Attitudes and stereotypes of gender inclusive strategies in Italian

Rosalba Nodari

Università di Siena

rosalba.nodari@unisi.it

Introduction: Italian language and morphology

- **Italian**: inflectional language with an overt expression of a morphological gender marking (Corbett 1991; Thornton 2006).

Il maestr-o 'the teacher' M.SG

La maestr-a 'the teacher' F. SG

- Sexist and non inclusive use of Italian language

e.g. *cari tutti* 'dear all' M. PLU. for addressing a mixed audience;

e.g. Il presidente Stefania Rossi 'the president Stefania Rossi' M.SG. addressing a woman
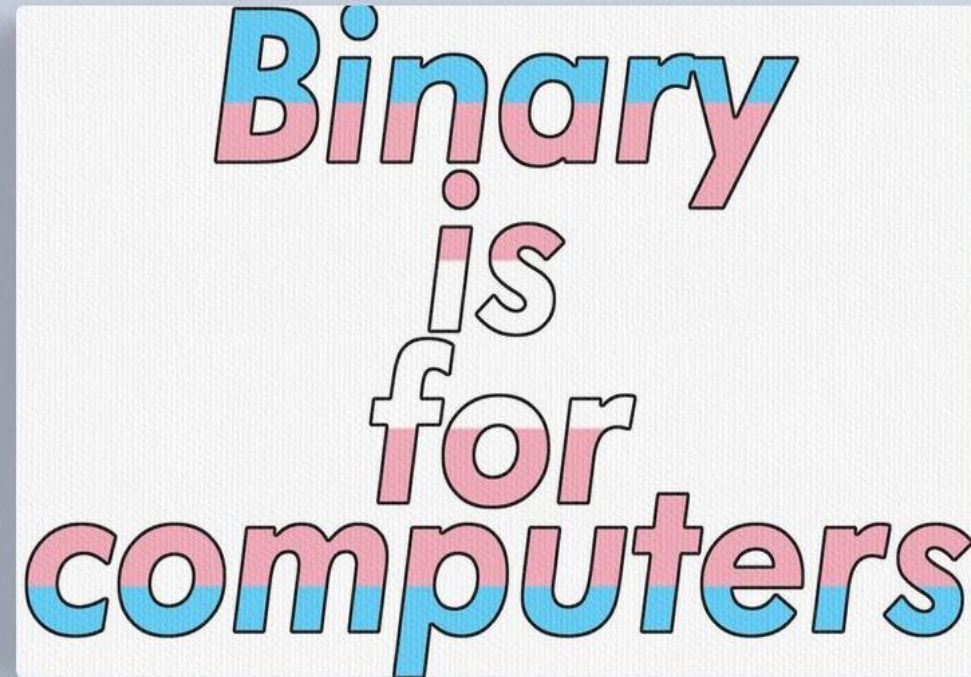
Italian, grammatical gender and gender inclusive strategies

- Alma Sabatini - *Raccomandazioni per un uso non sessista della lingua italiana,* 1986 (see again Thornton presentation)

- **Feminization of nouns** e.g. *il poliziotto -> la poliziotta* 'the policeman' -> 'the policewoman'

- **Reduplication** e.g. *i cittadini e le cittadine* 'the citizens'

- **Impersonal forms, invariable nouns and collective or impersonal names** e.g. *il corpo docente* vs. *i docenti* M.PL. 'the teaching staff', *il collegio elettorale* vs. *gli elettori* electoral council

(cf. Marcato and Thune 2002).

New debate on gender and language

- Linguistic representation of **gender fluid** and **nonbinary people**
- **New linguistic strategies**: **neutralization** of the morpheme that conveys the grammatical gender information
- **Graphical solutions**:

   -x *carx tuttx* 'dear all'; **-*** *car* tutt**; IPA symbol schwa **[ə]** *carə tuttə*, **-u** *caru tuttu*

- Neutralization for nonbinary or for addressing mixed audience:

   - *e.g. cari tutti, care tutte, car* tutt**
   VS *car* tutt**

(Marotta & Monaco 2016; Gheno 2019; Maturi 2020; Manera 2021)

