (NSF, see Section 4.1.2).

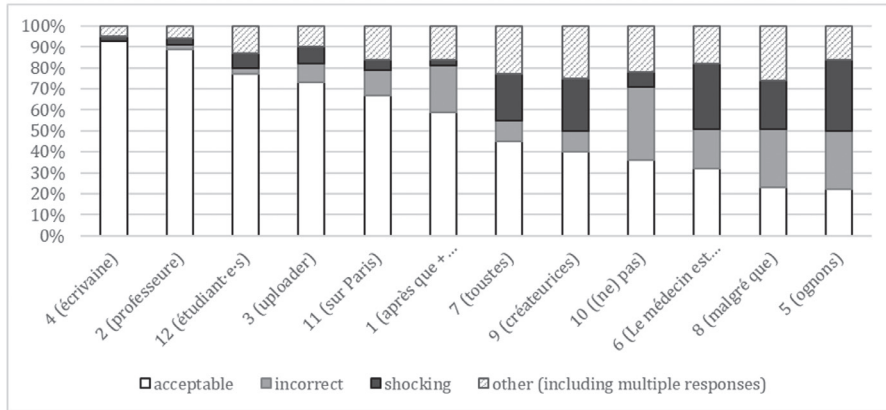
#### 4.1.1. *Gender issues: Global results*

The answers to the first series of test sentences, summed up in Graph 3 below, indicate that inclusive writing might indeed be better tolerated than other non-standard items in French.

Among these items, the three gender-related ones (GF) are among the most conclusive. Even relatively ‘new’ morphologically feminine forms are very well accepted (items 2 and 4: *écrivaine* “writer.F,” *professeure* “professor.F,” with ca 90% of respondents answering that these test sentences are “acceptable”). Conversely, the use of the masculine for a female referent is strongly rejected (item 6: *Le médecin* “the.GM doctor.GM,” with ca 30% of respondents answering this test sentence is “acceptable” and ca 30% answering that they are “shocked”).

The next item in terms of acceptability is one of the inclusive items (IF), item 12 (*étudiant-e-s* “student.F|M|NB.PL”), with ca 80% of respondents stating that it is “acceptable.” This puts it above all non-standard items (NSF) we tested in this series in terms of acceptability: these range from ca 20% of “acceptable” for *ognons* “onions” to ca 70% for *uploader* “upload.” The two other IF items, item 7 with *toustes* “all.F|M|NB.PL” and item 9 with *créateurices* “creator.F|M|NB.PL,” display ca 40% of “acceptable” answers, i.e. lower than some NSF items, but higher than others.

This suggests that respondents did indeed find inclusive writing significantly more acceptable than other forms of non-standard French, including the rectified spelling of *ognon*, which has been validated by the *Académie française* and can be found in dictionaries.

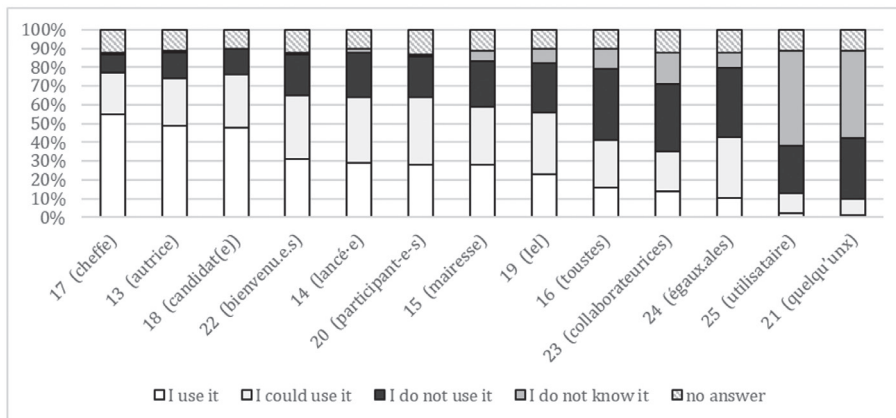
Graph 3: Acceptability of the first series of sentences.<sup>152</sup>

The answers to the second series of test sentences, summed up in Graph 4 below, indicate that the morphologically feminine forms are overwhelmingly accepted by participants, with the striking exception of *mairresse* ‘mayor.F’.<sup>153</sup> Among the typographic devices we included in the test sentences, brackets seem slightly more popular than other devices, but all appear to be quite acceptable: ca. 70% of respondents chose “I use (it)” or “I could use (it)” for the items *candidat(e)*, *bienvenu.e.s*, *lancée* and *participant-e-s*. However, more complex devices seem unacceptable to the participants, as such positive responses were given by only 40% of participants for the item *égaux.ales*, which combines the period and an irregular form of the plural.

