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Gender exclusive and inclusive language in Finnish: Explaining use of masculine job titles

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Gender in Finnish

- Finnish genderless ≠ gender neutral
- No gendered pronouns → lexicon still gendered (e.g. *mother, son, girlfriend*)
- (-)*mies* (man) very productive as epicene
 - ▶ *Joka miehen oikeudet* (every *man's* rights)
 - ▶ Occupational titles, e.g. *esimies* (supervisor/foreman), *palomies* (fireman)
- Similar feminine constructions rare, but exist, e.g. *lentoemäntä* (stewardess; literal: flight hostess)
- Other gendered expressions, e.g., *mie-h-istö* (crew[+masc]), *miehittää* (to man); but also e.g. *äidinkieli* (mother tongue), *tytär-yhtiö* (daughter company)

Background

- Inclusive language initiatives fairly recent (Aamulehti, 2017; cf. Institute for the Languages of Finland statement in 2007)
 - inclusive options: mostly gender-neutral (instead of feminine or combination forms)
 - change ongoing, e.g. Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare 2021, city of Lahti 2023, city of Pori 2024
 - Why so late? Many reasons
 - Misperception of Finnish as gender-neutral (e.g. *Helsingin Sanomat*, Mansikka 2019)
 - Gender less visible → difficult to see the need for change? (see Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell & Laakso, 2012)
- Language users still divided

Previous research

- Kaisa Karppinen (2000): " Sanomalehtikielen mies-, nainen-, poika-, tyttö- ja tytär-sanojen käytön kvantitatiivis-kvalitatiivista tarkastelua. Lisensiaatintyö"
 - *-mies [man]* and *-nainen [woman]* in newspapers (different usages)
- Engelberg (2016): "*Yleispätevä mies. Suomen kielen geneerinen, piilevä ja kieliopillistuva maskuliinisuus*"
 - Perception of generic masculines (male bias)
 - survey experiments
- Shagal et al. (2022): "Gendered job titles in genderless languages: A case of Finno-Ugric"
 - pilot surveys and corpora investigation; different strategies
 - Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Aanaar Saami, Meadow Mari, Northern Mansi

Recent surge in MA theses: attitude surveys

Attitudes towards gendered/gender-neutral job titles:

- Kiviharju (2018): "Esimiehen muuttaminen esinaiseksi ei kelpaa."
Ammattinimikkeiden sukupuolittuneisuus ja sitä koskevat asenteet.
 - Online survey, <100 high school students
 - **Result: mixed attitudes**
- Kerälä (2020): Selvitysmies vai selvittäjä? : pohjoissuomalalaisten käsityksiä sukupuolittuneista ammattinimikkeistä.
 - Online survey, 100 participants from Northern Finland
 - **Result: mostly negative attitudes**
- Heikkilä (2021): "Miehet eivät ole lentoemäntiä, mutta naiset ovat esimerkiksi lakimiehiä." Sukupuolittuneisiin ja sukupuolineutraaleihin ammattinimikkeisiin kohdistuvat kieliasenteet.
 - Online survey, 118 participants
 - **Result: mixed attitudes**

Recent surge in MA theses: other foci

- Luodemäki (2019): Lakimies/juristi (lawyer [masc]/[neutral])
 - Implicit association test, 136 participants
 - Both masc. and neutral associated more with men than women
- Väisänen (2023): Gendered/gender-neutral job titles in newspapers
 - Longitudinal study (2000-2021), *Helsingin sanomat*
 - Use of gender-neutral titles has increased (nearly as frequent as gendered titles)

Present study: Usage & attitudes

Research questions

- ▶ Focus on occupational nouns with *-mies* (man) and *-emäntä* (hostess) (see also Stout & Dasgupta, 2011; Vervecken et al., 2013)
- ▶ Main research questions:
 1. Do Finnish speakers use exclusive or inclusive language?
 2. Do Finnish speakers find exclusive language acceptable?
 3. What type of attitudes do Finnish speakers have towards exclusive/inclusive language use?
 4. Is there variation based on age, gender, education level or region?