Italian public debate
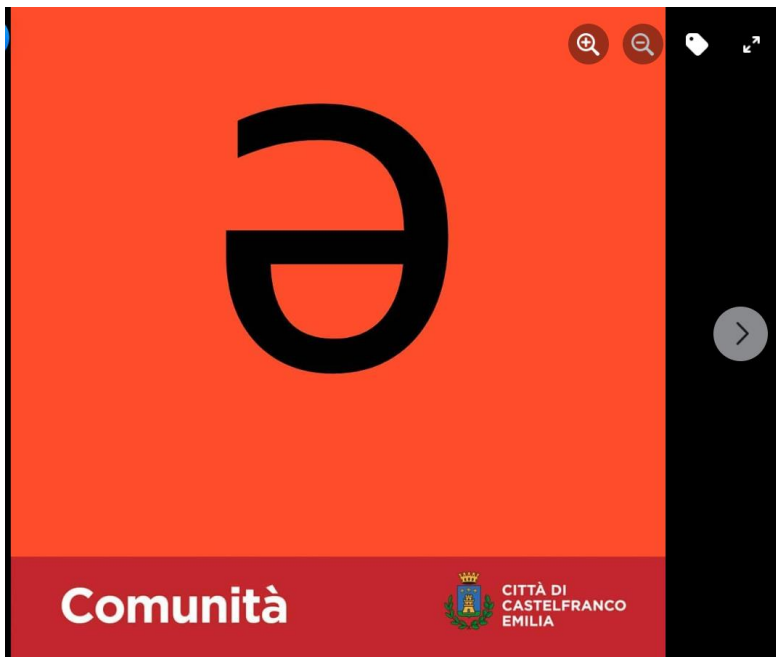
Città di Castelfranco Emilia
12 aprile 2021

#buongiorno #CastelfrancoEmilia
Da diverse settimane avete visto comparire in alcuni nostri post il simbolo presente nella card 👇, la #schwa, ə, a chiusura di alcuni termini usati.
❓Di cosa si tratta?
Ecco una breve spiegazione! 👇
Il rispetto e la valorizzazione delle #differenze sono principi fondamentali della nostra #comunità e il linguaggio che utilizziamo quotidianamente dovrebbe rispecchiare tali principi.
Ecco perchè vogliamo fare maggiore attenzione a come ci esprim... **Altro...**

mattia feltri ✔
@mattiafeltri

#Buongiorno n.791 - "Allarmi siam fascistə" ovvero lezioni di graficamente e foneticamente corretto".
Leggi il Buongiorno di Mattia Feltri
lastampa.it/topnews/firme/... via @LaStampa

Translate Tweet

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L'articolo che volevo scrivere ma che era già stato scritto

Il commento che il direttore di MicroMega voleva scrivere sullo schwa, ennesima idiozia reazionaria spacciata per progressista, è già stato scritto su Linkiesta. Per gentile concessione lo riproduciamo.

Paolo Flores d'Arcais   19 Aprile 2021

PROCEDURA PER IL CONSEGUIMENTO DELL'ABILITAZIONE SCIENTIFICA NAZIONALE ALLE FUNZIONI DI PROFESSORE UNIVERSITARIO DI PRIMA E SECONDA FASCIA (D.D. 553/2021 come rettificato da D.D. 589/2021) PER IL SETTORE CONCORSUALE 13/B3 – Organizzazione Aziendale

VERBALE N. 2 del 02/12/2021

Il giorno 02/12/2021 alle ore 11:00 si insedia la Commissione nazionale per l'Abilitazione Scientifica Nazionale alle funzioni di professorə universitario di prima e seconda fascia del Settore Concorsuale 13/B3 Organizzazione aziendale, nominata con Decreto Direttoriale n. 1611 del 18/07/202.

