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The Interpretation of the -ə Suffix as Representative of the Nonbinary Population in Italian

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Abstract	2
1 The Biological and Grammatical Gender Mismatch in Italian	4
1.1 The Classification of Grammatical Gender Systems	6
1.2 Gender Binarism in Italian	9
1.3 The Masculine Form as a Metaphor for the Appropriation of the Universal by the Hands of Men	15
2 Bucking the Trend: from Marking to Neutralizing the Difference	22
2.1 Degendering Strategies Available in Italian	23
2.2 Degendering Strategies Available Across Different Languages	32
3 Testing the Efficacy of Adopting the Morphological Variant -ə to Achieve Grammatical Gender Inclusion	38
3.1 Study Overview and Research Questions	38
3.2 Femininity-Masculinity Image Evaluation Survey – An Experimental Online Procedure	40
3.2.1 Participants and Procedure	40
3.2.2 Results	42
3.3 The Reference-Assignment Experiment Through Identification of Images	45
3.3.1 Participants	46
3.3.2 Textual and Visual Materials	47
3.3.2.1 Some Notes on the English Translations of the Stimuli	64
3.3.2.2 Visual Materials	66
3.3.3 Assessing the Relationship Between the Usage of Sexist Language and the Attitudes Toward it: Is There Room for an Inclusive Language?	71
3.3.3.1 Structure of the SILUI	72
3.3.4 Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits	79

3.3.5 Procedure	89
4 Data Analysis and Results	92
4.1 Results of the Sentence-Picture Matching Task	92
4.1.1 Response Coding	92
4.1.2 Quantitative Analysis of the Data	94
4.1.2.1 <i>Analysis 1: Measuring Accuracy with an All-Inclusive, Mixed-Gender Representation of the Plural Suffix -ə</i>	95
4.1.2.2 <i>Analysis 2: Measuring Accuracy with a Minimum Nonbinary-Specific Representation of the Plural Suffix -ə</i>	100
4.1.2.3 <i>Analysis 3: Reaction Times with an All-Inclusive, Mixed-Gender Representation of the Plural Suffix -ə</i>	102
4.1.3 Qualitative Analysis of the Data	105
4.1.3.1 Qualitative Analysis of the Distractors	114
4.2 Results of the SILUI	118
4.3 Results of the Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits	129
4.4 Discussion	145
Conclusions	150
Appendix	159
Appendix A	159
Appendix B	165
Appendix C	169
References	193

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Abstract

Numerose strategie linguistiche sono state proposte ai fini di espandere i confini del binarismo di genere imposto dalla lingua italiana. Tra le innovazioni di carattere morfologico emerge il suffisso *-ə*, maggiormente diffuso e apparentemente dotato di un'accessibilità superiore rispetto alle controproposte di natura ortografica (i.e., *-**, *-@*). Per testare l'interpretazione di questa variante morfologica non binaria abbiamo progettato uno studio sperimentale utilizzando un compito di abbinamento frase-immagine adattato da Bradley e colleghi (2019). L'analisi proposta si sviluppa su più livelli: mira a stabilire (i) se l'adozione del suffisso *-ə* comporta l'attivazione immediata di un referente (o gruppo) di genere non binario o di un gruppo di genere misto; (ii) se la comprensione di frasi contenenti tale suffisso richiede costi di elaborazione più elevati, dato rilevabile a partire dai tempi di reazione dei partecipanti; infine, (iii) se la forma maschile, dotata di un duplice significato (specifico vs generico), innesca più frequentemente l'interpretazione specifica. Sulla base dei risultati ottenuti riteniamo che l'utilizzo del suffisso *-ə* possa eventualmente stabilirsi soltanto per riferirsi a un gruppo di genere misto o che non si riconosce nella distinzione binaria del genere, pur comportando un'elaborazione più onerosa. Quanto alla forma maschile, è stato dimostrato che si tende ad associarla più frequentemente a un gruppo di soli maschi, escludendo dunque la possibilità che questa possa fungere da forma generica, rappresentativa di più generi.

1 The Biological and Grammatical Gender Mismatch in Italian

Gender and biological sex are strictly intertwined. In the collective imagination, the latter exerts some kind of biological influence on the determination of the former. It is almost as if biological sex naturally tends to mold gender, while admitting, however, that the construction of one's own gender identity can disregard one's biological sex in just as many cases, resulting in the separation of the two. To better grasp the complexity of this potential connection that might be established, a distinction must be drawn between their origin and thus the domain to which these two concepts belong. As the term suggests, sex has a biological basis, which can be explained as follows: "the human species, as well as other species having sexual reproduction, is divided into two major groups, males and females, with two bodies that differ from each other chromosomally, anatomically, and physiologically" (Ghigi, 2019: 15). Having determined that sex is exclusively biological in nature, gender is, instead, "its cultural elaboration, the product of the socialization process through which individuals learn what is necessary to properly interpret sexually defined roles. Speaking of gender thus refers to the social construction of sex [...]" (Sartori, 2009: 16). A further specification is found in the notion of gender identity, corresponding to the "deeply felt, inherent sense of being a girl, woman, or female; a boy, a man, or male; a blend of male or female; or an alternative gender" (APA, 2015: 834), that can even change over time (Lev, 2004).

