

## **Attitudes Towards Gender-Inclusive Language: Latvian Twitter and Online Forum Threads.**

The rise of gender-inclusive language and attempts to implement it in Latvia are topics that require much attention in Latvia. Latvian is a grammatical gender language which complicates attempts to break gender perceptions, but the implementation of gender-neutral terms in everyday language among young people shows that it is less about top-down prescriptivism from the State Language Centre and more about the willingness among language users to adapt and change (Strelēvica-Ošiņa, 2021), modifying the language to fit our understandings of emerging gender identities. This paper provides a more comprehensive picture of the current attitudes towards gender-inclusive language in Latvia, examining attitudes of Twitter and online forum users as well as attitudes towards inclusive language in the public sphere in general.

Content analysis of tweets and online forum posts made in 2020-2022 provides a deeper understanding of how people perceive inclusive language in terms of risks and benefits to the Latvian language. The aspects of language that appear in online discourse and are discussed in this paper are the following: gender inflections for occupations and surnames, masculine generics, preferred pronouns, gender stereotypes in language, and gender-neutral third person pronouns. Search terms such as *non-binary (nebinārs)*, *gender (dzimte)*, and *pronouns (vietniekvārdi)* were coded and relationships between concepts were analysed. Research reveals that word meanings and concept maps differ depending on attitudes towards gender-inclusive language, and the creation of extreme hypotheticals about the eradication of gender and traditional family values shows that there is a gap in communication in terms of defining the goals of inclusive language. Meanwhile, the creation of new third person pronouns (*viņo*) and gender inflections (*-o*), as well as the efforts of applying existing elements of English to Latvian indicates a higher acceptance of gender-inclusive language and a more favourable attitude towards it.

To acquire quantitative data about attitudes towards gender-inclusive language in Latvia, an electronic survey was distributed across Twitter, Facebook, and online forums. It includes general questions about inclusive language and more specific questions about the issues mentioned previously. The aim of these questions is to investigate people's associations with inclusive language and responses towards implementing change, providing real-life examples (Bonnin & Coronel, 2021). The majority of respondents reported having heard of inclusive language, but current attitudes towards it vary, more than a third of respondents being unsure. Responses show that associations about inclusive language differ – many see it as openness to diversity and inclusion of minorities, emphasizing respect and tolerance. However, while some understand it as freedom from prejudice, others perceive it as a form of censorship, emphasizing the simplification of language, linguistic manipulation, and disregard of existing definitions. Most respondents agree that inclusive language aims to avoid giving offence, but those in favour of inclusive language focus on minorities, while those against it stress the impossibility of being completely inoffensive. Finally, a significant number of respondents have no associations or do not understand the significance of inclusive language, which shows that discussions about it must take place outside of LGBT activist groups and small communities of linguists.

Previous research suggests that familiarity and exposure breeds liking (Gustafsson Sendén, Bäck & Lindqvist, 2015), and linguists must keep track of changes in attitude to create a systematic review of factors and social contexts that trigger different reactions towards gender-inclusive language. Attitudes stem from popular beliefs, and understanding the current attitudes is crucial for working towards not only a favourable attitude towards gender-inclusive language, but also a willingness to use it. Survey results revealed that most respondents either have a positive attitude towards inclusive language or they do not have enough information about it to have an informed opinion, so the next steps would include creating effective strategies to promote gender-inclusive language that extend beyond separate communities and individual language habits.

## References

- Bonnin, Juan Eduardo & Coronel, Alejandro Anibal (2021). "Attitudes Toward Gender-Neutral Spanish: Acceptability and Adoptability". In: *Frontiers in Sociology* (6:629616), doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2021.629616.
- Gustafsson Sendén, Marie & Bäck, Emma A. & Lindqvist, Anna (2015). "Introducing a gender-neutral pronoun in a natural gender language: the influence of time on attitudes and behaviour". In: *Frontiers in Psychology* (6:893), doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00893.
- Strelēvica-Ošiņa, Dace (2021). "Linguistic attitude in Latvian society: purism, gender and other aspects". In: Druviete, Ina (ed.). *Latvian Language Attitudes: Values, Beliefs, Practice*. Collective Monograph. Riga: The University of Latvia Press, pp. 184-217.

## Contact

Justīne Bondare  
Research Assistant / MA Student in Latvian Linguistics  
Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia  
4 Kalpaka Boulevard  
Riga LV-1050  
Latvia  
[justine.bondare@lu.lv](mailto:justine.bondare@lu.lv)