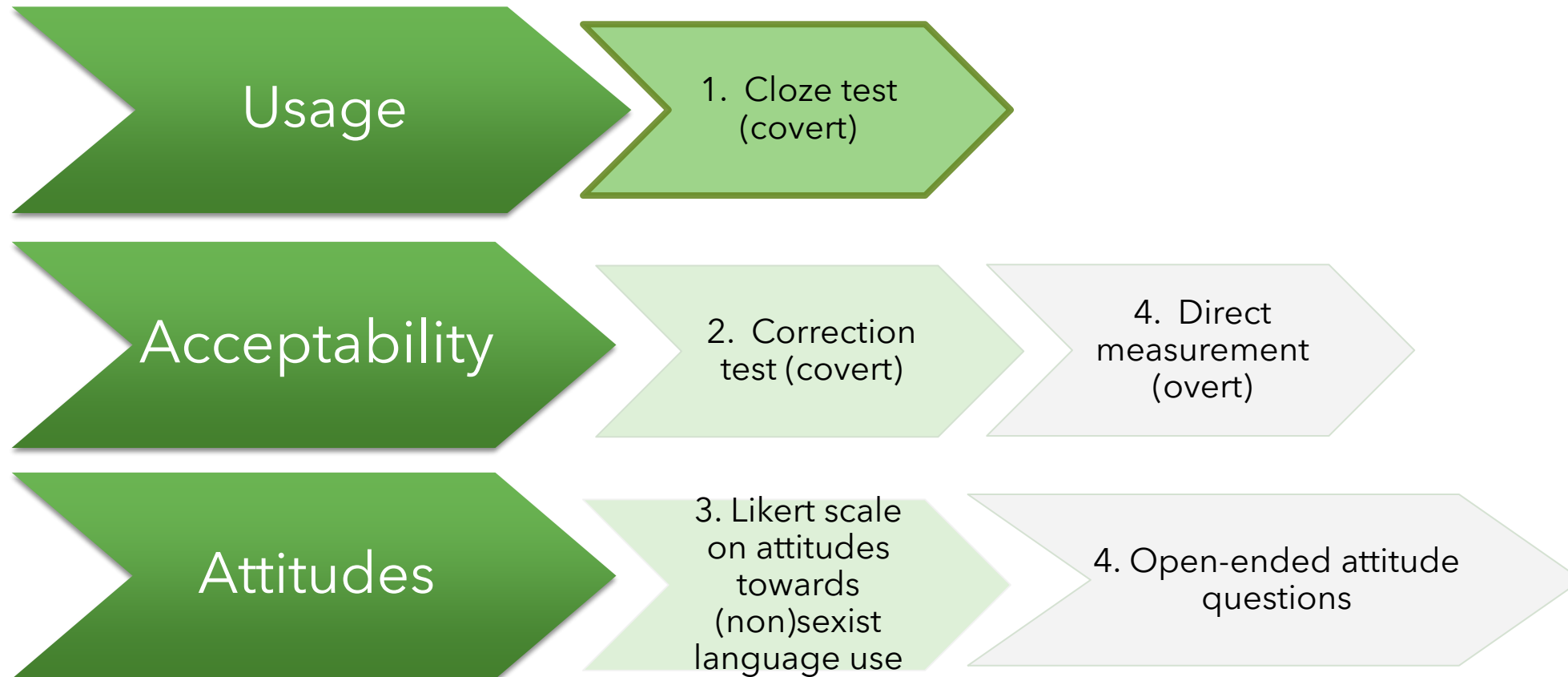
Present study: Survey

- Online survey (spring 2022)
- Several pilots before data collection
- Advertised on discussion forums and social media (e.g., Finnish Reddits, Facebook groups, Suomi24)
- Gender exclusive language focus covert for participants (with ethical approval)

Participants

- 1146 participants
- All native Finnish speakers (about 6% bilinguals)
- 54% cis men, 31% cis women, 7% nonbinary, 3% trans men, 1% trans women (rest: other/missing)
- Age range 15 to 90 years-old, but 86% are under 40-years-old
- 70% have college/university-level education