Their relationship is one that is hard to untangle. It can be intended as a relationship of mutual dependence that might lead to a perfect correspondence in the individual developing a gender identity perfectly in line with the biological sex received. In case this does not occur, a mismatch between gender and biological sex is found, a possibility that is to be equally contemplated. Indeed, the flexible, versatile nature of gender has long been advocated for by different social, gender justice movements, especially in recent years. In this view, gender "is not hard-wired and can be understood and expressed in a far more diverse range of ways" (Hines & Taylor, 2018: 6), driving us beyond the boundaries imposed by gender binarism. This malleability of gender is reflected in the several different labels that have been coined to distinguish among this vast array of gender profiles, which serve as key definitions to orient the audience in the public debate: the

term “genderfluid” points to the dimension of change over time and across different situations; “genderflux” refers to the level of intensity experienced by the individual; “gender-diverse” touches on the dimension of gender manifestation by addressing aspects such as physicality; “gender-queer” is a synonym for “non-binary” locating a person in between or outside the traditional categories of masculine and feminine; “agender” indicates absence or neutrality of gender (for a full list see Hines & Taylor, 2018: 10-11). The forging of these novel categories made it possible to identify the actors who have enacted this profound change with respect to the perception of gender, affecting the political, social and linguistic sphere.

Language is no longer confined to being a mirror of the world; it is a tool that acts in the world and contributes to the shaping of society (Lorusso & Serughetti, 2023), which, in turn, modifies language in a relationship of mutual influence. Along this process of continuous, reciprocal alteration which requires time, the socio-cultural change is hardly ever produced concurrent with the one discernable at the level of language. Indeed, for a nonspontaneous linguistic innovation to occur – one that is intentional and planned – and eventually be declared established, a good deal of experimentation is required, which nearly ever takes place simultaneously with the cultural revolution responsible for it. One can conduct a revolution by adopting a linguistic practice, which will nevertheless need its own testing time. Language is certainly one of the fields where the battle for the advancement of gender rights is played out (Lorusso & Serughetti, 2023). We are witnessing a public demand for “the linguistic materialization of gender-related transformative instances” (Lorusso & Serughetti, 2023), one that is pervasive and sits on several modules of language. Advocates are not willing to settle for an expansion of vocabulary, they are rather calling for a collective action that strikes the so-called grammatical gender. In so doing, they are introducing “a structural change in language, in its nerves, its framing” (Wittig, 1985: 7), one that is at the root of a political conflict, since acting in the world – be it through language or other media – cannot be separated from doing politics (Lorusso & Serughetti, 2023). It is only through a public, political commitment that an agreement can be reached in theory, marking a historic transition (Wittig, 1985).

It is this frame that encloses the present research, which, from a psycholinguistic perspective, carries out an investigation aimed at deepening the relationship between gender identity as a social construct and its realization at the level of language, by pointing out the implications on the linguistic system while drawing the boundaries within which this relationship can grow. To

this end, an experimental protocol was adapted from the one developed by Bradley and colleagues (2019a) for the evaluation of the accessibility of the variant *-ə* as the suffix representing the nonbinary population.

The first chapter of the thesis includes three sections reviewing the literature on the topics from which the study evolved: after outlining the features of “sex-based grammatical gender systems” (Gygax et al., 2019: 2) as opposed to neutral ones in an attempt to contrast the process of gender assignment in which they are rooted (Section 1.1), the focus will shift to the structure of the Italian declension system, by shedding light on the mechanisms underlying the derivation process (Section 1.2), which lead back to the generic meaning of the masculine form (Section 1.3). The second chapter presents an overview of grammatical gender-neutral language practices, with an in-depth look at those proposals pertaining exclusively to the context of the Italian language (Section 2.1), followed by a review of those found across different languages (Section 2.2). The third chapter provides a thorough description of the experimental design. The framing of the study is offered by explicitly addressing its research questions (Section 3.1), followed by the Femininity-Masculinity Image Evaluation Survey, conceived as a crucial step in the fine-tuning of the visual materials (Section 3.2), which, together with textual materials are clearly displayed along with participants and procedure in Section 3.3. Data analysis and interpretation is reported in chapter 4.

