

## Different approaches to naming gender-inclusive language in Spanish: A data-driven contribution to the transnational debate

In recent years, gender-inclusive language has gained terrain in Spanish-speaking public discussion. It is not uncommon to find speakers, including linguists, who believe that gender-fair language is a quite recent phenomenon. However, close observation of quantitative data on Google Trends on the names given to gender-inclusive language in Spanish, along with the history of the feminist and LGBTQ movement in Spanish-speaking societies could help us to delineate a different, more complex story.

It is well known that in the 1970s several feminist scholars and activists started to discuss the relationship between sexism and language practices in diverse cultures and languages (Bengoechea, 2015; Pauwels, 1998 & 2003). In the 1980s, Spanish-speaking feminist activists focused on the role of language in perpetuating sexism and, in response, they proposed different types of gender-inclusive language reform (Bengoechea, 2000; Guerrero Salazar, 2007), which today is widely known as *lenguaje inclusivo* 'inclusive language' and is employed in social movements and institutions alike (Rivera Alfaro & Cuba, 2021).

In many Latin American countries, Feminist linguistic reform has led to heated public debates. In the case of Brazil, Borba (2019) demonstrates that conservative power groups target the morpheme "-x" to catalyze their opposition to gender equality and pro-LGTB policies. Within Spanish-speaking communities, *Indisciplinadx*s, an international digital community of feminist linguists and activists, has also brought attention to how gender-inclusive language is proposed and negotiated in places as distant as Costa Rica and Uruguay (Rivera Alfaro, 2020a & 2020b). However, academic research analyzing the history and development of the Spanish gender-inclusive language is still rare (Bengoechea, 2000; Guerrero Salazar, 2007). Although there are some limited studies, which investigate the attitude toward inclusive language among the specific and limited population of university students (Bengoechea et al., 2009; Nissen, 2013; Pesce & Etchezahar, 2019; Cremades & Fernández-Portero, 2022), hardly the most relevant population to test for their beliefs. Considering these limitations, we acknowledge the necessity of studying the attitudes towards gender-inclusive language in Spanish at a transnational level and doing so by working with more extensive data.

In addition to contributing to the multilingual, comparative perspective of the conference, our study aims to open up the scope of the study of feminist linguistic activism in Spanish. When discussing and studying gender-inclusive language in Spanish, researchers tend to circumscribe their attention to the status of the phenomenon in a specific country (e.g., the debate of *lenguaje inclusivo* in Peru) ignoring the similarities and contrasts of neighboring countries. In response to this tendency, we aim to overcome the ideological restrictions underlying nation-state construction, which were naturalized in several sociolinguistic studies. Our project also challenges the strict separation between, on the one hand, historical changes and political struggles and, on the other, (new) linguistic normativities such as gender-inclusive language, a methodological schism that is still dominant in language studies. For such reasons, besides positioning ourselves as feminist linguists (Cuba, 2019), our analytical perspective aligns with glottopolitical studies, that is, we will consider the profound relationship between language and the political sphere (Del Valle & Arnoux, 2010). Finally, recovering the transnational history of the Spanish gender-inclusive language will help us to balance the contemporary dilemmas pointed out by feminist thinkers such as Brigitte Vasallo (2021) who, although supporting gender-inclusive language use, warns against thinking about *lenguaje inclusivo* as a mechanic, one-size-fits-all type of solution to sexism in language.

In this presentation, we critically examine the changing usage of four different phrases employed to refer to gender-inclusive language in Spanish: *lenguaje inclusivo*, *lenguaje no sexista*, *lenguaje neutro*, and *lenguaje no binario* (roughly translated as 'inclusive language,' 'non-sexist language,' 'neutral language,' and 'non-binary language,' respectively). We draw from the assumption that changes in naming practices correspond to changes in speakers' attitudes and, at the same time, shifts in the societies they live in. To carry out this project, we will use a data set provided by Google Trends search engine inquiries of the four phrases from January 2004 to January 2022. In other words,

we offer a longitudinal observation of the attitudes toward gender-inclusive language in the Spanish-speaking world, which permit us to surpass limiting narratives of the issue, commonly restricted to specific places and moments.

Methodologically, this work can be defined as infometrics and descriptive statistics; we mix this approach with a literature review on gender-inclusive language and recent social movements in Spanish-speaking societies regarding sexuality and gender matters. For the analysis, we will contextualize and correlate the data with the external factors that may have influenced the changes in the preference and avoidance of the studied phrases. For instance, some external factors motivating such changes could be sociopolitical changes on issues related to sexual and gender politics (e.g., legalization of abortion access) and the emergence of new ways of feminist and LGBT activism in the region (e.g., gender non-binary activism).

As part of our preliminary results, we find that *non-sexist language* is the oldest of the four phrases, being the only one found in 2004 and 2005 in Spanish searches. Also, during that time, there were very few places where *non-sexist language* was searched from. Around 2012 the term *inclusive language* started gaining importance, and in 2018 it became the most searched phrase. The peak of *inclusive language* coincides with a peak in the feminist movement in Latin America, because 2018 was also the year when the fight for the legalization of abortion in Argentina caught international attention and ignited the movement in other countries of the region.

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