Survey design



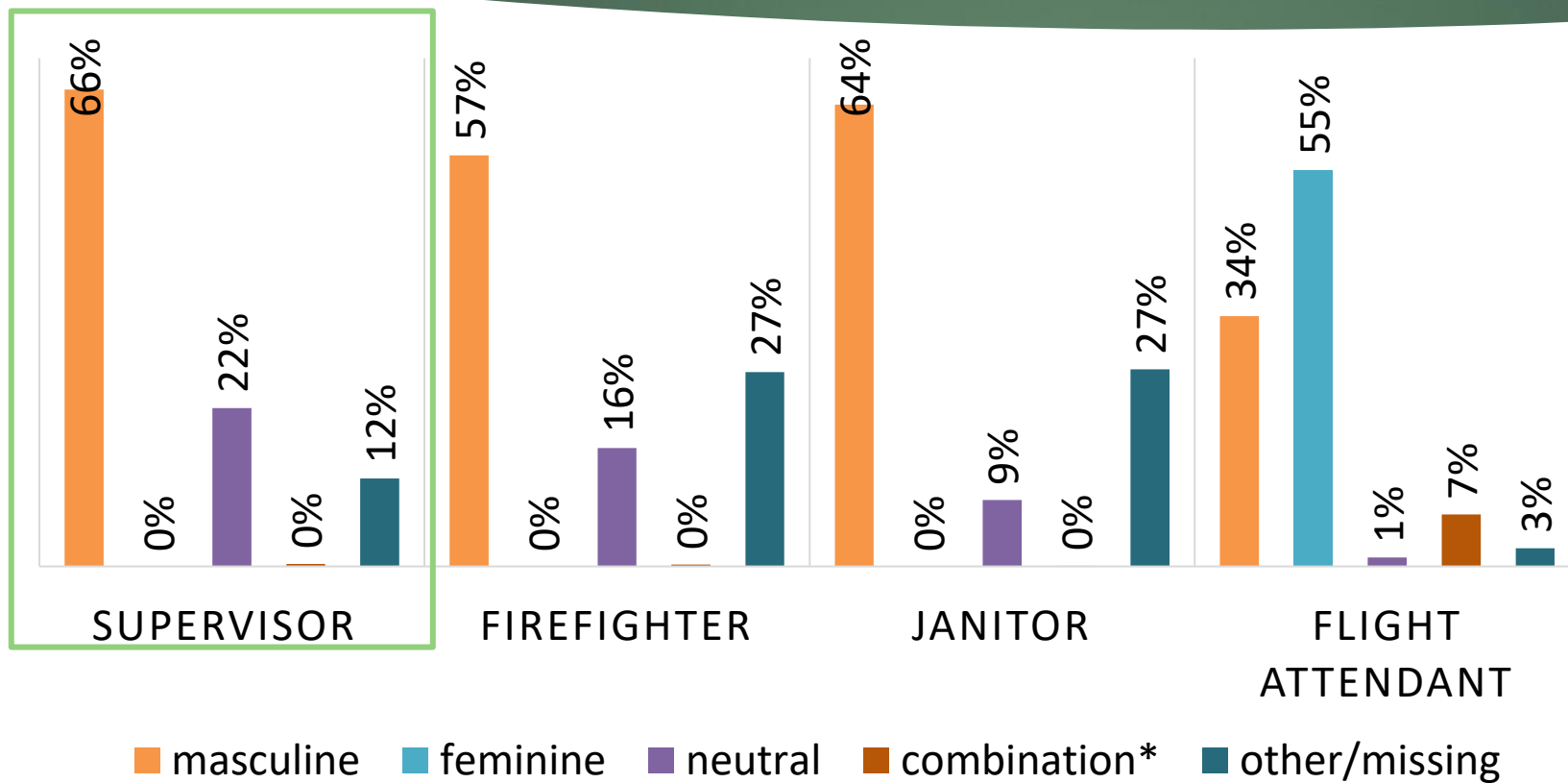
Usage: cloze test

- Only 4 test variables, 12 fillers
- Test variables:
 - ▶ stereotypically male: *palomies/pelastaja* (fireman/firefighter) & *huoltomies/huoltovastaava* (janitor)
 - ▶ stereotypically female: *lentoemäntä/matkustamotyöntekijä* (air hostess/ flight attendant)
 - ▶ stereotypically 'neutral' masculine: ***esimies/esihenkilö*** (supervisor[+masc])

Usein työntekijät kokevat, että lähin _____ ei puutu työpaikalla ilmeneviin ongelmiin tarpeeksi napakasti.

