

The editors of Revista del Hospital Italiano de Buenos Aires would like to offer our readers the opportunity to reflect on issues under debate in the scientific community. For this purpose, we have invited two prestigious referents of the subject with opposing views to present their positions on non-sexist language in an academic journal based on a clinical situation. Below, we share the reflections of Prof. Viviana Ackerman and Dr. Vilda Discacciati based on the following hypothetical scenario:

The editorial team of a scientific journal receives a manuscript for publication with the title “Risk Perception in Adolescents with Marijuana Consumption.” The study falls within the editorial profile of the journal and demonstrates high methodological quality. Additionally, the manuscript is written using non-sexist language (“..les adolescentes...”, “.. otros grupos de pares...”, etc.).

After the methodological approval by peer review, the editorial team informs the lead author that, while the journal does not have a declared policy regarding language use, the study will be published; however, it is essential that it be written in natural Spanish.

Inclusive or Visibilizing?

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In our Romance languages and many others (e.g. Slavic languages), there is the grammatical category of inherent gender (arbitrary) and that of assigning sex to sexed living beings (biologically determined). Examples of the former: *mueble, computadora*. Examples of the second: *actor/actriz, gato/gata*. This grammatical category requires agreement with that of number: *la sal gruesa, los soldados, valerosos*.

On the other hand, in Spanish, the masculine gender has a double value: inclusive (*Los invitados quedaron encantados* -- masculine encompassing men and women) and exclusive (*Los voluntarios deberán concurrir al Centro de 8 a 11 para donar esperma* – here the masculine means “exclusively” men).

When I call a company or institution on the phone, and the answering machine tells me: “*aguarde unos instantes y será atendido*,” I do not hang up because, as a woman, I feel included. Every speaker, even the defenders of the “inclusive” language, can perfectly decode the masculine inclusive and distinguish it from the exclusive. In other words, Spanish is inclusive, so why should we maintain the opposite and, consequently, want to force the language?

The proponents of the inclusive one also call it non-sexist. We have already seen the inappropriateness of the first name. Regarding the second, the language and its users are assigned a sexist intent when we say, for example, “*los alumnos vinieron a las 7*”. The sexist character would lie in the fact that the sender would not be referring to female students, and therefore, sexism would be the predominance of the masculine grammatical gender. Some go so far as to propose that the universal is the feminine.

“We note that advocates of “non-sexist language” propose the abolition of the traditional inclusive value. They express universality through various modalities: duplication (los alumnos y las alumnas) and using the ‘x’ and ‘@,’ and ‘e’ (*les argentines*). Alternatively, they eliminate certain nouns, generating distorted and non-synonymous expressions: the phrase ‘*el día del niño*,’ which belongs to our linguistic-cultural identity, is replaced by ‘*el día de las infancias*.’ Any speaker can perceive the difference between the two expressions. To avoid the “problem” of the inclusive Spanish word “*niños*,” it is set aside and replaced by another word (*infancias*) that doesn’t convey

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the same meaning but allows bypassing the gender morpheme. This strategy is often used to navigate the problematic use, for the “non-sexist” of the traditional inclusive form.”

We are, therefore, facing coercion and imposition on language, not the spontaneous evolution typical of natural languages. It is an authoritarian behavior, as those who do not adhere to the “inclusive” are canceled. They cease to belong, turning them into someone to “exclude.”

Considering that Spanish is inclusive, one should rather speak of a “visibilizing language” capable of distinguishing between men/women/others.

Does a policy of such coercion make sense? To whom? How far should “inclusive practices” be extended? To the point of rewriting the classics? One thing is the natural and spontaneous drift of languages, and quite another is the dogmatic ambition to transform and standardize them. There are historical cases of such ambition and its failure.

Gender studies, some radicalized feminisms, and the entire culture of identity fragmentation originating in the United States push for the use of these creations. They discriminate, censor, and punish. The antidiscrimination proponents are, paradoxically, the most discriminatory.

Anyone who does not use their coined terms, who dares to say “*mis amigos*” or “*todos*,” is stigmatized by the culture of inclusive cancelation. For quite some time now, the use of any “inclusive” proposals by non-followers and even opponents is a gesture negotiated in the opening words of some speeches (*compañeros y compañeras*, etc.) to signify support for rights struggles. These displays of goodwill for not being canceled fade because they are uneconomical, cacophonous (let’s remember natural languages follow the principle of the economy), and impractical.

This “inclusive” coercion would aim to modify reality through language modification. It is a voluntarist conception that ignores the distance between words and things and their incredibly complex relationship. The language/reality dynamic is not mechanical. Besides, how can we make other identities visible? Should diverse morphemes be created for existing and future diversities?

Individual rights are indisputable, and all forms of violence are condemnable. However, is the visibility-seeking will and its linguistic proposal the answer? I propose to advocate for cohesion rather than fragmentation.