1.1 The Classification of Grammatical Gender Systems

The linguistic category of gender “permeates the whole body of language” at various degrees depending on the language in question (Wittig, 1985: 5). There are only a few exceptions of languages attested as being unspecified for gender, hence lacking any linguistically-detectable gender features. For a language to possess grammatical gender, three main requirements must be satisfied (Dixon, 1982): (i) the grouping of nouns into classes; (ii) the grammatical agreement surfacing between the noun and its dependent functional or lexical words; (iii) a plausible semantic correlation between biological sex and class membership. The third requisite, which is not included in the definition later provided by Corbett (1991) – who conducted extensive research on grammatical gender – reflects one of the most vigorous considerations Monique Wittig made in her essay *The mark of gender* (1985: 5), namely that “gender is the enforcement of sex in language”. It nevertheless performs several functions on both a syntactic and

morphological level, contributing, to some extent, to language processing and disambiguation purposes. This applies at different levels of intensity according to the language's gender system under investigation.

The centrality of grammatical gender is manifested in its ability to generate a series of morphological references within the text. Grammatical gender, in fact, triggers agreement. It follows that the elimination of grammatical gender removes the possibility of agreement within a text (Robustelli, 2023), resulting in the deprivation of a whole series of essential communicative functions (e.g., anaphora resolution). Hence, the functional role of gender marking is that of facilitating reference tracking, established by means of the agreement between gender markers and anaphoric pronouns, as well as solving misidentifications of the referent (Dye et al., 2017). Conversely, evidence suggests that “gender incongruence should lead to diminished encoding or recall” (Yorkston & De Mello, 2005: 225). It is in light of this theoretical assumption that all proposals for transformation that go in the direction of “zero marking” must be evaluated.

Having established that grammatical gender, where present, is marked differently across languages, by assuming, for instance, a different number of grammatical gender categories – up to six in Swahili (Corbett, 1991) – several classifications grouping together similar linguistic systems with respect to gender have been proposed (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001-2003; Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012). The recent taxonomic system devised by Gygax and colleagues (2019) profiles five different language groups:

1. Grammatical gender languages (e.g., French, Spanish, Czech, German, Italian);
2. Languages with a combination of grammatical gender and natural gender (e.g., Norwegian, Dutch);
3. Natural gender languages (e.g., English);
4. Genderless languages with a few traces of grammatical gender (e.g., Oriya, Basque);
5. Genderless languages (e.g., Turkish and Finnish).

Beginning with the correlation between biological sex and grammatical gender, with reference to the third requirement listed in Dixon's definition (1982), in languages belonging to the first group (i.e., grammatical gender languages) there tends to be an almost exact match between the biological sex of the referent and the assigned grammatical gender of human nouns (*la ragazza* ‘the.F.SG girl.F.SG’; *il ragazzo* ‘the.M.SG boy.M.SG’). On the contrary, the assignment of gender to inanimate nouns (*la luna* ‘the.F.SG moon.F.SG’; *il sole* ‘the.M.SG sun.M.SG’) is

“mostly semantically arbitrary” (Gygax et al., 2019: 3). The process of gender assignment is indeed strongly modulated by reality when it comes to human nouns. Although the classification of nouns by gender concerns both categories (i.e., inanimate and human), the process leading to the determination of gender follows two independent paths, one that is reality-driven, the other conventional.

As to the second group (i.e., languages with a combination of grammatical gender and natural gender), both inanimate and human nouns are classified on the basis of grammatical gender. Also, within these languages the usual link to the reference biological sex has been attested with respect to human nouns. What changes, however, when comparing these languages with those belonging to the first group, is the fact that most human nouns are not “linguistically differentiated” between feminine and masculine forms (Gygax et al., 2019: 4), meaning that they are interchangeable, regardless of the sex of the referent. This, however, does not apply to personal pronouns, which instead adhere to an assignment procedure based on the sex or gender identity of the human referent.

Personal pronouns represent the only category marked by gender in languages labeled as natural gender languages, i.e., the third group in the classification above. In pronouns, gender assignment is dictated by the sex of the referent (e.g., *my professor* - *she*, *your professor* - *he*). Inanimate nouns, as well as the great majority of human nouns, are unspecified for gender (e.g., *accountant*, *doctor*).

The only aspect allowing for a discernible distinction between genderless languages and genderless languages with a few traces of grammatical gender is the presence, in the latter, of “a few gendered forms” that make their appearance “in nouns with gender suffixes or gendered adjective or verbal forms” (Gygax et al., 2019: 4). As to the rest, the detectable distinctions in personal pronouns are derived from features of animacy, rather than gender. The information of gender can thus only be extracted by drawing from the lexicon. There still might be traces of gender-suffixes on human nouns, at times; such use, however, has long been abandoned in the process of coining new words.