Employees often feel that their closest _____ does not address the problems that arise in the workplace firmly enough

Usage: descriptive results



Traditional: lentoemäntä
[+fem]

Masc. title: Stuerkki [+masc]

(Gender neutral neologism:
matkustamotyöntekijä/
cabin crew worker)

N=1146

*combination: mostly
masculine+neutral, only a
handful of other combinations

Esimies or esihenkilö?

- ▶ Logistic regression analysis (to explain variation)
- ▶ Tested IVs: Age, gender, residential region (6 regions), education level, attitudes towards (non)sexist language use, covert acceptability of *esimies*
 - ▶ *Covert acceptability: participants corrected test sentences with masc. job titles*
 - ▶ *Attitudes towards (non)sexist language use: 12 items, some adapted to the Finnish context from Parks & Roberton (2000) and Hekanaho (2020)*
- ▶ All significant in univariate analyses, but...

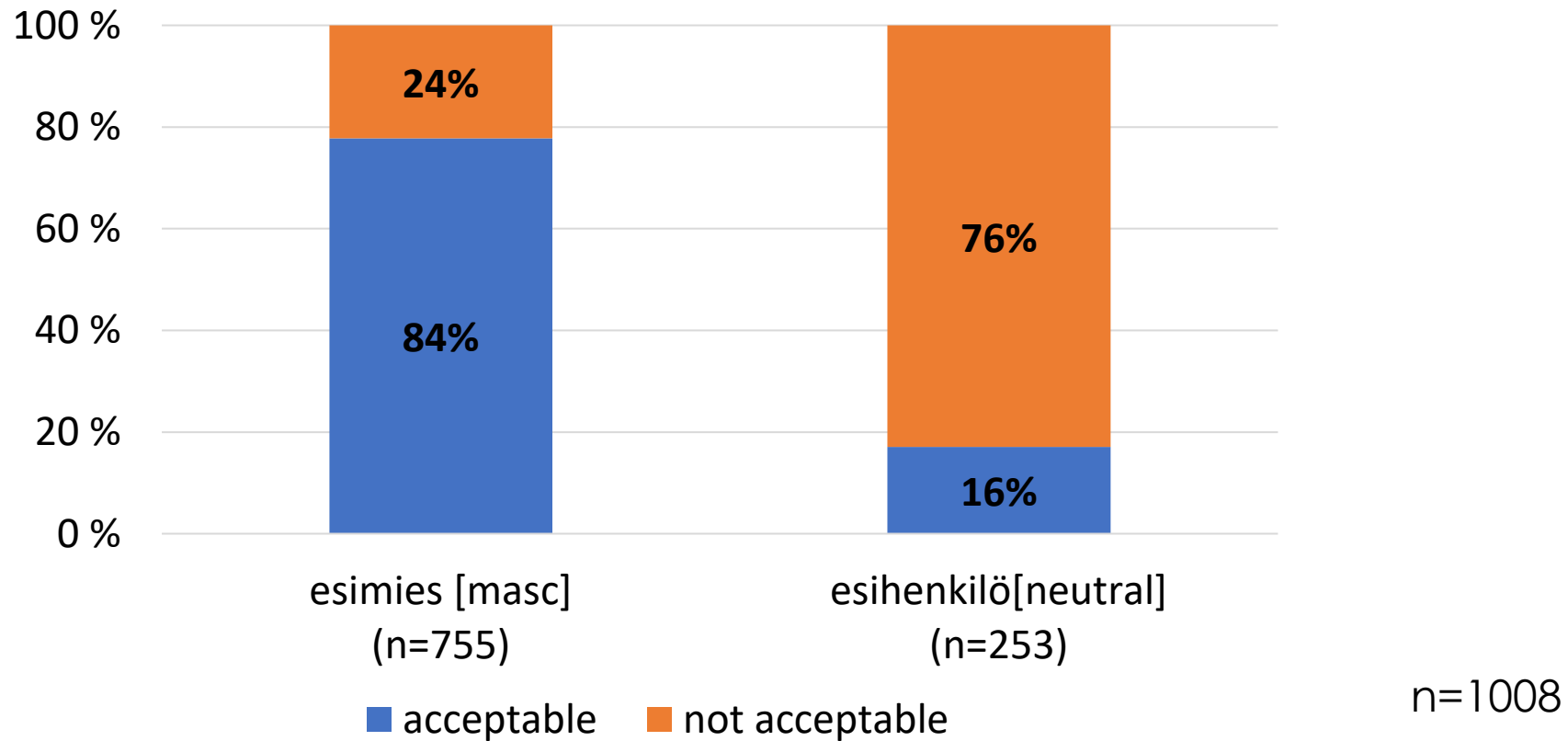
Logistic regression model: use of *esihenkilö* (and *esimies*)