Sono presenti i Professorɜ:

Prof. ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮   ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Lo schwa (ə)? No, grazie. Pro lingua nostra

PROCEDURA PER IL CONSEGUIMENTO DELL'ABILITAZIONE SCIENTIFICA NAZIONALE

23.286 hanno firmato. Arriviamo a

Nodari - Attitudes and stereotypes of gender inclusive strategies in Italian

6

Language ideologies vs gender ideologies

- Political value of linguistic strategies such as neutralization: different political stances and different feminist views

- Different stances for adopting or rejecting specific linguistic strategies can be useful for accessing **different language ideologies** (cf. Cameron 2003).
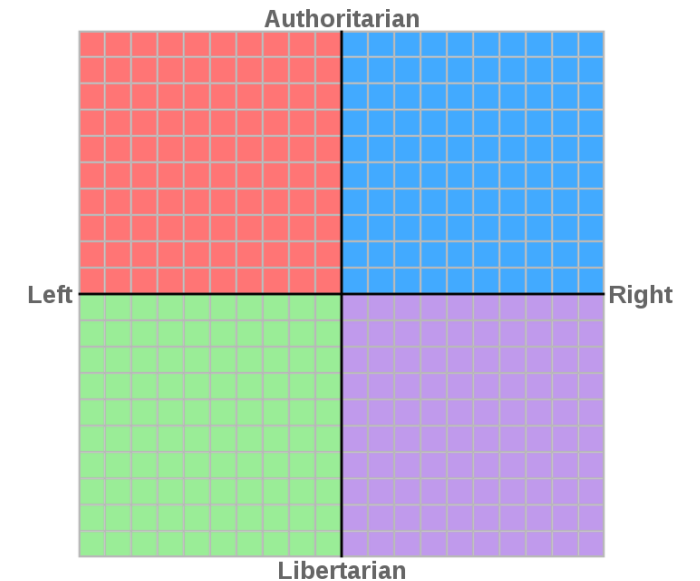
Italian literature review

- How different strategies (i.e. reduplication, neutralization) are used (Comandini 2021, Safina 2022)

- How sexist language can be a vehicle of sexist prejudices (Biemmi 2010)

- How some non-sexist strategies, such as feminization, can activate negative stereotypes related to low status or low competence (cf. Mucchi Faina, Barro 2001; Cacciari, Padovani 2007; Merkel, Maass, Frommelt 2012, where it is shown how some professions declined with the masculine form are associated with a higher status with respect to the corresponding feminine form, e.g. professore vs professoressa; cf. Sczesny, Formanowicz, Moser 2016)

- **How people react to the use of inclusive language**

- **? …**

(for a similar case cf. Slemp 2013).

The current research (ongoing)

- What are the attitudes of the Italian linguistic community towards gender inclusive language?

- Is there a relationship between self-declared political stances and attitudes toward gender inclusive linguistic usage?

- Can we observe a change in attitudes?

Experimental design

- Pre-test for selection of texts of appropriate length
- A questionnaire with a selection of 8 ecological texts taken from Facebook, emails, and public communication
- **4 texts with reduplication strategies** (es. ciao a tutti e tutte), 2 formal - 2 informal
- **4 texts with neutralization strategies** (es. buongiorno a tutt*), 2 formal - 2 informal
- 125 answers: 76 F, 43 M, 5 other, 2 without answer; btw 18 – 50 y.o.
- 50,4% univ. degree, 40% high school, 10% PhD or equivalent
- 65% respondents have concerns in feminist issues

# Theoretical framework: stereotype content model SCM and IASNL-G

- Stereotype content model (SCM; Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002) – covert attitudes
  - Social perception of the out-group is based on the dimensions of competence and warmth
  - The two dimensions are influenced by status and competition: the higher the status, the higher the competence, the higher the competition, the lower the warmth
  - SCM and linguistics: perception of non-native accents, perception of regional accents etc.
  - Speakers of standard varieties are generally perceived as more competent, where speakers of local varieties are better assessed along the dimensions of warmth and solidarity (e.g. MacFarlane, Stuart-Smith, 2012)
- IASNL-G Inventory of Attitudes toward Sexist/Non sexist Language – General: 21 items on a Likert scale that attempt to verify self declared attitudes toward gender inclusive strategies

Competence		
	High	Low
High / warm	Admiration	Pity
Low / cold	Envy	Contempt

Warmth

The questionnaire

- First section: 10 questions on a 5 point Likert scale
  Who do you believe might have written this text? (SCM section)
  - How much do you judge him\her being:
    - competent (4 adjectives)
    - Warm (4 adjectives)
    - With high status
    - Being competitive
  - Do you believe the author is a male\female?
  - Do you find this text being acceptable\non acceptable?

