"Words We Live By": Foreign Language Teachers and Gender-Inclusive Language (GIL) in UK Higher Ed

Image and title : *Words we live by - A guide to LGBTQ+ language*
CRAL project, University of Nottingham (Dr Lucy Jones)

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Background

- Assistant professor in French (T&CL, MLC and Language Centre)
- Gender-inclusive language :

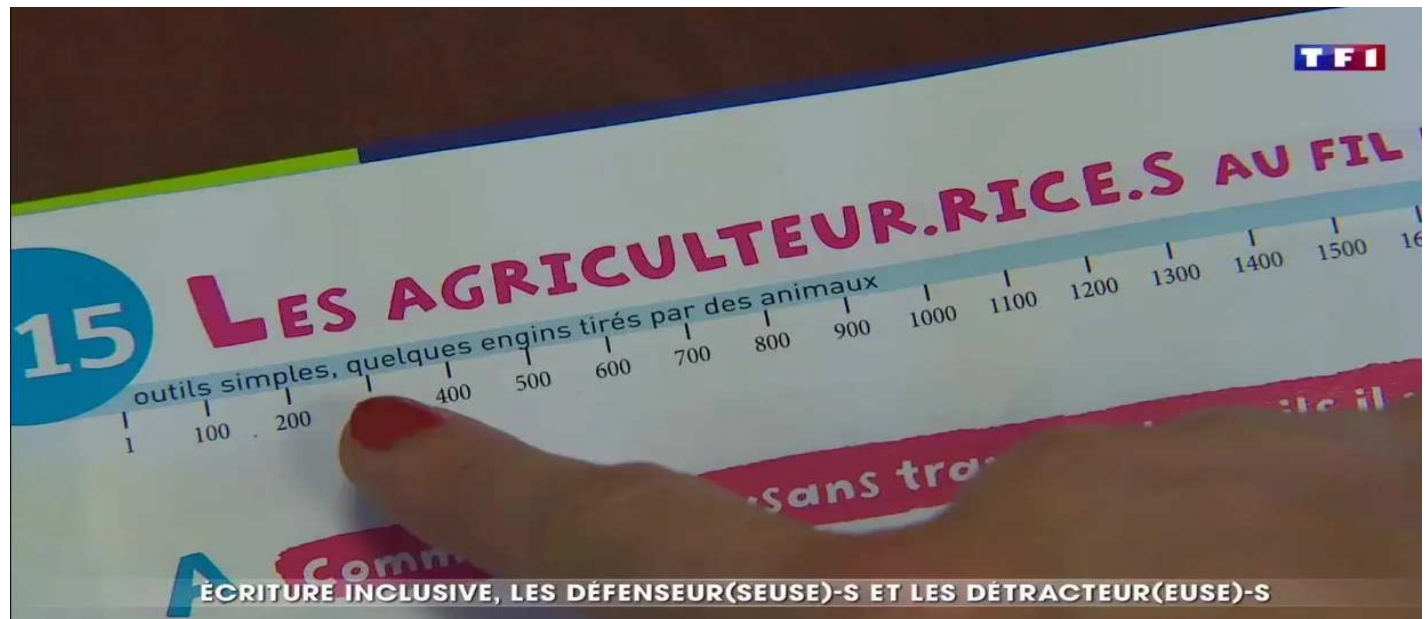|	
Grammar	T&L environment
Culture	Critical thinking
Identity	Education for social justice
Translanguaging	

Why does GIL matter in "gendered-based languages" more particularly?

Offered on degree course at UoN:

French/Spanish/Portuguese:
2 genders: masculine, feminine

German/Serbian/Croatian/Russian:
3 genders: masculine, feminine, neutral

- Grammatical gender applies to nouns, adjectives, pronouns...

Sexist languages?

- Absence of feminine equivalents for titles and professions

- Non-binary?

