

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

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Attitudes Towards Gender-Inclusive Language

September 8th, 2022



Project Overview

Using a corpus of opinion pieces published in major French newspapers, I argue that the phrase *l'écriture inclusive* 'inclusive writing' has become shorthand for a variety of stances towards progressive social issues, among them queer politics, feminism, and linguistic prescriptivism.

Project Objective

In line with the explicitly ideological goals of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this project aims to uncover the ways that editorials reinforce cultural hegemonies regarding gender and language.

Three Major Questions

- 01 How are prominent French daily newspapers framing discussions of *l'Écriture Inclusive*?
- 02 What does *l'écriture inclusive* look like for opinion writers?
- 03 What does *l'écriture inclusive* stand for in opinion pieces?

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Background



What is Écriture Inclusive (EI)?

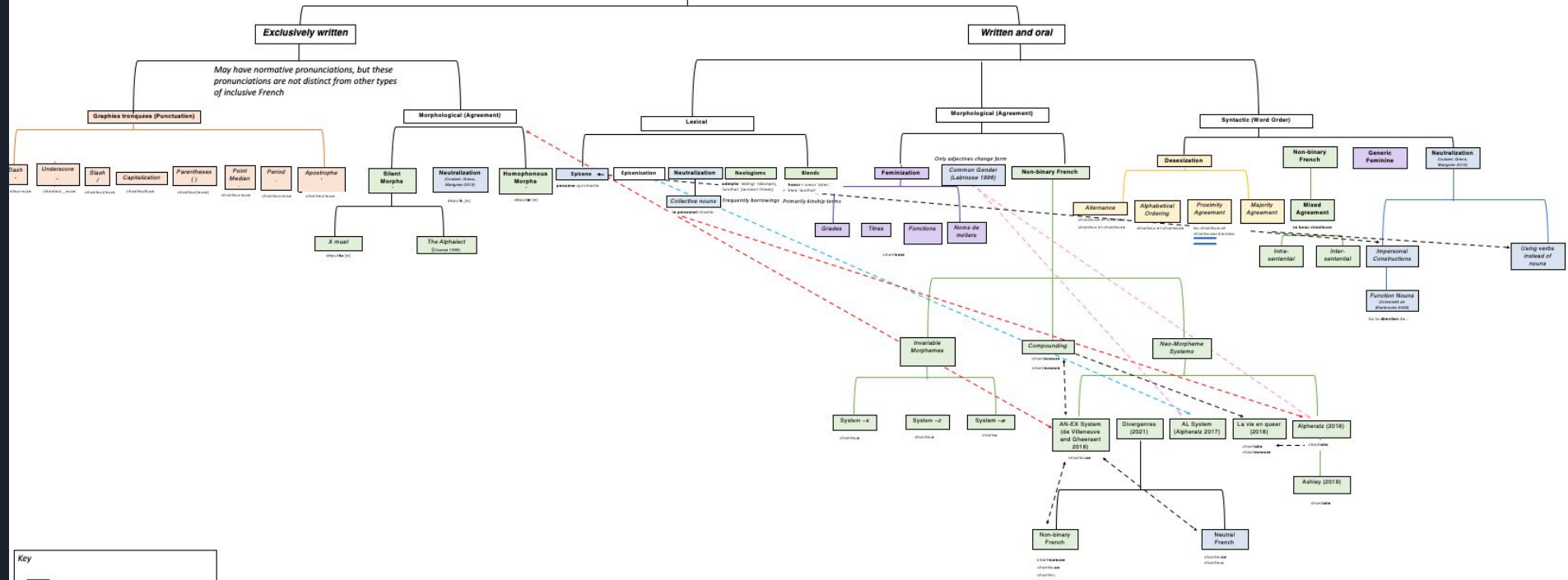
A very good question!

- A *written* form of Inclusive French

So what's inclusive French? Well...

See Chart!