<sup>152</sup> Respondents could choose one or more answers: *ne sait pas* = “I don’t know”; *choque* = “I am shocked by this”; *pas correct* = “This is incorrect”; *acceptable* = “This seems acceptable.”

<sup>153</sup> This is perhaps not entirely surprising, given that the reference dictionary TLF (available online: <http://atilf.atilf.fr/>) notes that it is more often used jokingly to refer to the mayor’s wife, and rarely to refer to a (woman) mayor – further specifying that it is more usual in this case to say *Madame le maire* “Ms. the.GM mayor.GM.”

Graph 4: Use of inclusive writing (Possible answers: “I use it [= this form or construction] / I could use it [= this form or construction] / I do not use it [= this form or construction] / I do not know it [= this form or construction] / No answer”).



### 4.1.2. Gender issues: Interparticipant variation

Our results indicate a significant effect of political views, age and gender on language-related gender issues.

This is the case for the acceptability of inclusive writing. ‘Liberal’ (henceforth,  $Part_L$ ) respondents accepted inclusive forms more easily than others (a statistically significant effect, at  $p < .001$ ). This is also true of younger respondents ( $p < .001$ ) and of women vs. men ( $p < .001$ ) ( $Part_O$ , i.e. respondents in the “other response” category for gender, accepted inclusive writing more than women, but the difference is not statistically significant, at  $p < .01$ ).

Some of these differences can also be observed in the case of items with feminine morphological marking: while there is no statistically significant effect of age or gender,  $Part_L$  respondents accept these items more readily than other respondents ( $p < .001$ ), with a reverse effect for item 06, which is a case of masculine form for a female referent.

Finally, regarding the reported use of inclusive forms, our results indicate that there is an effect of gender, with  $Part_O$  respondents reporting a higher frequency of use with friends than  $Part_F$  ( $p < .001$ ; no significant difference for the use of these forms with colleagues, at  $p = .16$ ), and  $Part_F$  respondents reporting a higher frequency of use of these forms than  $Part_M$  respondents, both with friends ( $p < .001$ ) and with colleagues ( $p < .001$ ). There is also an effect of political

views, with Part<sub>L</sub> respondents more likely to use inclusive writing with friends ( $p < .001$ ) and colleagues ( $p < .001$ ).<sup>154</sup>

#### 4.1.3. *Other issues related to the linguistic norm*

Our results indicate that the effects observed for other issues related to the linguistic norm are somewhat different. The effect of age and political views is similar (non-standard forms are more readily accepted by younger respondents, at  $p < .001$ , and by Part<sub>L</sub> respondents, at  $p < .01$ ). However, the effect of gender is different, with Part<sub>M</sub> respondents accepting non-standard forms more readily than Part<sub>F</sub> respondents ( $p < .001$ ); the same is true of Part<sub>O</sub> vs Part<sub>F</sub> respondents ( $p < .001$ ).

One effect is common to all participant groups as far as gender is concerned (Part<sub>M</sub>, Part<sub>F</sub> and Part<sub>O</sub>): all three groups accept the morphologically feminine and inclusive forms included in our test sentences (IF and GF items) more readily than the other non-standard forms (NSF items).

## 4.2. Perception: opinions about inclusive writing

A series of items were designed to test the respondents' perceptions of inclusive writing. One open-ended and one closed-ended question were asked to test our hypothesis that certain forms of inclusive language are preferred (i.e. accepted and/or used) over others.