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Changing the rules. Inclusive Language

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In principle, a point from which we start is that language is not neutral, and the Spanish language manifests itself in a sexist way by considering the masculine grammatical gender as universal. This writing modality has been historically endorsed in academic circles, whose norms conform to standardized writing. Another point is that words are not naive, just as language is not innocuous.

Here begin the discomforts of readers and writers who do not feel represented in the hegemonic

standardized norms of institutions with established formal requirements. In response to the question “Why revise these rules?” in her essay on the Spanish language, Paula Quintero writes: “*Todes somos hombres salvo que haya información que lo contradiga*” (we are all men unless there is information to the contrary). The author explains that the masculine is called *the unmarked gender* and designates males and others, while the feminine is *the marked gender* because it only serves to designate women. It matters because, through readings over time, it builds up an

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Figure 1. Map of universities approving inclusive language (Source: Instituto Geográfico de la República Argentina)

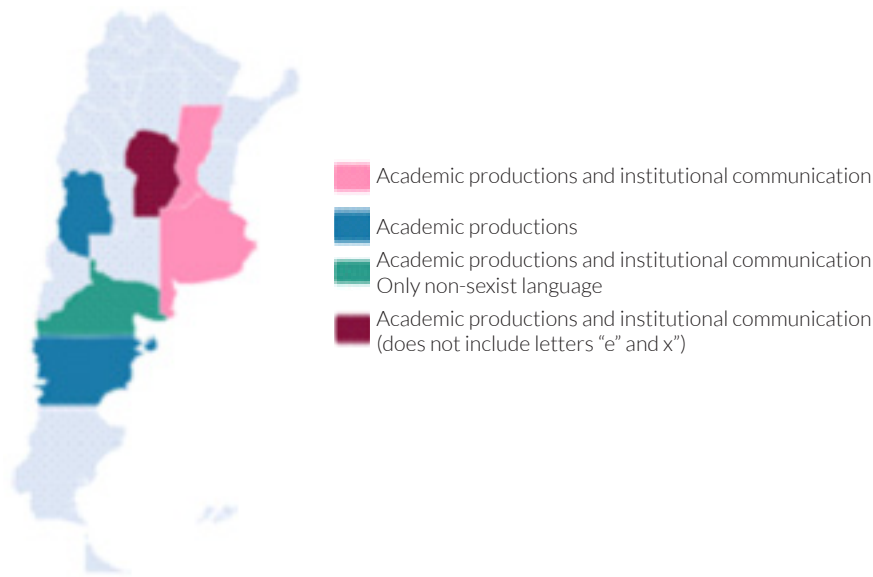


image of who is writing. Some studies demonstrate that the (grammatical) type of writing influences the gender-based image.

Therefore, the role of inclusive language becomes relevant precisely because of the image it represents. One of the options proposed is to use non-sexist language, using grammatical feminine and masculine forms (for example, *las y los usuarios y usuarias de*). But this modality is still framed in a binary epistemology, questioned by some philosophers, as it continues to exclude others in that writing format.

Concerning the presented manuscript, I would try to think that the researchers, in this case, distanced themselves from androcentrism and cissexism, aiming not to reproduce the norm (the normal) or the hetero norm as the correct language. It is a writing that challenges the usual academic writing, that unique and hegemonic formality inherent to that sphere. It opens up questions about how to write from dissidences and permeate the beauty of thinking from the margins as an anti-racist, anti-colonial, and feminist gesture, acknowledging that in writing, other theoretical forms of social norms are reproduced and produced.

If the manuscript submitted to the editorial is methodologically correct and provides interesting contributions to the community, deserving dissemination, and the authors present it in inclusive language, I would think that there is an intention to make all individuals visible and to highlight their position in the gender perspective already expressed through the manuscript.

I wonder why ask the authors to change the writing of a text they have inhabited and want to share in that way with the readers. Is it because it sounds strange or wrong? Is it to respect historical norms? Is it because their regular readers would feel discomfort? An interesting exercise would be to respect the writing proposed by them, in its position-taking, arguing in their favor that the uncomfortable reading for some can lead to reflection, and in the process, the gender perspective becomes visible. Accepting it without changes would also be a way to give space to sectors that historically feel that discomfort in reverse.

Therefore, accepting their original proposal would add to the debate on whether considering inclusive language is a form of epistemological activism, as other texts suggest "de-linguaging" the academy, inhabiting spaces that impact and allow us to be affected.

It is worth noting that institutional changes are currently taking place in universities, expressed in the acceptance of language changes.

También por fuera de la academia, en ámbitos formales y gubernamentales se propone una escritura en lenguaje neutral, no como asunto de corrección política, sino justamente porque asumen que el lenguaje refleja e influye en las actitudes, las conductas y las percepciones.

Using inclusive, or at least non-exclusionary language, entails an equality-based approach so that no gender occupies a privileged position, and prejudices against any gender are not perpetuated.

I believe that language is the primary tool for interacting with reality, for intervening in reality, and

attempting to modify it. Today we are witnessing a discursive opportunity that allows us to rethink the current rules and the existing rules for a deconstruction of language that gives rise to non-sexist and inclusive communication.

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