In an attempt to draw a general trend in the process of grammatical gender assignment from a cross-linguistic perspective, one could affirm that the grammatical gender distinctions found in human nouns reflect biological gender distinctions, further reinforcing this tight relationship, that seems to be exploited by grammar whenever possible. In statistical terms, 40% of the languages

of the world display grammatical gender distinctions (Corbett, 2013a). From those, 75% has a correlation between biological sex and grammatical gender that can be observed (Corbett, 2013b). As suggested above, Italian belongs to the group of grammatical gender languages. In the next section, we focus on the gender system of Italian.

1.2 Gender Binarism in Italian

Italian is a language with a binary number system (singular and plural) and a two-class gender system (masculine and feminine). Gender and number are functional features bundled together in an “abstract fused morpheme” which is expressed through a vocalic ending (Acquaviva, 2009: 50), as (1.1) below shows.

- (1.1) a. *Ragazz-o* (m.sg.) – *Ragazz-i* (m.pl.)
 ‘boy’ – ‘boys’
 b. *Ragazz-a* (f.sg.) – *Ragazz-e* (f.pl.)
 ‘girl’ – ‘girls’

In adopting a comparative approach, which looks at Spanish as the other language, a necessary condition with which this bound morpheme must comply is clearly delineated. According to Harris (1996: 104), in Spanish “stems require a class marker (CM) constituent in order to be morphologically well-formed free-standing words” – with the notion of “class” referring to a set of inflectional realizations in morphology (Aronoff, 1976). It just so happens that any Italian word also requires an unaccented end-vowel other than /u/ in order for it to be considered “canonical”, hence well-accepted, corroborating Harry’s proposal (Acquaviva, 2009). The intrinsic linguistic explanation for this condition must be traced back to phonotactic constraints occurring at word boundaries, according to which no consonants are permitted as word-endings in Italian¹. As a matter of fact, “some of these constraints are relevant to word boundaries, other to syllable boundaries”, others identify both (Tagliapietra et al., 2009: 409). The stem with specified class is thus “phonologically realized as a form that ends in one of a set of canonical vowels, conditioned by the stem’s class and by the features on the abstract agreement” (Acquaviva, 2009: 55). It is therefore crucial to emphasize that the reason for having a required

¹ There are, however, a few exceptions to this rule: some functional words may indeed end in a consonant (e.g., *con* ‘with’, *per* ‘for’); the same applies to some names (e.g., *Carmen*, *Miriam*) and very few lexical words (e.g., *bar* ‘café’, *lapis* ‘pencil’).

vocalic ending is not to be attributed to the overtly display of the features of gender and number; its primary function is rather to fulfill a phonotactic criterion. Unlike Spanish, however, which provides for the inclusion of a discrete morpheme to convey the number feature separately – as shown in (1.2) by means of the addition of the *-s* suffix for plural – Italian opts for the co-expression of the two features of gender and number in a single thematic end-vowel (cp. (1.1)) (Acquaviva, 2009).

- (1.2) a. *Caball-o* (m.sg.) – *Caball-o-s* (m.pl.)
 ‘horse’ – ‘horses’
 b. *Maripos-a* (f.sg.) – *Maripos-a-s* (f.pl.)
 ‘butterfly’ – ‘butterflies’

Class or word markers in Italian determine the shape of words, regardless of their category (i.e., lexical or grammatical). The following list (1.3) shows the non-specificity of Italian nominal morphemes, in that the same forms are indeed found in verbal inflection as well as non-inflected words:

- (1.3) Italian Word Markers: unaccented *-a*, *-e*, *-i*, *-o* (not *-u*), inflected and uninflected
- nominally inflected: *gatt-o*, *gatt-a*, *verd-i*, *quest-e*, *lett-in-o*, ...
 - verbally inflected: *cant-o*, *veng-a*, *potess-i*, *andar-e*, ...
 - uninflected: *prim-a* ‘before’, *doman-i* ‘tomorrow’, *quand-o* ‘when’, ...
 - (nominal, invariable: *lam-a* ‘llama’, *fot-o* ‘photo’, ...)
 - no word marker: *città*, *-ità*, *sport*, *per* ...
- (Acquaviva, 2009: 55)

Although not absolute, as there are some exceptions to this rule (e.g., verbal endings requiring stressed end-vowels such as *accadrà* ‘it will happen’, *berrò* ‘I will drink’), this is a general criterion for word formation in Italian (Acquaviva, 2009). In the process of noun formation, 70% of nouns are indeed assigned a specific end-vowel (i.e., *-a* as opposed to *-o* in designating feminine gender) that can overtly discriminate between masculine and feminine (Thornton et al., 1994). These are “phonologically transparent” nouns, as they allow for the immediate recovery of the gender information from the surface form (De Martino et al., 2011). The unaccented end-vowel *-o* conveys the masculine singular features (e.g., *parc-o* ‘park’), whereas its plural form is formed with *-i*, as in *parch-i* ‘parks’; feminine forms, on the other hand, carry *-a* as their vocalic ending (e.g., *tort-a* ‘cake’) and opt for *-e* to form the plural form (i.e., *tort-e* ‘cakes’) (De