n = 982 (no outliers excluded), AUROC 0.86, Nagelkerke R square 0.48

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	OR	inverse	95% C.I. for OR	
							OR	Lower	Upper
(non)sexist lang attitudes	-1.33	0.14	90.85	1.00	<0.001	0.26	3.79	0.20	0.35
<i>esimies</i> acceptability	2.00	0.23	74.75	1.00	<0.001	7.37		4.68	11.58
No higher ed.			13.17	3.00	0.00				
Voc. higher ed.	0.29	0.29	1.00	1.00	0.32	1.33		0.76	2.35
BA-level	0.46	0.29	2.56	1.00	0.11	1.59		0.90	2.79
Graduate levels	0.87	0.26	11.60	1.00	<0.001	2.39		1.45	3.95
Constant	0.97	0.35	7.63	1.00	0.01	2.64			

OR: Odds ratio, i.e. comparing the odds of something happening between two groups

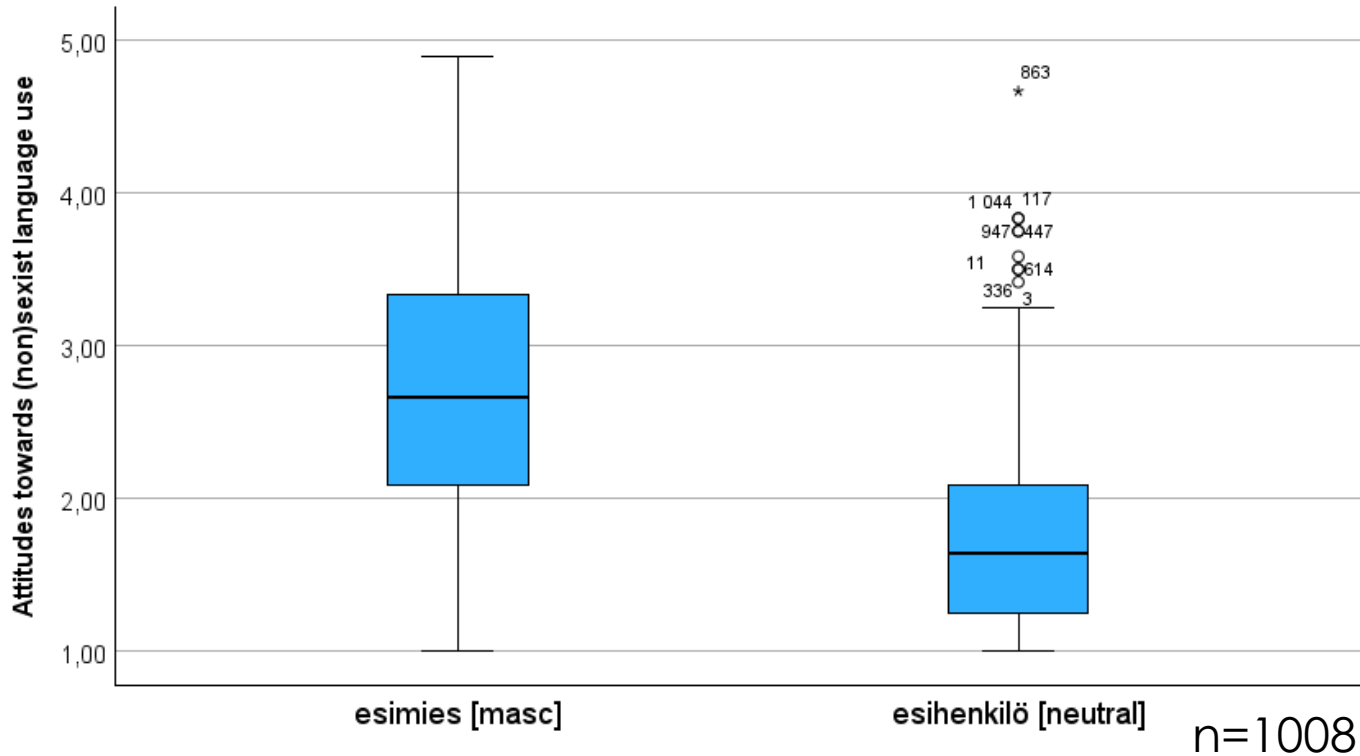
Covert acceptability



Attitudes towards (non)sexist language use

Example items

17



Women who think that being called a "chairman" is sexist are misinterpreting the word "chairman."

Jos nainen kokee "lakimieheksi" kutsutuksi tulemisen seksistiseksi, tulkitsee hän sanan merkityksen väärin.

Worrying about sexist language is a trivial activity.

On turhaa murehtia seksistisestä kielenkäytöstä.

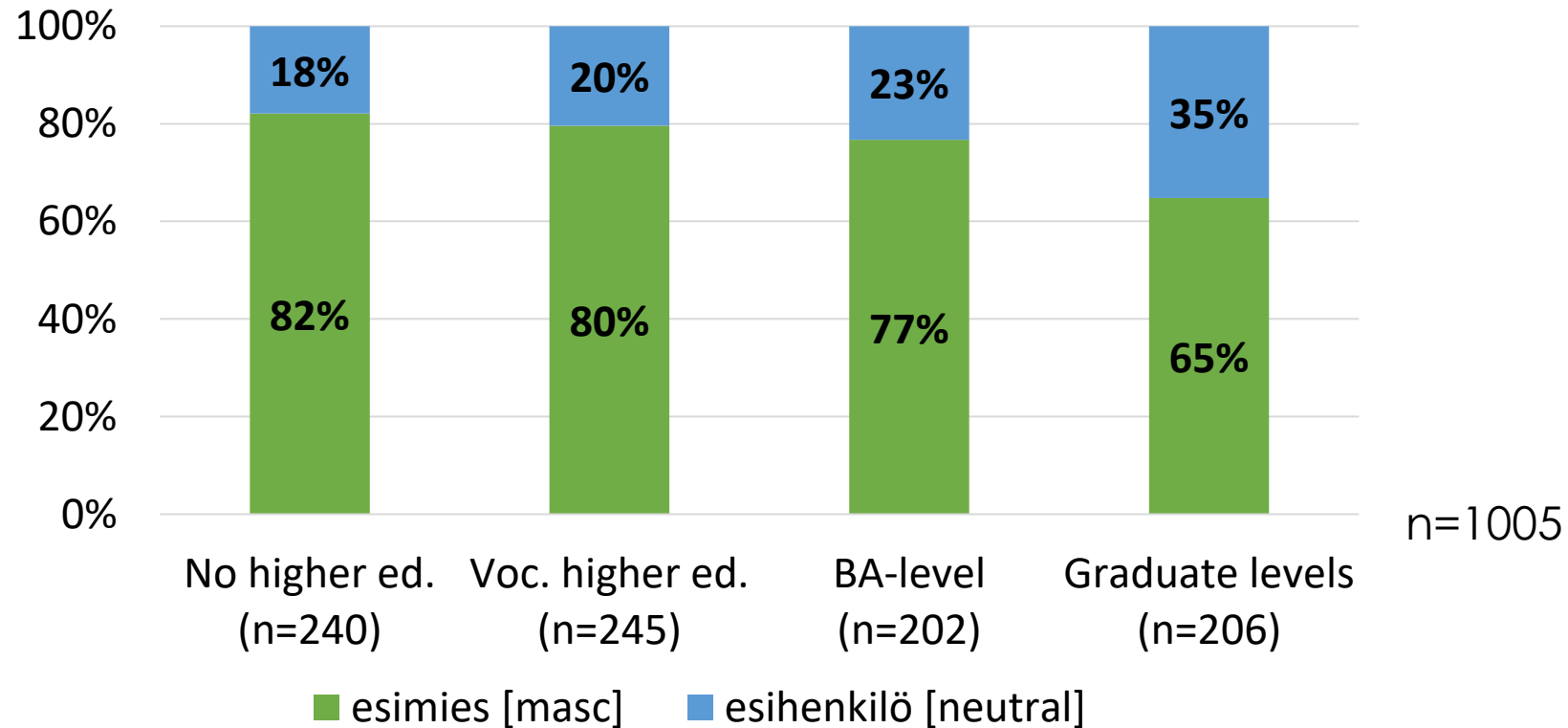
If the original meaning of the word "he" was "person," we should continue to use "he" to refer to both males and females today.