Inclusive French

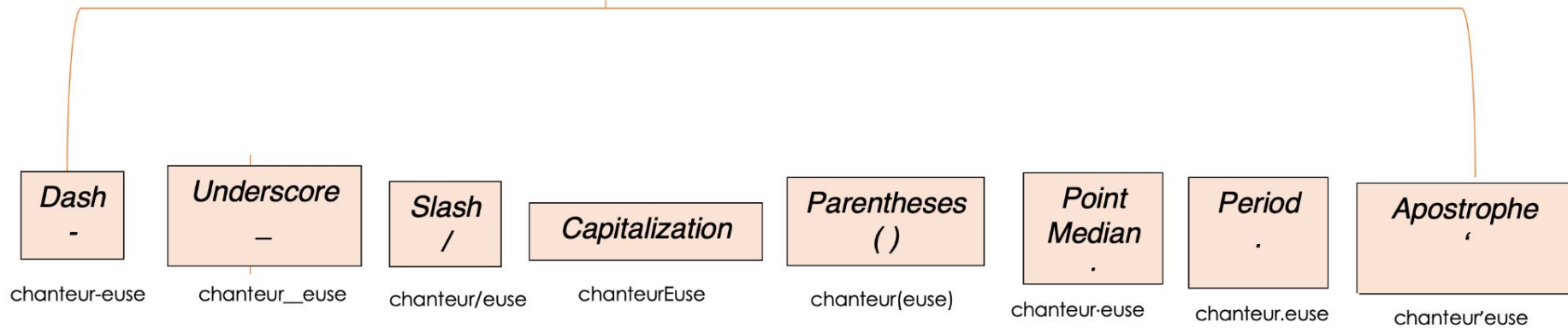


Key

- Primarily associated with non-binary French
- Neutral French
- Inclusive for women referents; not inclusive for non-binary referents
- Inclusive for women referents; inclusivity for non-binary referents debated
- Inclusivity of non-binary referents dependent on external factors
- Co-directional influence in the creation of inclusive forms
- Unidirectional influence in the creation of inclusive forms

Kaplan, J. 2022. Gender (un-)Marking in Varieties of Français inclusif. Israeli Association for the Study of Language and Society. June 19th, 2022.

Graphies tronquées (Punctuation)



Kaplan, J. 2022. Gender (un-)Marking in Varieties of Français inclusif. Israeli Association for the Study of Language and Society. June 19th, 2022.

What is *Écriture Inclusive to opinion writers?*

- Mostly punctuation of *graphies tronquées* (eg., Median Point)
 - **Écrivain·e** (vs. *écrivain* [m], *écrivaine* [f])
 - → Median point (·) simultaneously includes masculine and feminine referents

What's an Opinion Piece?

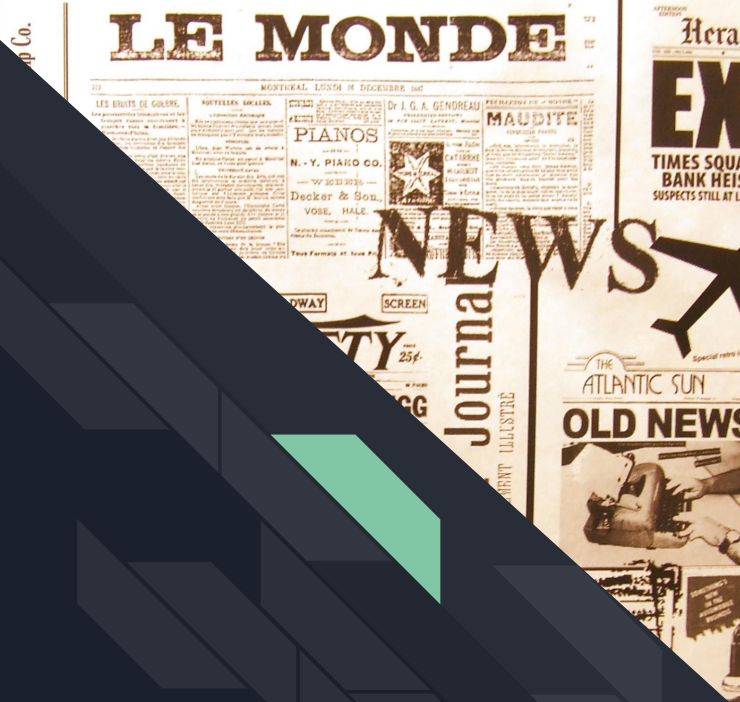
- No singular definition
- 'intended to persuade the reader' (Biber, 1988: 148)
- 'argumentation' (Le, 2002: 384)
- For this study: Pieces expressing the explicit point of view of a single author or group of authors, where **opinion** = "evaluative beliefs' (van Dijk, 1998: 29)
 - Encompasses *opinion pieces* and *editorials*

