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### **Attitudes Toward Inclusive Writing in the Opinion Pieces of *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro* and *Libération***

This study uses a corpus of opinion pieces published in major French newspapers to examine how the press frames discussions of *écriture inclusive* (inclusive writing). Inclusive writing is a subtype of inclusive French most commonly associated with using punctuation such as the median point (·) and period (.) to orthographically separate gender and number markers; it has been a major topic of discussion in the French press since 2017, with *Le Robert*'s inclusion of neutral pronoun *iel* inciting the most recent media cycle in November 2021. Because of its historical association with progressive groups (e.g., feminists; anarchists; the LGBTQ+ community), investigating the treatment of inclusive writing in media discourse reveals how arguments surrounding the term itself reinforce transphobic and sexist hegemonies.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an ideal framework for analyzing ideology in editorials. CDA is a critical perspective with an explicit sociopolitical positionality, one that pays particular attention to the dominance relations of key groups and how they are legitimized through talk and text (Van Dijk, 1993), in order to 'get more insight into the crucial role of discourse in the reproduction of dominance and inequality' (Van Dijk, 1993: 253). Much CDA work focuses on the representation of social actors in the press: who has the authority to access journalists directly (Fairclough, 1998; Van Dijk, 1996), and when and how they are given more or less agency for their actions (Van Dijk, 1998; Van Leeuwen, 1996). Prior CDA studies of the French press have focused on language used by *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde* and—with slightly lower frequency—*Libération* (Abdeslam 2019; Bharat 2021; Choi 2006). However, the majority of these studies focus solely on news articles (Abdeslam 2019; Choi 2006), or audience reaction to news articles (Vicari 2021). Le (2002; 2009) is among the few to explicitly examine the language of editorials in the French dailies from a CDA perspective, with her most important contribution being the conclusion that we can extricate journals' sociocultural values from the values expressed by their editorial authors.

In the present study, a corpus containing all opinion pieces published from 2017-2021 in three elite daily newspapers (*Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, and *Libération*) using the keyphrase *l'écriture inclusive* is analyzed through the lens of CDA. This timeframe encompasses both the first and second media cycles around inclusive writing. The first cycle took place in fall 2017 after a writer at *Le Figaro* discovered a CE2 textbook published by éditions Hatier containing examples of inclusive writing; the second took place during the months leading up to the 2021 French regional elections on June 20<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. The corpus encompasses 58 editorials totaling approximately 35,000 words. The major outcomes of this study are 1. a frequency analysis of authorial stances toward inclusive writing (coded as positive, neutral, or negative), 2. and identification and frequency analysis of six major themes throughout the corpus, each of which is associated with sets of key terms: *Culture Wars*, *Language Change*, *Barriers to Communication*, *Censorship*, *Sexism*, and *French Cultural Heritage*.

There are several major findings. Firstly, I find that authors in *Le Figaro*, the most conservative source in the corpus, are more likely to take a negative stance toward inclusive writing than authors in *Libération* and *Le Monde*. This finding correlates with my second result, where I identify how the phrase *l'écriture inclusive* becomes a rhetorical stand-in for general progressive ideology. The equation of *l'écriture inclusive* with progressive ideology is further supported by the co-occurrence of the keyphrase alongside key terms associated with the French political *Culture Wars* theme within all three sources; however, authors take different stances toward or against *l'écriture inclusive* on the basis of their own

positions for or against the progressive ideologies for which they use the keyphrase as a proxy. Close readings of three short passages further support the use of *l'écriture inclusive* as rhetorical shorthand for larger ideologies: Of radical feminism, anti-purist prescriptivism, or harbinger of the acceptance of gender diversity, in language and in society.

Through both quantitative analyses of the language surrounding the term *l'écriture inclusive* and in-depth qualitative readings of how the term is employed, this study problematizes the discourse around inclusive writing by identifying the variety of valences the term can carry. It also provides concrete, empirical data demonstrating the changing portrayal of inclusive writing in the French press over time and in sources of diverse ideological positionality.

## References

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