- Second section: 21 items of the **IASNL-G; Inventory of Attitudes toward Sexist/Non sexist Language – General** (Parks & Roberton 2000; Italian translation Maass & Merkel 2013)

- Third section: personal data (gender, age, school title, <u>concern over feminist issues</u>)

Results 1 - SCM
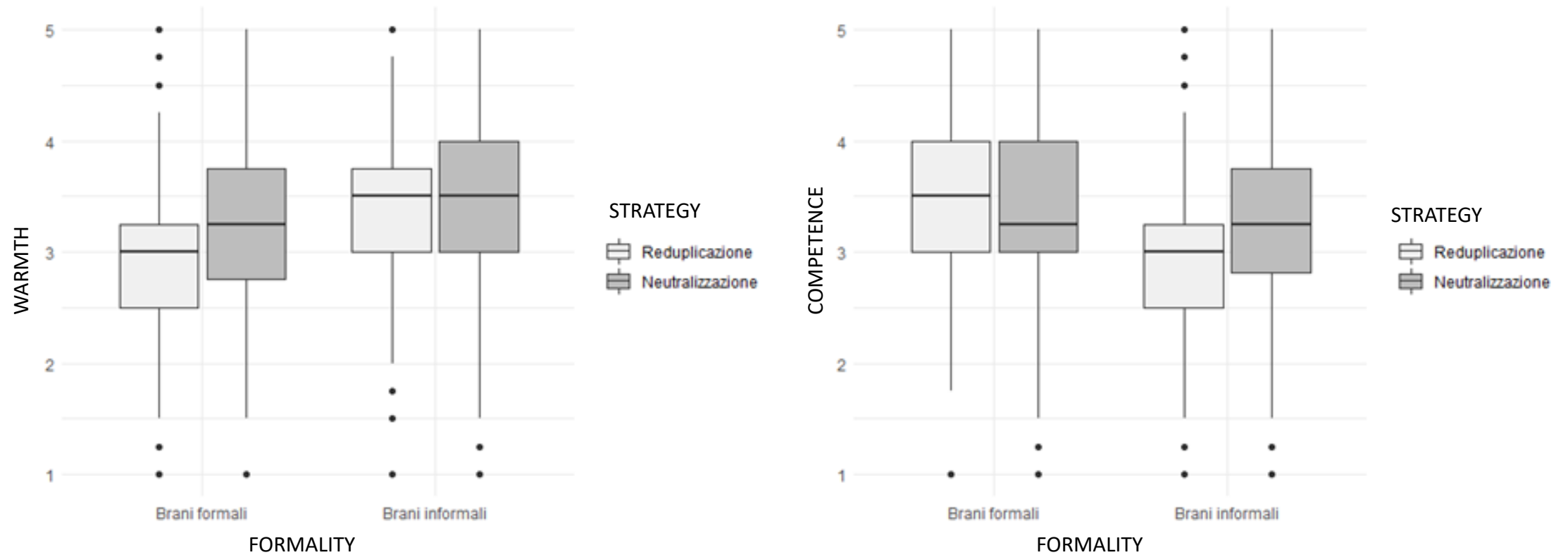
Higher scores = higher warmth and competence

Results 2 – Acceptability and perceived sex

Strategies	Acceptabilty		Perceived sex of the writer	
	Formal texts	Informal texts	Formal texts	Informal texts
Reduplication (cari tutti, care tutte)	**4,0** (sd. 0,9)	3,5 (sd. 1,2)	2,9 (1,1)	3,8 (1,2)
Neutralization (car* tutt*)	3,8 (s.d. 1,2)	3,6 (sd. 1,2)	**3,5** (1,2)	3,1 (1,3)

Remember: scores between 1 – 5
Scores closer to five = acceptable
Scores closer to one = non acceptable