- Generic masculine, primacy of the masculine

The generic masculine "elicits representations of gender that are biased toward men" (Rothermund and Strack, 2024)

GIL proposals (not prescriptive)

No changes to the language :
- Epicene words
- Doubling/split forms
- Feminisation of titles and professions

Modifications on the language :
- Generic feminine
- Proximity agreement
- New or merged endings (incl. graphic markers)
- Neopronouns

Using a more gender inclusive language contributes to reducing inequalities. (Sczesny, Formanowicz and Moser, 2016; Gygax, Zufferey and Gabriel, 2021)

HUMAN

HUMAN

WOMAN   MAN

Sommes nous… prêtEs / prêt.e.s / prêt·e·s / prêt-e-s / prêt(e)s / prêt/e/s pour l'écriture inclusive ?

ell@ *presidenta* TODES elles *todxs* l@s CHICX

GIL in Foreign- language classroom in Higher Education

3% identify as transgender, gender fluid, or non-binary in 2023, 6% for those born after 1997
(Ipsos)

- **Foster EDI values** (Dörnyei, 2009; Selvi and Kocaman, 2021)

- **Enhances student engagement and linguistic acquisition and competence** (Knisely, 2022)

- **Increase critical thinking, intercultural and interlinguistic awareness**

Role of the teacher (Language Policy and Planning)

"Teachers and language specialists, even at a grassroots level, can play an agentive role in influencing policy even if they may lack decision-making power." (Liddicoat and Taylor-Leech, 2021)

GIL in my teaching practice

- Adressing students using GIL, orally and in writing

- Non-binary pronoun

- Alternatives to generic masculine

- Addressed as a theme
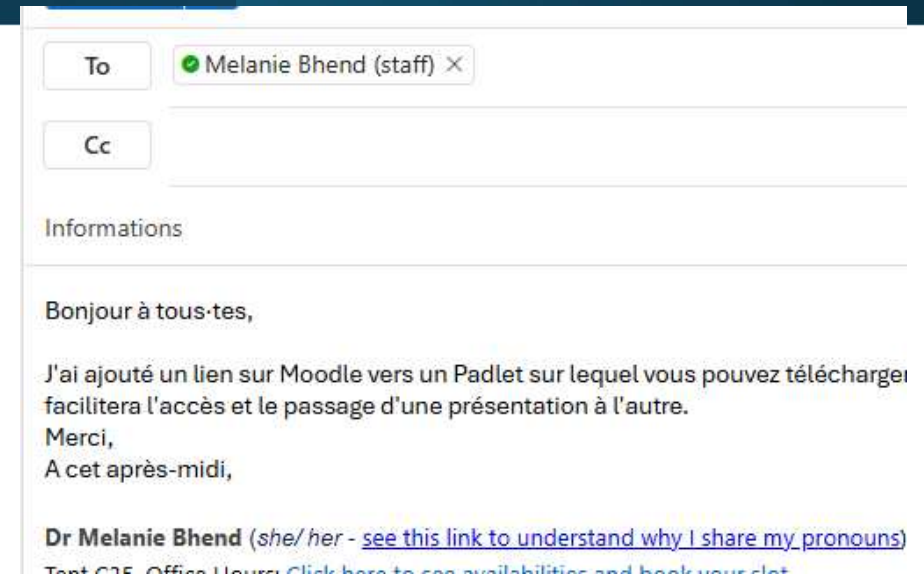
> *I have really enjoyed taking this module. It is one of the most inclusive and accessible modules i have taken at this university, which is one of the most important things to me about the modules i take.*
>
> *(Student module evaluation survey)*

Projects - research

- Collaborations with colleagues teaching other gender-based languages

- Pedagogical framework for GIL implementation

- Understand language teachers' perspective on GIL

- «Bottom-up» approach (Johnson and Freeman, 2010; Chua and Baldauf, 2011)