Why Opinion Pieces?

Opinion pieces lay journalists' ideological positions bare.



Theoretical Framework



Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

- **CDA:** Not a methodology—a **critical perspective** (Van Dijk, 1993)
 - How **dominance** (Fowler, 1996) and **inequality** (Kress, 1996; van Dijk, 1993) surfaces in talk and text
 - Texts reinforce **ideologies** (Garrett and Bell, 1998)
- Many tools have been developed in service of the CDA perspective—will talk about in **Methods**

Applying CDA to Opinion Pieces

- Many studies on editorials cross-linguistically (English, German, and Dutch...)
 - (e.g. Tirkkonen-Condit, S. and Lieflander-Koistinen 1989; Bonyadi 2010; Belmonte 2007; Fozadi and Saghaye-Biria 2007)
- Only Elisabeth Le (2002; 2006; 2009) has applied CDA methods to French opinion pieces
 - Major takeaway: we can extricate journals' sociocultural values from the values expressed by their editorial authors



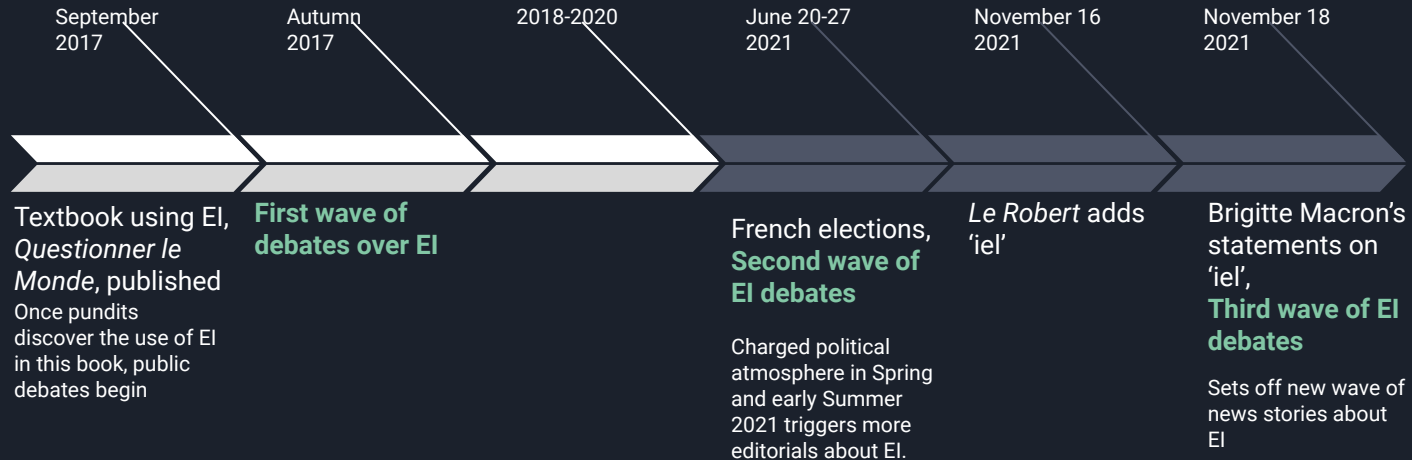
Methods



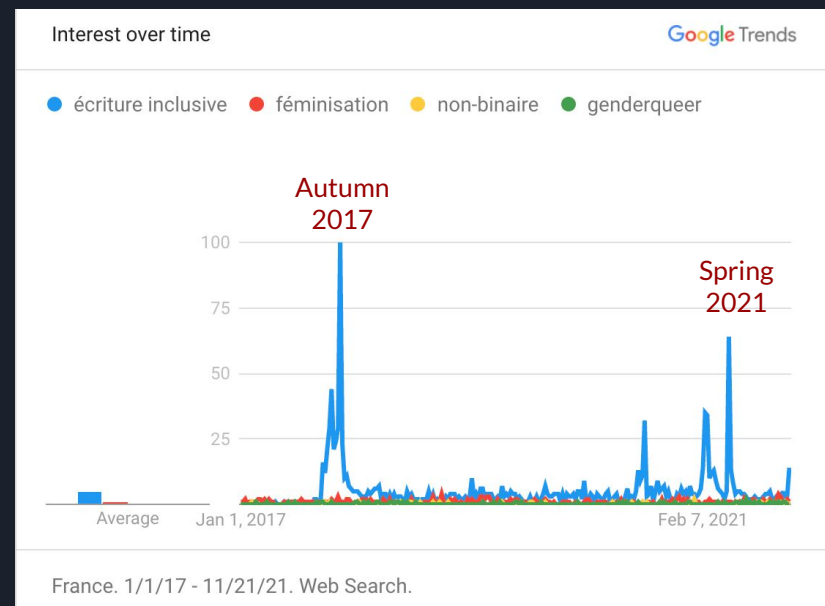
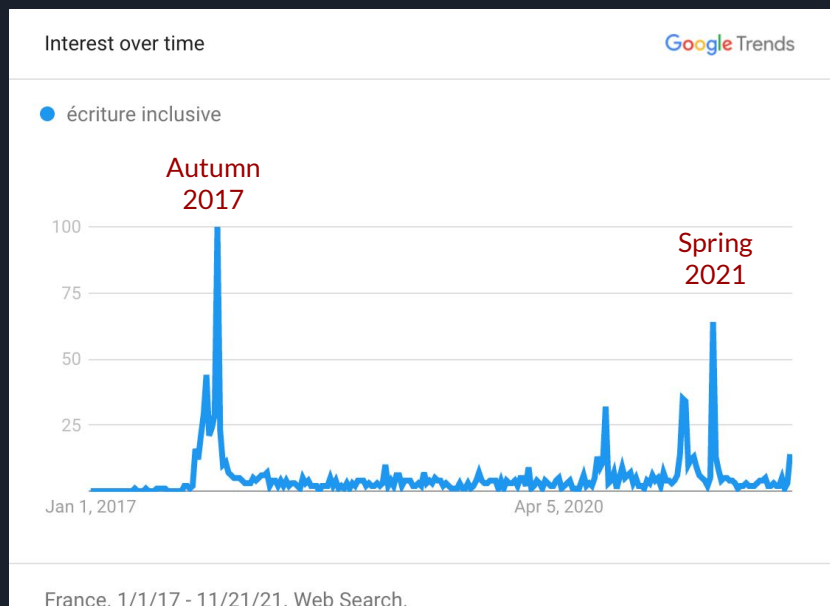
Methods Organization

1. Defining the Timeline
2. Defining the Corpus
3. Analytical Methods (Drawn from Prior Work on CDA)

Timeline of Debates Over Écriture Inclusive



Search Trends for Écriture Inclusive, 2017-2021



Defining the Corpus

- **Sources:** Three respected + widely circulated dailies
 - *Le Figaro* (Lean-Conservative)
 - *Le Monde* (Lean-Conservative; Center)
 - *Libération* (Lean-Left)
- **Time period:** 2017–2021
 - Two news cycles surrounding *l'écriture inclusive*
- **Keyphrase:** *L'écriture inclusive*
- **Stats**
 - 58 opinion articles
 - ~35,000 words

Corpus at a Glance

TABLE 1. All opinion pieces with the keyphrase *l'écriture inclusive*, by journal, by year

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<i>Le Figaro</i>	7	4	6	6	8
<i>Le Monde</i>	4	2	3	0	4
<i>Libération</i>	4	0	3	1	6