Martino et al., 2011). There are, however, major exceptions to this that make up for the 20% of the vocabulary. As reported by Stark (2007: 58), Modern Standard Italian has

preserved 3 main declension classes, 2 overtly marked genders as well as overt number marking. However, and this is a crucial point, the declensional endings *-a* and *-e* are far from being unambiguous markers of singular or plural, as they can either indicate feminine singular, (rarely) masculine singular or feminine plural (*-a*) or masculine singular or feminine plural (*-e*). The morpheme *-o* unambiguously indicates singular, but both masculine and (rarely) feminine gender.

Six declensional classes can thus be distinguished in Italian. The traditional partition is shown schematically by Acquaviva (2009: 50) in the table below (see Table 1.1), allowing for an effective visualization of the three main declension classes (i.e., Class I, Class II, and Class III) appearing in the first row. Only Class I and Class II are indeed productive (Acquaviva, 2009) as well as overtly marked by gender and number. Nouns belonging to Class III can either be feminine or masculine. Class IV, Class V, and Class VI – perceived instead as somewhat “exceptional classes” owing to their unusual declension – trigger some interesting observations which will be further discussed.

Class I (all fem.)		Class II (all masc. except one)		Class III (masc. and fem.)	
sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.
-a	-e	-o	-i	-e	-i
<i>donna</i>	<i>donne</i>	<i>libro</i>	<i>libri</i>	<i>fiore</i>	<i>fiori</i>

Class IV (almost all masc.)		Class V (all masc. → fem.)		Class VI (masc. and fem.)
sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg. and pl.
-a	-i	-o	-a	[invariable]
<i>poeta</i>	<i>poeti</i>	<i>uovo</i>	<i>uova</i>	<i>bar, blu, koala, ...</i>

Table 1.1 - The visual representation of declensional classes in Italian reported in Acquaviva (2009: 50).

What becomes immediately clear by looking at Table 1.1 is that a fixed, one-to-one correspondence (e.g. with *-a* designating a feminine, *-o* designating a masculine) cannot be established at all times. By contrast, the potential ambiguity or versatility of gender markers arises from the nouns listed below (1.4), each one ascribable to the classes just outlined:

(1.4) Sg.: -o/ -a/ -e;

Pl.: -i/; -a/ -e:

- | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| a. | <i>libr-o – libr-i</i> (m.) | <i>mano – mani</i> (f.) | <i>bracci-o – bracci-a</i> (m. – f.), |
| | ‘book’ – ‘books’ | ‘hand’ – ‘hands’ | ‘arm’ – ‘arms’; |
| b. | <i>cas-a – cas-e</i> (f.) | <i>poet-a – poet-i</i> (m.) | |
| | ‘house’ – ‘houses’ | ‘poet’ – ‘poets’; | |
| c. | <i>can-e – can-i</i> (m.) | | |
| | ‘dog’ – ‘dogs’ | | |

(Stark, 2007: 58)

Some masculine nouns happen to take on in their singular form the *-a* suffix generally employed to form feminine nouns (De Martino et al., 2011). A case in point is the masculine *poet-a* ‘poet.M’ (1.4b), belonging to Class IV (cp. Table 1.1). The corresponding plural form instead follows the more traditional rule by adopting the *-i* suffix, hence being fully classified as “phonologically transparent” (i.e., *poet-i* ‘poets’). This is an instance of irregular inflection for gender, only visible in the singular form. The opposite trend can be observed on the feminine noun *man-o* ‘hand.F.SG’ (1.4a), formed with the *-o* suffix traditionally designating the masculine form. Here, unlike the previous case, the standard masculine suffix is also maintained in the formation of the plural of the feminine noun, resulting in *man-i* ‘hands.F.PL’. This constitutes the only exception found in Class II (cp. Table 1.1). Notice, also, that the plural *braccia* ‘arms’ (1.4a) written in bold characters reveals the traces of the original neutral latin form in *-a*, in contrast with the regular plural form in *-i* (Stark, 2007).

As there are no absolute unambiguous gender markers *per se*, which can take many different values instead, the process of morphological derivation in Italian can be highly inconsistent, and it can result in unexpected feminine forms. The latter are in fact usually derived from the original, masculine forms via suffixation (Gygax et al., 2019). Derivational paradigms, however, cannot always be reconstructed *a posteriori*; there are cases where it is not possible to determine which of the two forms (i.e., masculine or feminine) is actually derived (e.g., *ragazz-o* ‘boy’, *ragazz-a* ‘girl’). For the purpose of our analysis, we assume that the general tendency is to derive the feminine from the masculine form.