Koska "esimiehellä" on aina voinut viitata myös naisiin, voidaan sanaa käyttää jatkossakin naisiin viitatessa.

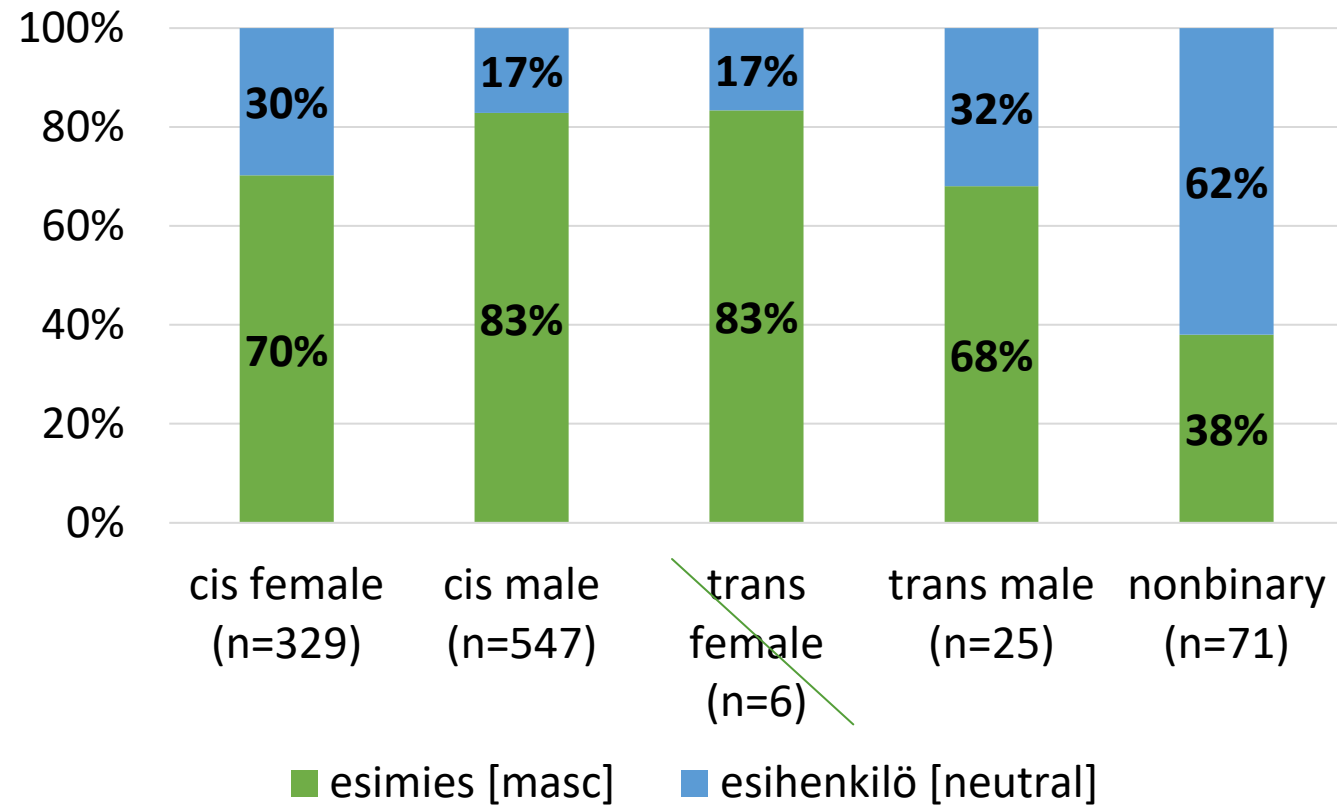
Orientation:

- lower scores: negative attitudes towards sexist language use and positive attitudes towards nonsexist language use
- high scores: dismissive attitudes (there's no sexist language, sexist language not a problem, no need for nonsexist language)

Education level



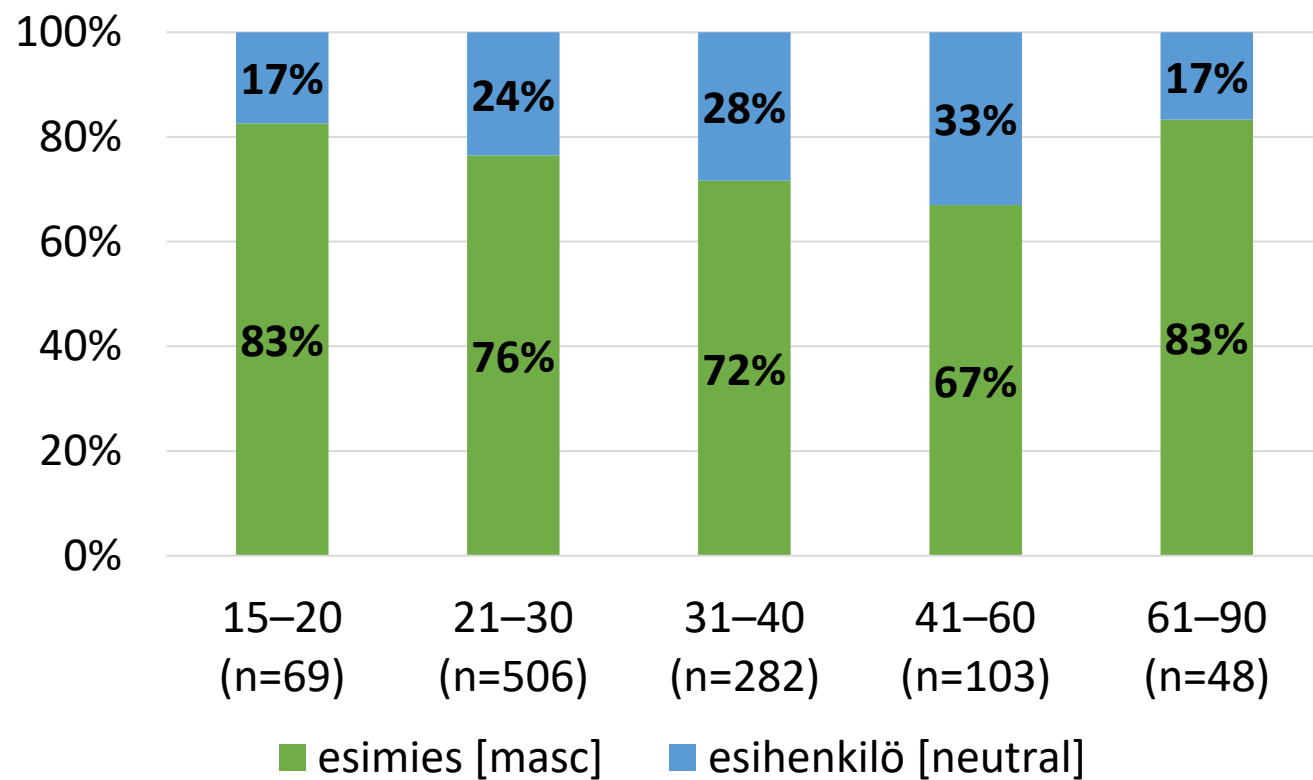
Gender?



n=978

(non-significant in the model)

Age?



n=1008

(non-significant in the model)

In sum...

- Previous research somewhat limited – more to come?
- Masculine job titles still common (data collected in 2022)
- Acceptability, attitudes towards (non)sexist language use, and education level significant predictors for use of inclusive/exclusive job titles
- Age and gender significant only as univariate → association to another IV?
- (Somewhat) aligns with previous research on English (Hekanaho 2020)

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