Key Terms and Themes

- Identify *Key Terms/Key Lemmas* (Hardt 1995; Le 2002)
 - → Assist with Qualitative Thematic Groupings
- Use Key Terms to Coalesce around **Themes**
- Themes may be argumentative (Le, 2002; 2009) or rhetorical (Baker et. al., 2008)

Stance

- **Stance:** One's position toward something (stance object), that they communicate to an interlocutor (DuBois 2007)
 - **Stance Object:** *l'écriture inclusive*
 - **Interlocutor:** the Reader
- Quantifying *stance* toward EI as positive/neutral/neg (Humphries 2019)



Results



Results Organization

1. Results at a Glance
2. Themes
3. Stances
4. How all three factors play out in close readings of passages

Thematic Groupings

- Culture Wars
 - Americanization
 - Feminist Militancy
 - France as (Potential) Victim
 - Cultural Marxism
 - Progressivism
 - Islamo-Gauchisme
- Censorship
 - Wokism
 - Political Correctness
- French Cultural Heritage
 - Language as Culture
 - Intellectual Freedom
- Sexism
 - Visibility/Invisibility of Women
- Communication & Barriers to Communication
 - Lisibilité/ilisibilité
 - Disorders of Speaking and Reading
- Language Change

What Key Terms + Thematic Groupings Tell US

- The rhetorical role that the phrase *l'écriture inclusive* comes to play in discourse takes on a variety of valences
- Its symbolic connotations go well beyond its denotation (a way of writing)
- Connotations it takes on
 - **Culture Wars:** EI associated with Canadian, American progressivism, vs *French* cultural values
 - **Censorship:** EI **blocks** other types of writing
 - **French Cultural Heritage:** French orthography = French culture
 - **Sexism:** EI as combatting and/or making a mockery of sexism
 - **Communication Barriers:** EI making French writing harder to read
 - **Language Change:** EI in comparison with other language changes

Quantifying *Stance* toward EI

Stance toward EI in *Le Figaro*

	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Negative</i>
2017	0	42.9% [n=3]	57.1% [n=4]
2018	0	0	100.0% [n=4]
2019	0	66% [n=4]	33% [n=2]
2020	0	50.0% [n=3]	50.0% [n=3]
2021	0	25.0% [n=2]	75.0% [n=6]
TOTALS	0% [n=0]	32% [n=8]	68% [n=17]

Quantifying *Stance* toward EI

Stance toward EI in *Le Monde*

	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Negative</i>
2017	50.0% [n=2]	0	50.0% [n=2]
2018	0	50% [n=1]	50% [n=1]
2019	33.3% [n=1]	33.3% [n=1]	33.3% [n=1]
2020	—	—	—
2021	75.0% [n=3]	0	25.0% [n=1]
TOTALS	46.2% [n=6]	15.4% [n=2]	38.5% [n=5]

Quantifying *Stance* toward EI

Stance toward EI in *Libération*

	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Negative</i>
2017	50.0% [n=2]	50.0% [n=2]	0
2018	—	—	—
2019	66.6% [n=2]	33.3% [n=1]	0
2020	0	0	100% [n=1]
2021	27% [n=1]	83% [n=5]	0
TOTALS	35.7% [n=5]	57.1% [n=8]	7.1% [n=1]

What Distribution of Stances Tells Us

- **Le Figaro:** Stance toward EI is **mostly negative, never positive**
 - *Le Figaro*: Most conservative paper in corpus
 - Has historically taken a more conservative stance toward linguistic issues (Vicari 2021: 113)
- **Le Monde:** More balanced distribution of stances: Stances congregate at two poles, either **negative or positive**
 - Reported to represent “French national ideology” (Le 2002:388)
 - → Cultural *split* in attitudes towards EI
- **Libération:** Stance toward EI is mostly **neutral, sometimes positive, rarely negative**
 - EI has more positive connotations in left-leaning spaces
- These different distributions indicate that “l’écriture inclusive” has different connotations—and different **rhetorical uses**— for each paper

Results

Qual Excerpt #1 Figaro.2021.4.Ferry
Title: 'La grammaire est elle "fasciste"?'