With regard to the functioning of the derivational processes, there are several paths that can be taken, resulting in more or less symmetrical masculine/feminine pairs, where one form may or may not anticipate its counterpart. The inventory of all the possibilities provided below thus constitutes the theoretical starting point for the construction of derived forms to which innovative

suffixes are added, which will be part of the textual stimuli of the experiment conducted for the present study. The linguistic motivations behind the choices leading to the forms we find in the experimental materials will be outlined in § 3.3.2, but it should be made clear that this is the morphological substrate from which they draw. The forging of “structurally symmetric pairs” constitutes a viable building option creating two forms that are equally complex from a morphological point of view, by employing different suffixes (e.g., *postino* ‘postman’ – *postina* ‘postwoman’) (Gygax et al., 2019: Supplementary Table S1). Other regular suffixes are *-tore.M*, *-trice.F* as in *minatore-minatrice* ‘miner’; *-tro.M*, *-tra.F* as in *maestro-maestra* ‘teacher’. The same applies to female personal nouns (e.g., *Mario/Maria*). There are, however, as reported in the Supplementary Table S1 by Gygax and colleagues (2019), “competing feminine derivations” for the same masculine noun, some of which can be negatively connotated (e.g., *avvocatessa* ‘lawyer.F’ as opposed to *avvocata* ‘lawyer.F’ presenting the same morphological structure as in *avvocato* ‘lawyer.M’). Complete morphological asymmetry is found instead in the so-called fixed-gender nouns: masculine/feminine pairs whose components do not share any common roots (e.g., *fratello* ‘brother’– *sorella* ‘sister’; *marito* ‘husband’ – *moglie* ‘wife’; *toro* ‘bull’ – *mucca* ‘cow’).

Some derivational suffixes that are unmarked for gender in the singular form are also present in Italian (e.g., *-ista* as in *attivista* ‘activist’). These are referred to with the term epicenes, defined as “phonologically opaque” (De Martino et al., 2011: 749), and can only be disambiguated by means of the determiner (e.g., *il/la preside* ‘the.M/F.SG dean’). The latter are considered a minority, constituting 20% of word types in Italian (Thornton et al., 1994). Finally, for some nouns indicating animals, only one of the two forms is provided, so that the opposite gender is formed by adding a descriptor such as *il tasso femmina* ‘female badger’ and *il maschio della tigre* ‘male tiger’ (Ghenot, 2020a).

It can therefore be argued that in the vast majority of cases, except for those suffixes unspecified for gender, it is the singular form that dictates the gender of the noun (Corbett, 1991). Gender distinctions are then maintained in plural forms (Gygax et al., 2019), accounting for a steady relationship between the two features (i.e., gender and number). It follows that nearly all Italian singular nouns are marked for gender, with all plural nouns being specified for gender.

Gender declension, however, is not confined to noun class marking only. Other lexical categories inflecting for gender in Italian are adjectives and verbs (more precisely, past participles). The

functional categories that encode number and gender are determiners, third-person accusative (i.e., *lo* ‘him/it’; *la* ‘her/it’; *li/le* ‘them.M.PL/them.F.PL’) and dative clitics (i.e., *gli* ‘to.him’; *le* ‘to.her’; *gli/loro* ‘to.them.M.PL/to.them.F.PL’). Both feminine singular and plural dative clitic pronouns (i.e., *le* and *loro*) are, however, confined to formal contexts. The latter, in fact, tend to be replaced in current colloquial Italian by the dative clitic *gli*, intended as an invariant form “used for both singular and plural and masculine and feminine antecedents”, indiscriminately (Cardinaletti et al., 2021: 315). This generalized, underspecified use of *gli* is to be understood as the output of a process of lexical change, for which the original masculine dative pronoun seems to have turned into a gender-neutral one, as a consequence of losing the specification for the features of gender and number (Cardinaletti, 2004). The fact remains that redundancy of functional features such as gender is scattered across several grammatical categories in Italian. The gender class of a noun systematically molds the gender nature of the other categories that are associated with the noun (Yorkston & De Mello, 2005). That is, being an inherent property of the noun, grammatical gender is “reflected in agreement with other elements” (Velnić, 2020: 1). In Italian, gender (and number) agreement is marked on determiners (both articles and demonstratives) and adjectives (e.g., *la donna ricca* ‘the.F.SG woman.F.SG rich.F.SG’), as well as on the past participle (e.g., *è ritornato* ‘he is back.M.SG’; *è ritornata* ‘she is back.F.SG’). As for pronouns, personal (1.5a), relative (1.5b) and demonstrative (1.5c) are regularly marked for gender:

- (1.5) a. *Lui/Lei è arrabbiato/a* ‘he/she is mad.M.SG/F.SG’;
- b. *Il mio amico Mario, il quale è venuto a trovarmi qualche anno fa, ha deciso di partire per la Svizzera.*
 ‘My friend Mario, who.M.SG came to visit me a few years back, has decided to leave for Switzerland’;
- c. *Questo è mio marito* ‘this.M.SG is my husband’.