Remember: scores between 1 – 5
Scores closer to five = perceived female
Scores closer to one = perceived male
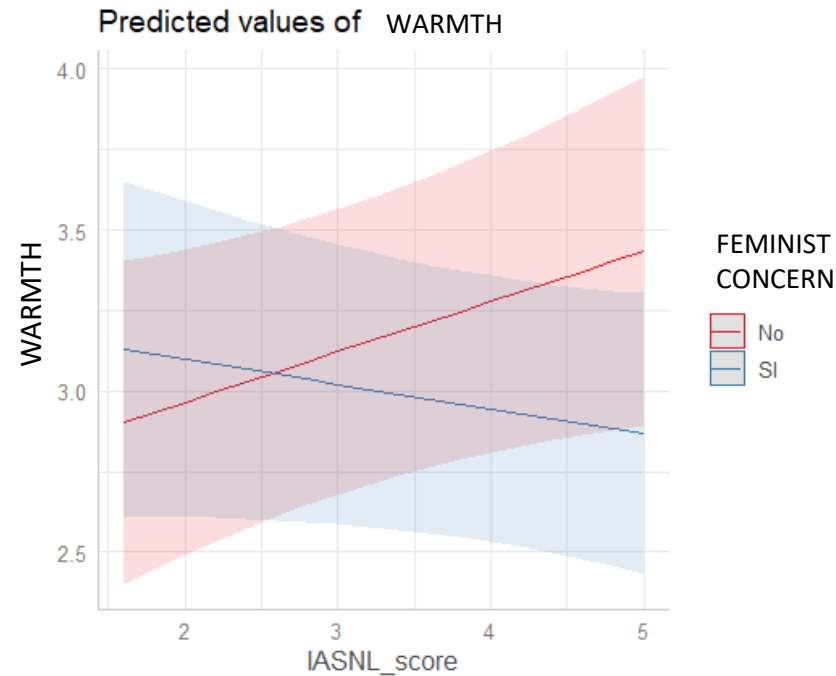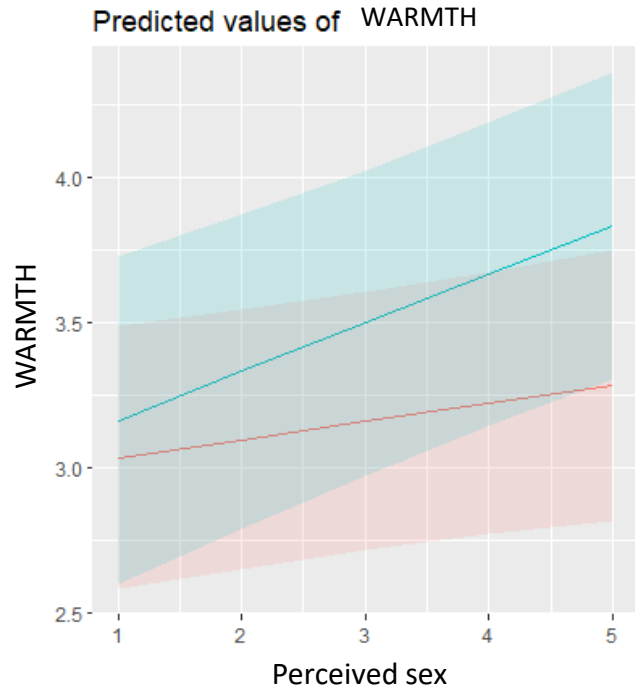
Results 3 – Statistical analysis WARMTH DIMENSION

Anova III type with different variables

- Informal texts are perceived as warmer

- The perceived sex of the writer and the age of the respondents to the questionnaire were significant.

- The texts are perceived as warmer when they are perceived as produced by female individuals

- Younger people rated the texts as generally warmer.