'[pour] les partisans de l'écriture inclusive...la langue est fasciste et la grammaire une forme insidieuse de domination des dominés par la « violence symbolique », mais il y a plus : le patriarcat, capitaliste, raciste et blanc ne se contente pas d'écraser l'ouvrier sous sa botte fascisante, mais ce sont aussi les femmes et les « racisés », voire avec eux la nature et les « bêtes », qui sont les premières victimes de l'oppression que véhicule la langue, l'écriture inclusive étant désormais un passage obligé non seulement pour les décoloniaux, les écoféministes et les Verts, mais aussi pour les véganes.'

English

[For]supporters of inclusive writing...language is fascist and grammar [is] an insidious form of domination of the dominated by "symbolic violence," but there's more: The patriarchy, capitalist, racist and white is not content to crush the worker under its fascist boot, but also women and the "racialized," indeed, even nature and "beasts," who are the first victims of the oppression for which language is the vehicle, inclusive writing being moreover an obligation not only for decolonialists, ecofeminists, and the Greens, but also for vegans.

Results

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Stance

- (-) toward EI

Rhetorical Function

- EI → Political ideology

Results

Qual Excerpt #2: Figaro.2021.4.Ferry
Title: 'La grammaire est elle "fasciste"?'

'[pour] les partisans de l'écriture inclusive...la langue est fasciste et la grammaire une forme insidieuse de domination des dominés par la « violence symbolique », mais il y a plus : le patriarcat, capitaliste, raciste et blanc ne se contente pas d'écraser l'ouvrier sous sa botte fascisante, mais ce sont aussi les femmes et les « racisés », voire avec eux la nature et les « bêtes », qui sont les premières victimes de l'oppression que véhicule la langue, l'écriture inclusive étant désormais un passage obligé non seulement pour les décoloniaux, les écoféministes et les Verts, mais aussi pour les véganes.'

Thematic Groupings

- Culture Wars
 - Victimes
 - Femmes
 - écoféminists
- Censorship
 - Fasciste

Qual Excerpt #2: Figaro.2021.4.Ferry
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'[pour] les partisans de l'écriture inclusive...la langue est fasciste et la grammaire une forme insidieuse de domination des dominés par la « violence symbolique », mais il y a plus : le patriarcat, capitaliste, raciste et blanc ne se contente pas d'écraser l'ouvrier sous sa botte fascisante, mais ce sont aussi les femmes et les « racisés », voire avec eux la nature et les « bêtes », qui sont les premières victimes de l'oppression que véhicule la langue, l'écriture inclusive étant désormais un passage obligé non seulement pour les décoloniaux, les écoféministes et les Verts, mais aussi pour les véganes.'

Who's Involved—Social Actors

- Les partisans
- Des dominés
- l'ouvrier
- Les femmes
- Les racisés
- Les bêtes
- Victimes
- Les décoloniaux
- Les écoféministes
- Les Verts
- Les véganes

Results

Qual Excerpt #2 Monde.2019.10.Delorme
Title: Forum philo. 'Dénommer l'Autre, c'est l'incarcérer de mots"

Les réticences à la féminisation des noms de métier...à l'écriture inclusive et au discours identitaire des minorités en lutte contre les oppressions, révèlent la même chose que les protestations contre le mariage gay: ceux qui sont contre savent bien que toucher aux signifiants ('madame la présidente,' 'messieurs les mariés,' 'iels refont le monde') change les pôles du pouvoir. Rien n'a plus le même sens, le signifié s'emplit de nouveaux référents. Une fois que mute le code dans lequel on s'exprime, l'espace du pensable se déploie autrement.

English

The hesitations toward the feminization of names and titles, toward inclusive writing and toward minority identitarian discourse in fighting against oppression, reveal the same thing as the protests against gay marriage: Those who are against [these things] know well that to nudge the signifiers ('madame president,' 'the misters married,' 'they [neut] remake the world,') changes the poles of power. Nothing retains the same sense, the signified is filled with new referents. Once the code in which we express ourselves is mutated, the conceivable space is otherwise unfurled.