### 4.2.1. *Statistical analysis: confirming the effect of gender on the acceptability of inclusive writing*

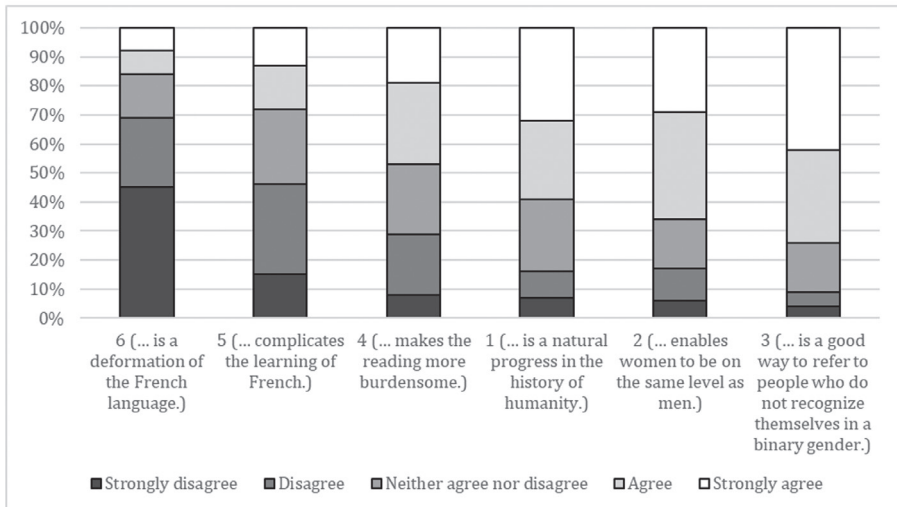
The results for these items confirm the effect of gender on the acceptability of inclusive writing, with Part<sub>M</sub> respondents seemingly less supportive of inclusive writing than Part<sub>F</sub> and Part<sub>O</sub> respondents ( $p < .001$ ; there is no statistical difference between Part<sub>F</sub> and Part<sub>O</sub> respondents, at  $p = .22$ ). They also confirm the effect of political views, with Part<sub>L</sub> respondents more supportive than other respondents ( $p < .001$ ).

The answers to items 36-41 bearing on inclusive writing are presented in Graph 5.

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<sup>154</sup> For this analysis, two models were realized: one for the use of inclusive forms with colleagues and another for their use with friends. Since the same items are analyzed twice, a Bonferroni correction (Holm, 1979) was applied to the results. The significance level is therefore  $p < .025$ .

Graph 5: Answers to items 36-41 on inclusive writing.<sup>155</sup>



For this general question, the proposed answers consisted in different statements for which a graduated response was possible, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” These statements include three negative statements bearing on limitations of inclusive writing, and three positive statements bearing on its virtues. Overall, the answers indicate disagreement with the negative statements, and agreement with the positive statements, with over 50% of respondents disagreeing with negative comments, and agreeing with positive comments. This is less true for item 37 (2<sup>nd</sup> question), and especially for item 38 (3<sup>rd</sup> question), which are objective statements relating to the added cognitive load of inclusive writing.

This suggests that a minority of respondents clearly oppose inclusive writing and consider it not only not to be beneficial (be it in broad terms as in item 39, or more specifically concerning women or non-binary persons as in items 40 and 41), but that they reportedly consider it to be burdensome for reading

<sup>155</sup> Translation of statements: “[According to you, inclusive writing...] ... is a natural progress in the history of humanity. / ... enables women to be on the same level as men. / ... is a way to refer to people who do not recognize themselves in a binary gender. / ... makes the reading more burdensome. / ... complicates the learning of French. / ... is a deformation of the French language.”; possible answers: “Strongly agree / Agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Disagree / Strongly disagree.”

and learning the language (items 37-38), and even a deformation of the French language (item 36). This minority seems, however, quite limited among our respondents, since only 10% chose “agree” or “strongly agree” for item 36.

#### 4.2.2. *Qualitative analysis: Insights into the perception of inclusive writing*

The second question about the perception of inclusive writing was an open-ended question: “Would you have another opinion to share about inclusive writing?.” Two hundred seventy-six responses were recorded for this question, corresponding to 18% of the participants.

Forty respondents addressed the use of typographical devices. They generally indicated a dislike for the use of typographical devices, and a preference for other devices, viz. double flexing, feminization, or a neutral form. One respondent, for instant, stated “I use the middot only when I have no other choice. I would rather use other constructions (hello to all.F and to all.M) or epicene words” (*J’emploie uniquement le point médian quand je n’ai pas d’autres choix. Je préfère d’autres formulations (bonjour à toutes et à tous) ou des mots épicènes*; our translation). A minority of respondents stated their appreciation of typographical signs (N=15), explaining that they help save space, especially in long and/or administrative texts. These answers are in line with the results for the second series of test sentences (see Section 4.1.1).

Twenty-three respondents commented on the absence of a convention for inclusive writing, and the need for assistance in its correct use. One respondent, for instance, wrote: “It is sometimes difficult to integrate the codes and I would like more pedagogy” (*Il est parfois difficile d’en intégrer les codes et je souhaiterais plus de pédagogie*; our translation). Indeed, while there are many guides on gender-fair language use (see Elmiger, 2022; Steinhauer & Diewald, 2017), their stance on inclusive writing is sometimes negative (Dister & Moreau, 2020), in line with the negative stance of many linguists (see Section 1.3).