- Interviews of foreign-language teachers

- Based on **'Instructors' Navigation and Appropriation of Gender-Inclusive Spanish at a U.S. University'** (Fuentes and Gómez Soler, 2023)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. How do foreign language teachers at UoN perceive gender-inclusive language proposals in the language they teach?
2. How does this perception impact their classroom practices?
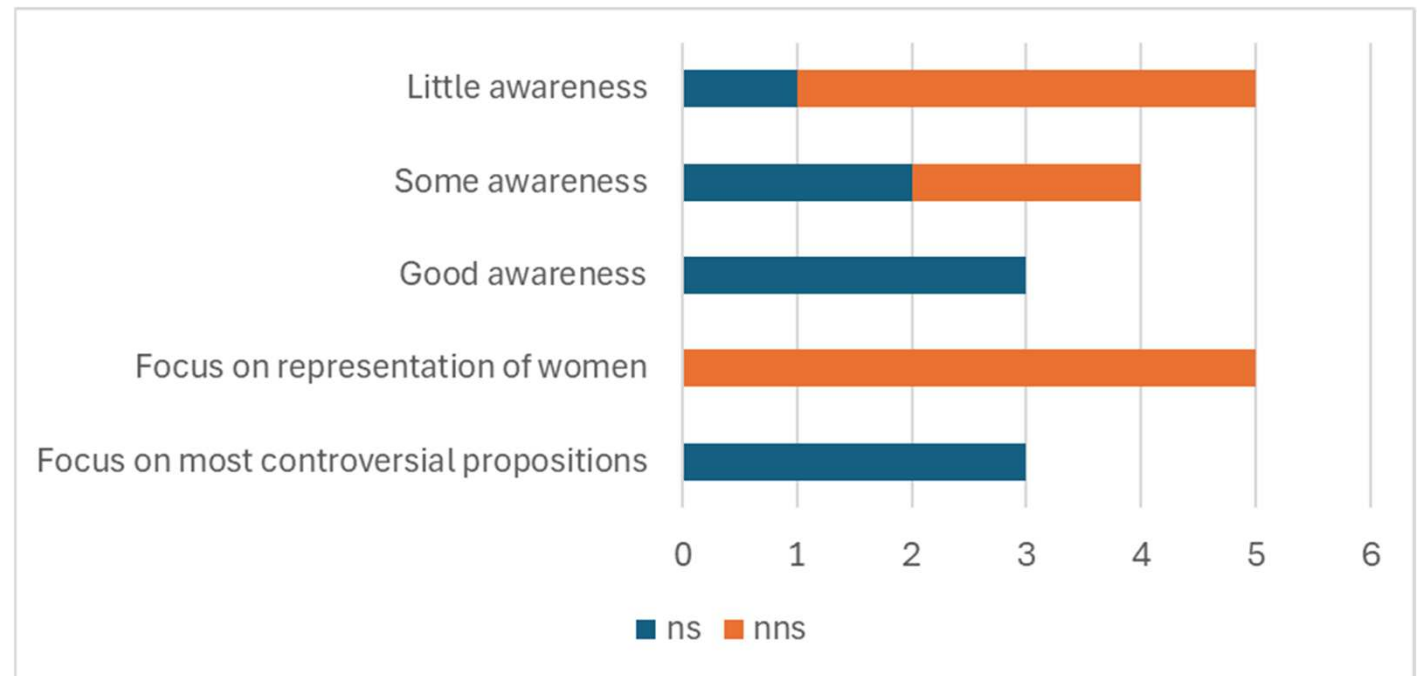
Participants – Demographics