Results 3 – Statistical analysis – Interactions WARMTH DIMENSION

Predicted values of WARMTH

STRATEGY
— Reduplicazione
— Neutralizzazione

Predicted values of WARMTH

FEMINIST CONCERN
— No
— SI

- Regardless of the strategies used, those who are interested in feminist issues and have more positive attitudes towards inclusive language judge the writers as less warm;

- Those who do not declare themselves feminist but still have a positive attitude towards inclusive language tend to consider warmer both the strategies used

Results 4 – Statistical analysis WARMTH DIMENSION

Predicted values of WARMTH
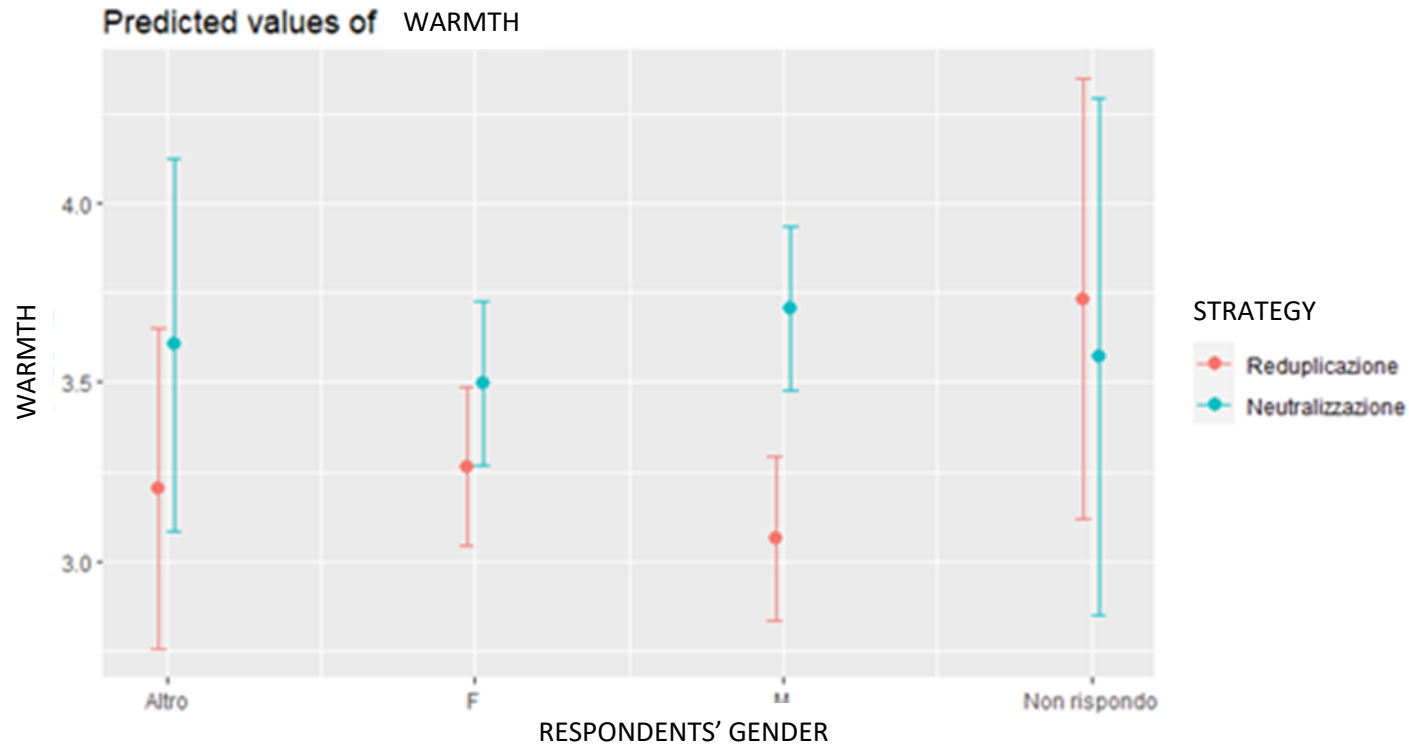
Interaction between gender and strategies. Female respondents do not always prefer neutralization. Male respondents show differences between the two strategies

Results 4 – Statistical analysis COMPETENCE DIMENSION

Anova III type with different variables

- Neutralization texts are perceived as more competent

- Higher levels of competence associated with texts perceived as written by female persons

- Older respondents are less likely to associate writers with high levels of competence, regardless of the type of text and strategies used.