Notice that only third-person personal pronouns (i.e., *lui* ‘he’; *lei* ‘she’) – as for clitics above – are marked for gender, as opposed to first- and second-person pronouns (i.e., *I* ‘io’; *you* ‘tu/voi’; *we* ‘noi’; *they* ‘loro’) which are not. The complementizer *che* ‘that/which/who/whom’ as well as *cui* ‘whom/which’ are both unspecified for gender (e.g., *Lo studente che ha ricevuto il voto più alto lavora duro.* ‘The student who got the highest grade works hard’), differently from *il quale/la quale* ‘who.F.SG/who.M.SG’ (1.5b). Unlike the classes of pronouns listed above,

interrogative pronouns are not marked for gender (e.g., *Chi viene al cinema?* ‘Who is coming to the movies?’) (Gygax et al., 2019). Possessive pronouns agree with the gender of the possessee (e.g., in *la nostra casa è piccola, la vostra è grande* ‘our house.F.SG is small, yours.F.SG is big’, *vostra* ‘yours.F.SG’ is feminine because the possessee *casa* ‘house’ is feminine, regardless of the gender of the possessors).

Numerals and quantifiers also behave differently with respect to gender. Quantifiers do agree with nouns (e.g., *certe finestre sono alte* ‘some.F.PL windows.F.PL are tall.F.PL’), as opposed to numerals with which there is no agreement, with the exception of the numeral ‘one’ (e.g., *un bambino* ‘one.M.SG child.M.SG’; *una bambina* ‘one.F.SG child.F.SG’) (Gygax et al., 2019).

The trajectory underlying the morphological derivation system, as seen, when it can be unveiled tends to move in a specific direction: from masculine to feminine. Only in a few cases the opposite occurs. Generally, it is the masculine responsible for molding the feminine, the starting point from which the transformation process takes place. This is not by chance. The same trajectory can be in fact traced in other languages (e.g., French), and inevitably leads to a perception of the primacy of the male form over the female one, as well as the dominance effect exerted. Even before digging into the mechanisms behind the process of derivation, it is possible to grasp the same disproportion by dwelling solely on the masculine form, in that it activates a dual interpretation (universal vs specific), not triggered by the feminine form, which will be further explored in the following section.

1.3 The Masculine Form as a Metaphor for the Appropriation of the Universal by the Hands of Men

The encounter with a masculine form when reading a text may give rise to conflicting interpretations. Depending on whether it is a singular or a plural form, the situation may change drastically. After all, the plural denotes many subjectivities, with their various characteristics (e.g., different gender identities). The singular conversely entails one subjectivity (e.g., one single gender identity), hence supposedly raising less doubts as to the actual characteristics of the person or the implied plurality in question. As to say, there only seems to be less room for ambiguity with the singular. Yet, its linguistic context and accompanying elements could still cause confusion and interfere in the process of inferring gender – an example of this will be reported and commented shortly in (1.7b).

Confusion arises at the level of meaning activation, as two possible interpretations become available to the individual, who is eventually called to disambiguate between a specific and a generic meaning (Gygax et al., 2021). The specific meaning of the masculine form, on the one hand, is activated when an exclusive correspondence with men is assumed, as to say, the referent is conceived as either a man or a group of men. The generic meaning, on the other hand, entails participation of non-male agents as well. In other words, the masculine form is used *generically* when the gender of the referent is unknown, neutral, or the group composition we are referring to is of a mixed nature with respect to gender. Both interpretations are indeed “connected through their common inclusion of the male gender” (Gygax et al., 2021: 5).

The study conducted by Gygax and colleagues (2021) precisely sets out to explore the general implications arising from the semantic ambiguity of the masculine form when referring to humans, by looking at a multitude of languages. As a matter of fact, this intrinsic duality has been attested across different languages, regardless of the differences in the language’s gender system. Sentence (1.6) in French presupposes the selection of the generic meaning, since the conveyed intention of the female subject of the sentence is that of talking to someone working in the surgical staff, and whether that person is a female, nonbinary or a male surgeon is absolutely irrelevant.

(1.6) *Elle voulait discuter avec un chirurgien.*M
‘She wanted to talk to a surgeon.’