Total participants: 12
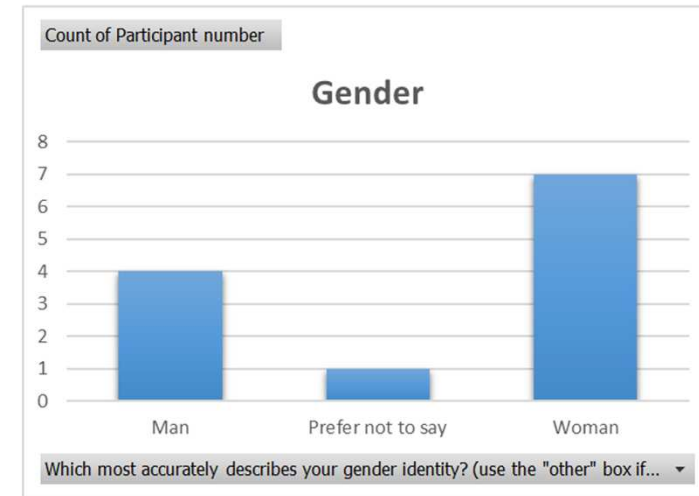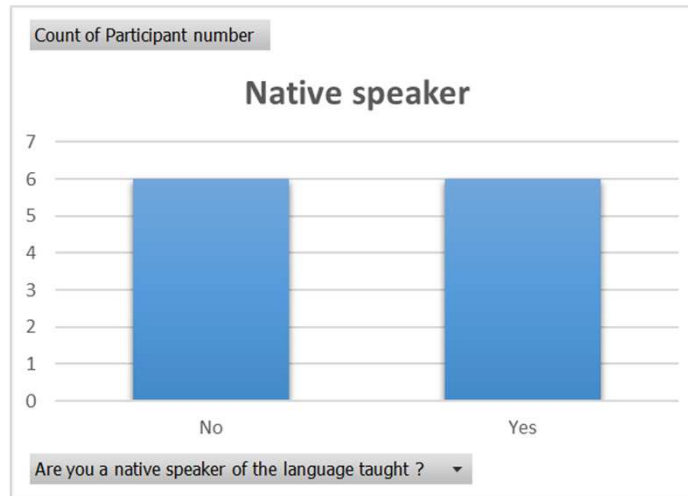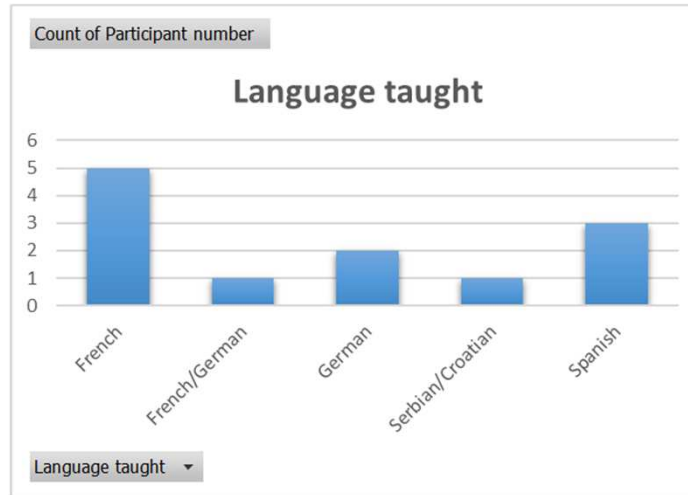
All the participants were aware of GIL in English (especially the use of the pronoun *they*) and agreed with the general aims of GIL

Research question 1:

ns=native speaker of the language taught

nns=non-native speaker

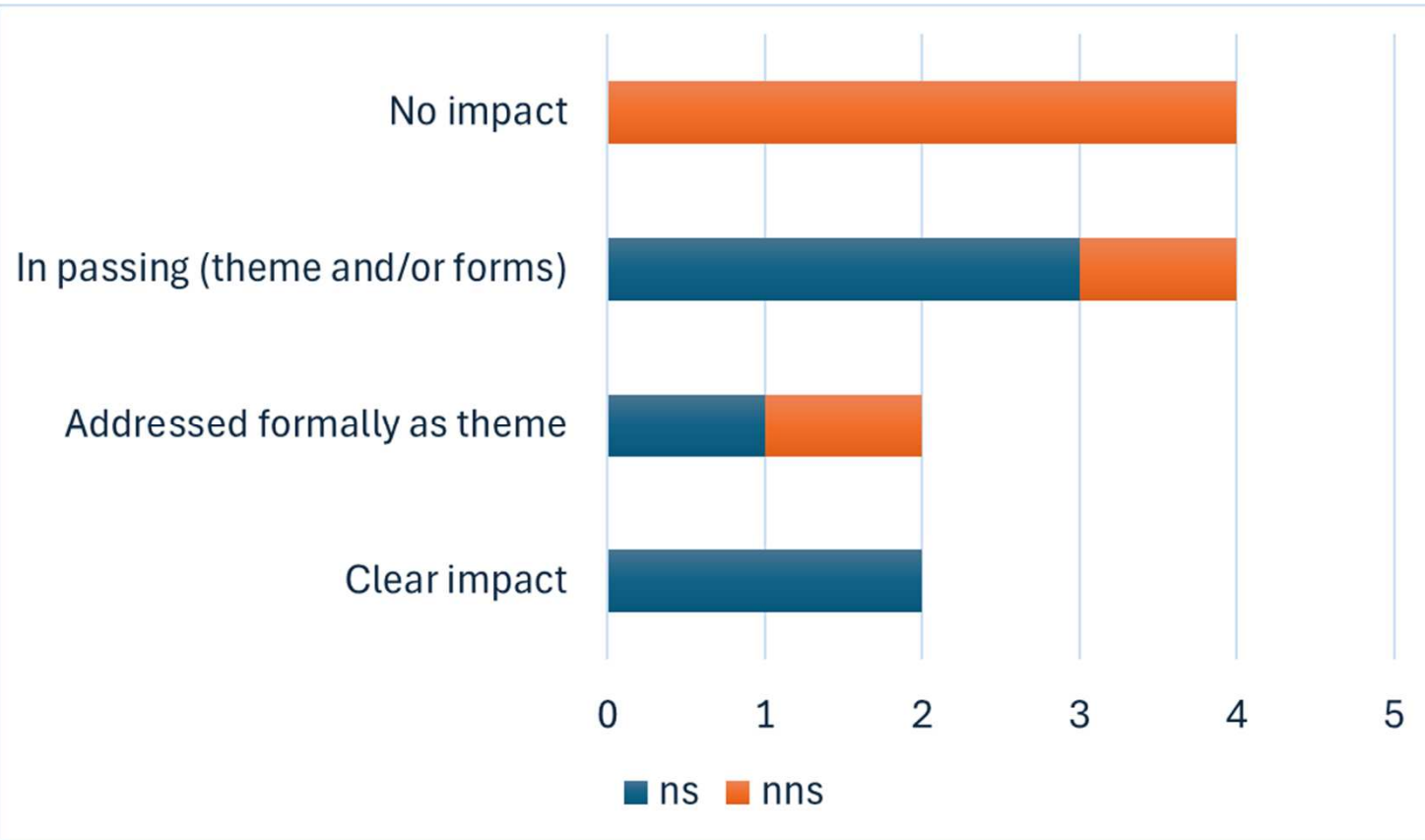## Awareness of gender-inclusive language in the language taught

Research question 2: Impact

ns=native speaker of the language taught

nns=non-native speaker

Impact of GIL on classroom practices

Linguistic acquisition vs social justice

My job, as an educator, is to teach people the language they need for the course [...] I see my role more as teaching people the language rather than doing a kind of social education study lesson with them.

Addressing GIL topics "enhances [students'] openness to, interest in and valuing of developing these aspects of language further. (Knisely 2024)

"insecurity" of the non-native speaker

I've always been acutely aware of not being, of the <u>limitations that not being a native speaker</u> puts on you in your grasp of the subtlety of the language

I think that in terms of me preparing, I would also probably want to run whatever I'm going to talk about <u>past a native speaker</u> or to just to <u>check</u> that I am <u>on the right track</u> here and I've just not <u>misread</u> something.

"I'm not confident enough. [...] I'm not confident enough to use it and being able really to place [the graphic sign] right and I think it's my own issue there."

The multiple backgrounds

"Well, both times that we have discussed it, we ended up having a politics class, rather than a grammatical class. Because in China, this kind of openness in terms of identifying a particular way, changing the signature, being open about being gay, or gender-[neutral/fluid]. That, for them, is very difficult to understand."

1. **Cultural background of the teacher**
2. **CultureS of the language taught**
3. **Cultural background of the students**
4. **University's culture and values**

Take-aways

- Teachers are agents of change
- Disparities in awareness of GIL
- Misconceptions
- Institutional support

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Thank you

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