Results 4 – Statistical analysis COMPETENCE DIMENSION

Predicted values of COMPETENCE
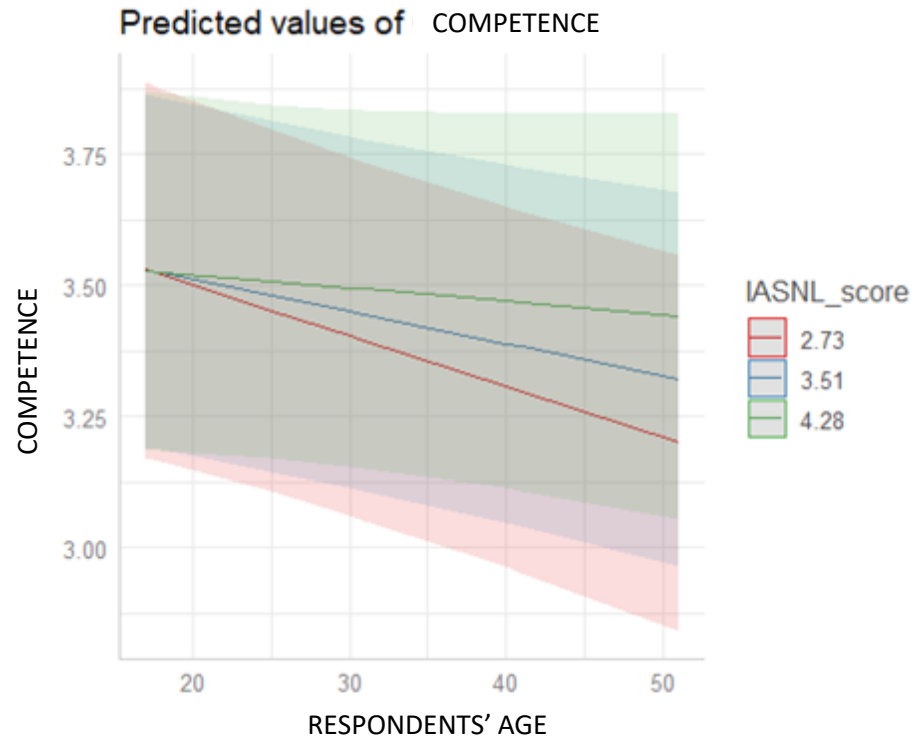
Younger speakers, regardless of their IASNL score, evaluate the writers as more competent. For older respondents only those who obtain a high IASNL score tend to evaluate the writers who use gender inclusive language as being more competent

Discussion

1. Fruitful application of the SCM to written texts.

2. No negative stereotypes associated with neutralisation strategies. Neutralisation appears to be better evaluated on the warmth and competence dimension. Admiration stereotype?

3. Controversial results regarding concern in feminist issues: second wave vs third wave feminism?

4. Change in progress in attitudes toward gender inclusive language: older people appear to have a more conservative language ideology

Problems and further directions

- Evaluation of short texts: limitation
- Make a three way comparison with sexist texts that do not use inclusive strategies.
- SCM and written texts: some dimensions are perceived as difficult (i.e., competition dimension)
- Data imbalance: 65% respondents concerned in feminist issues
- Test the questionnaire with different respondents.

Some quotes from the free answer session

- *L'uso dello ə è linguisticamente insensato* 'The use of ə is linguistically nonsense'

- *Personalmente non mi piace per nulla questa modalità di utilizzo dei simboli come * e la "e" ribaltata. A mio avviso rendono il testo illeggibile, non aggiungono nulla alla volontà di essere inclusivi. Si può scrivere tranquillamente "Buongiorno a tutte e tutti" o a "Buongiorno a tutti/e" garantendo una sacrosanta leggibilità.* 'Personally, I don't like this way of using symbols like * and the inverted "e". In my opinion they make the text illegible, they add nothing to the desire to be inclusive. You can easily write "Good morning everybody" or "Good morning to all M.PL./F.PL." guaranteeing a sacrosanct legibility.

- *L'uso dello schwa in alcuni stimoli sembrava un po' pretenzioso.* "The use of schwa in some stimuli seemed a bit pretentious."

- *TROPPE SCHWA TROPPI ASTERISCHI* "Too much schwa too much asterisks2

Thank you!

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