

Language and Gender: Research and Desiderata

# Three wishes for French

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*Language and Gender: Academic Research and Practical Implementation*

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# A short overview

1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s	2020s
first critical works	debate about lexical considerations («féminisation lexicale»);  ... and about the use of (generically intended) personal nouns in the peripheral franco-phonie of the north	research on various theoretical and practical issues	... as well as psycholinguistic/psychological research on the way gendered forms are understood	2015-2017: revival of the discussion in France: under the name <i>écriture/langue inclusive</i> ; with hitherto unusual forms ( <i>agriculteurs.rice.s</i> )	a binary gender system vs. binary and non-binary identities 

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## 1 What about use?

- criticism of the use of generically intended masculine forms
  - suggested alternatives, e.g.:
    - double forms (*étudiantes et étudiants*)
    - abbreviated double forms (*étudiant-es, étudiant-e-x-s*, etc.)
    - indifferentiated («épicènes») forms (*responsables*)
    - collectives (*clientèle*)
- How large is the proportion of texts that deal with gender-specific forms?
  - (Elmiger 2021, Müller-Spitzer et al. 2023 (German))
- To what extent has the use changed over time? Will AI help with large-scale studies?
  - (Sökefeld et al. 2023 (German))
- What about lexical considerations and the use of gendered personal nouns in context?
  - (Aleksandrova & Meyer 2021, Fujimura 2005, Mihatsch & Schnedecker 2015, Schnedecker & Mihatsch 2018)

# 1 What about use?

- What about spoken language?

- language in interaction, turn-taking, utterance length, interruptions, etc.
- voice and its implication in gender (re)production
  - (Arnold 2015, Bailly 2009, Greco 2012, 2014)
- How stable/observable are categories like 'men', 'women', 'non-binary'? To what extent can we know whether there are differences between genders in language use?
  - intersectional properties; contextual importance of other; etc.
- «Women tend to use ... differently» vs.
- «Cis women in hierarchical superior positions, during online meetings, tend to use...»?

# 2 What about effects?

- Psycholinguistic research shows that
  - mental representation is biased towards a more specific understanding of generically intended masculine forms
  - other forms (e.g. double forms) induce more balanced representations
- This research is – often unjustly – subject to critique because of
  - small sample sizes
  - bias towards young university students
  - significance vs. effect strength
  - little context (what about «contextual dilution»?)

## 2 What about effects?

- And above all: How strong is the link between mental representation and «real life» (salaries, rights, real-life decisions, etc.)?
  - Few studies are able to take into account real-life consequences.

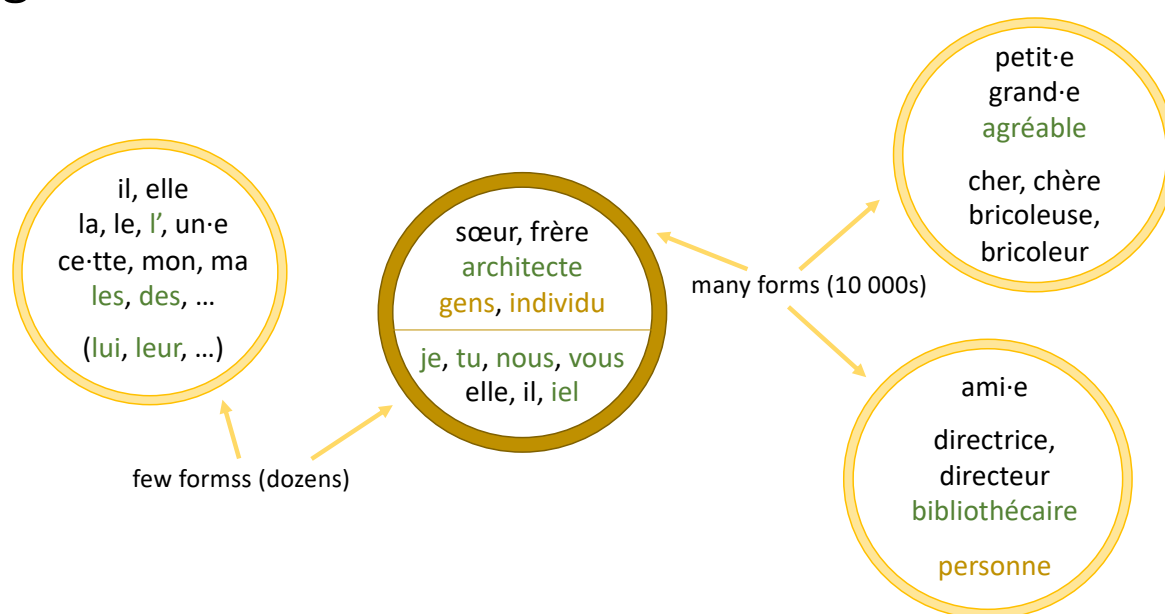


Mancomunidad de Municipios Valle del Guadiato (2007): *Cómo hablamos, -o/a. Lenguaje no sexista*. De la Peña Palacios, Eva M<sup>a</sup> (autora): 22 p.: p. 4

## 3 What about nonbinary language?

- Romance languages have (mostly) a binary language system.
- Simplified:
  1. la femme, l'homme; la clinicienne, le clinicien; la directrice, le directeur; la députée, le député; elle/il
  2. certaines/certains libraires; les élèves; la/le malade (jeune, âgée/âgé)
  3. la personne, l'individu
  4. la clientèle, le peuple

# Agreements



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## What about nonbinary language?

- Various individual forms as well as nonbinary systems have been suggested.
  - pronouns
    - *iel, al, ol, / toustes / tou·te·x·s*, etc.
  - abbreviated forms
    - *lecteurice, travailleuse*, etc.
  - complete debinarised systems
    - (Alpheratz 2018, Borde 2016, Knisely et al. 2023, Marsolier et al. 2024)
- How will French evolve? What differences between spontaneous and planned/suggested language use?

# Discussion

There are many more questions, e.g.

What is going on in the (global) francophone countries and regions?

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chronique: *Les genres réécrits*: <https://www.revue-glad.org/405>

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