Twelve respondents commented on the understandability of inclusive writing. These respondents noted that they find it difficult to understand and/or a vector of reading difficulties, particularly related to the cumbersome aspect of the text. This concern was taken into account by Gygax & Gesto (2007), who demonstrated that the reading of texts with inclusive writing for occupation names is not (significantly) heavier and that the reading speed is not (significantly) different with inclusive writing: from the second mention of a given item, there is a habituation effect.

People were particularly concerned about the difficulties that DYS persons might encounter. Two dyslexic respondents provided contrasting comments on this subject. The first one stated that it takes time to adapt, just like learning a new word: “I am dyslexic, and I often hear that it makes reading and learning more difficult for dyslexic people. It seems to me that any new form requires adaptation, but those of inclusive writing are no more or less complicated to learn or use than the discovery of a new word” (*Je suis dyslexique, j’entends souvent dire que cela complique la lecture pour les personnes dys et les apprentissages. Toute nouvelle forme me semble demander une adaptation, mais celles de l’écriture inclusive ne sont pas plus ni moins compliquées à apprendre ou utiliser que la découverte d’un mot nouveau*; our translation). The other one indicated that it requires a significant additional effort: “I am dyslexic, reading something in inclusive writing requires a great deal of additional effort” (*Je suis dyslexique, lire quelque chose en écriture inclusive me demande un gros effort supplémentaire*; our translation).

## 5. Conclusion and perspectives

The results of our study, with 992 respondents, allow us to validate our hypotheses. Our first hypothesis was that the acceptability of inclusive language is not uniform across participants: this is indeed the case in our study. The main result in that respect is that participants who do not report identifying with binary male/female categories accept and use inclusive writing more than women, and women accept it more than men. Similarly, participants who identify as Liberal accept inclusive writing more than others; and younger participants accept it more than older participants. These results are in line with previous research (Abbou, 2023; Sauteur et al., 2023).

Our second hypothesis was that the acceptability of inclusive language is not uniform across constructions. This is also in line with our results: while some constructions elicited very positive answers, with e.g. ca 90% of respondents saying that the test sentence hosting the item *édutiant-e-s* is “acceptable,” other items were judged less favorably, e.g. *iel* “they.sg” or even *toustes* “all.F|M|NB.”

Our third hypothesis was also confirmed, i.e. that the acceptability of inclusive language is comparable to and in some cases even higher than that of

other non-standard constructions (e.g. forms considered as errors by prescriptive grammars, or perceived as such by non-linguist speakers).

One possible limitation of our study is that our participants are not necessarily representative of the French society at large. In order to overcome this limitation, we replicated our survey with a larger panel of participants (ca 2,000), which have been selected for their representativity.

Data statement: the information collected does not contain any personal data, but political opinions are considered as sensitive data. Respondents to this questionnaire have given their consent to the processing of their data for research purposes. For this reason, the data underlying this study are only available on request from the authors.

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## Empirical Approaches to Gender and Language

- SAUTEUR, Tania, Pascal Gygax, Julia Tibblin, Lucie Escasain & Sayaka Sato. 2023. « L'écriture inclusive, je ne connais pas très bien... mais je déteste ! ». Liens entre connaissances linguistique et historique, orientation politique et attitudes envers l'écriture inclusive. *GLADI. Revue sur le langage, le genre, les sexualités* 14.
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## Appendix

Table 9: Perception of inclusive writing (Series 4, questionnaire items 36-41).

Selon vous, l'écriture inclusive...

	Pas du tout d'accord	Pas d'accord	Ni d'accord ni pas d'accord	D'accord	Tout à fait d'accord
Est un progrès naturel dans l'histoire de l'humanité.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Permet aux femmes d'être sur le même plan que les hommes.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Est un moyen de faire référence d'une manière adaptée aux personnes qui ne se reconnaissent pas dans un genre binaire.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Alourdit la lecture.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Complicque l'apprentissage du français.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Est une déformation de la langue française.	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

This book explores the linguistic representation of gender and how gender asymmetries in language structure both mirror and further drive the imbalance of power and visibility of gender groups in society. These inequalities may also impact the way we conceptualize gender, potentially contributing to the perpetuation of gender disparities. By examining the intricate relations between language, gender, and society, this book aims to shed light on some of the many ways language shapes perceptions, relations, and social structures.



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