Results

Qual Excerpt #2 Monde.2019.10.Delorme
Title: Forum philo. 'Dénommer l'Autre, c'est l'incarcérer de mots"

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Stance

- (+) toward EI

Rhetorical Function

- Meta-commentary: An author's stance toward EI reveals their stance toward the oppressed
- EI → signals anti-hegemonic positionality
- EI → gesture toward futurity, expansion of thought

Results

Qual Excerpt #2 Monde.2019.10.Delorme
Title: Forum philo. 'Dénommer l'Autre, c'est l'incarcérer de mots"

Les réticences à la **féminisation** des noms de métier...à **l'écriture inclusive** et au discours identitaire des **minorités** en lutte contre les **oppressions**, révèlent la même chose que les protestations contre le mariage gay: ceux qui sont contre savent bien que toucher aux **signifiants** ('madame la présidente,' 'messieurs les mariés,' 'iels refont le monde') change les pôles du pouvoir. Rien n'a plus le même sens, **le signifié** s'emplit de nouveaux référents. Une fois que mute le **code** dans lequel on **s'exprime**, l'espace du pensable se déploie autrement.

Key Terms

Thematic Groupings

- Culture Wars
 - Oppressions
 - Minorités
- Communication
 - Code
 - Significance
 - Référents
 - Le signifié
 - s'exprime
-



Conclusion

- Authorial **stances** toward EI are not evenly distributed, and correlate with overall ideological position of a given journal
 - E.g., More *conservative* journal (Le Figaro) has no opinion pieces with a positive stance toward EI
 - But why? Because they are taking a stance against what they see EI to symbolize, which includes...
- Issues related to six different **thematic axes**, including Culture Wars, Censorship, Sexism, Language Change, Communication, and French Cultural Heritage
- In **close readings**, we saw how l'écriture inclusive can have different valences for different authors
 - *Le Figaro Excerpt*: EI symbolizes **leftist movements**, which author took a **stance against**
 - *Le Monde Excerpt*: EI Symbolizes **expansive possibilities of the future**, which author took a **stance toward**
- **'L'écriture inclusive'** is rhetorical shorthand for a wide field of orientations

Three Major Questions

01

How are prominent French daily newspapers framing discussions of *l'Écriture Inclusive*? Discussions framed differently depending on political ideology of a given paper—broadly, the more conservative paper (Le Figaro) takes a more negative stance than either *Le Monde* or *Libération*

02

What does *l'écriture inclusive* look like for opinion writers? Chiefly, the *graphies tronquées*

03

What does *l'écriture inclusive* stand for in opinion pieces? Not just a way of writing, but rhetorical shorthand for different ideologies (e.g., leftism, fight against oppression)



Contact Information

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Key Terms/Key Lemmas.

- Genre (*genré, dégenré...*)
 - Féminisation (*féminiser, déféminiser...*)
 - *Féminisme (*féminité...*)
 - Homme
 - Femme
 - Sexe
 - Masculin (*Masculinisation...*)
- Langue (*novlangue, langage...*)
 - Grammaire (*grammatical...*)
 - Point médian
 - Parole
 - Mot
 - Orthographe
 - Épicène
 - Générique
 - Neutre (*neutraliser...*)
 - Barbarisme
 - Doublet (*réduplication...*)
 - Alternance
- Politique
 - Culture (*multiculturalisme*)
 - Woke (*wokisme...*)
 - Progressive (*progressisme...*)
 - Guache (*gauchisme, islamo-gauchisme..*)
 - Marx (*marxisme...*)
 - Fascisme
- Guerre
 - Victime (*victimaire...*)
 - Militer (*militant, militantes, militarisme...*)
 - Révolution
- Identité (*identitaire...*)
 - Minorité
 - Race
 - Noir
 - Blanc
 - Queer
 - Québec
 - Américan
- Égalité (*égalitaire...*)
 - *Sexisme (*sexiste, non-sexiste...*)
 - Discrimination
 - Inclusive (*inclusif...*)



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