(Gygax et al., 2021: 6)

It is safe to say that the gender information retrieved from *chirurgien* ‘male surgeon’ does not represent a crucial characteristic for the purpose of identifying the person sought by the subject. In fact, it may very well be ignored since its use is meant to include, in this specific instance, potentially different gender identities, as none is meant to prevail over the other. The use of the masculine form is therefore intended to be generic, as to say inclusive, in that it does not necessarily refer exclusively to a male surgeon; a female or nonbinary surgeon are equally contemplated here. Notice that the same word (i.e., *surgeon*) in (1.7) in a natural gender language (i.e., English) that has – as described in § 1.1 – the great majority of human nouns that are unspecified for gender, still raises the question of this dual interpretation, despite the word lacking an overt manifestation of the gender information. It follows that the source of this uncertainty must be located outside the linguistic context.

- (1.7) a. The surgeons passed their exams.
b. The surgeon passed the exam and cried.

(Gygax et al., 2021: 1,3)

In comparing 1.7a and 1.7b, we soon realize how much we were actually taking for granted the male gender assignment to the word *surgeons* – hence picturing a team of exclusively male surgeons. Even though the noun is unmarked for gender, and cannot be formally recognized as a masculine form grammatically speaking, it seems to activate a referent with a specific male gender. As in the case of French (1.6), however, the bare form is here, once again, intentionally employed to refer instead to the collectivity of surgeons, regardless of their gender. Yet, the realization of an automatic male-gender attribution comes to us the moment we are confronted with the second sentence (1.7b), which attributes to the subject of the sentence (i.e., *surgeon*) – in all likelihood assumed to be a man – a typically “feminine” action (i.e., crying) – or at least long-depicted as such by the collective narrative. This juxtaposition can trigger a mild sense of disorientation in the reader, who is now suddenly forced to consider the option of looking at a female referent, as the information provided by the verb *crying* clashes with that of the presumably male subject. The only way to find our way around this sentence (1.7b) is for us to abandon the specific interpretation that sees the exclusive activation of the male gender, and assume its generic function of possibly including a female surgeon. If, on the contrary, the presumably male surgeon's performance of crying did not raise any doubts whatsoever (i.e., in picturing a crying male surgeon), the specific interpretation is more likely to stay active (Gygax et al., 2021), thus decreeing the selection of the specific meaning, i.e., male surgeon.

There are reasons to believe, however, that the juxtaposition of the word *surgeon* with the verb *crying* – being two words to some extent intrinsically connotated by the opposite gender – could be perceived as some sort of misplacement, giving evidence of two, relatively unrelated aspects: (i) “gender as a spontaneous inference” (Gygax et al., 2021: 1); (ii) the steady relationship between a specific gender and a role noun – a concept known as *gender stereotypicality* indicating the likelihood of human nouns to refer to women or men, which will be further explored later on. With reference to the first aspect, this is an instance that proves that readers naturally tend to process the gender of the subject of the sentence (i.e., the surgeon's gender) “and include it as part of their mental representation of the text” even when there is no gender cue available at the surface of the word and, most importantly, is not needed to achieve “a

coherent representation of the sentence” (Gygax et al., 2021: 1-2). In the case of the singular (1.7b), the confusion arising from the activation of the gender information is produced by the presence of the surrounding words, in particular the verb *crying* combined with the supposedly male *surgeon*. It was assumed that the latter, in the collective imagination, cannot fail to be a man, and his weeping is hard to imagine.

When the gender trace is visible, as shown in (1.6) for French, and in (1.8) below for Italian, the visual hook provided by the noun appearing in the masculine form and its dependent functional words – also inflected for the masculine – only reinforces the preference for the exclusive masculine interpretation, with no distinction as to number features. Be it a singular or a plural masculine noun, the choice of a male referent is favored over a mixed one, even when, in the intentions of the writer or speaker, other subjectivities should be included.

- (1.8) a. *I medici dovranno prendere parte a un corso di aggiornamento nel fine settimana.*
‘Doctors must attend a refresher course on the weekend’
b. *La terapia individuata dal medico ha portato alla guarigione del paziente.*
‘The treatment advised by the doctor led to the patient’s recovery.’

As a matter of fact, *i medici* ‘the.M.PL doctors.M.PL (1.8a) should be understood as referring to a composite of women, men and nonbinary people – meaning everyone who is working as a physician. Yet, the reader could instantly be tempted to picture only male doctors. In a similar way, it is not known whether the physician in (1.8b) is of female, nonbinary or male gender; nonetheless, the reader is expected to be more prone to trace the action of the suggested treatment, once again, back to a male doctor. This interpretative possibility could also be framed as the product of *gender stereotypicality*, representing a nonlinguistic factor defined as “the generalized beliefs or expectations about whether a specific (social or occupational) role is more likely to be held by one gender or the other” (Misersky et al., 2014: 842). Extensive research in social psychology (e.g., Banaji & Hardin, 1996) and psycholinguistics (e.g., Oakhill et al., 2005) has been conducted on the topic, revealing that readers automatically rely on stereotypes upon encountering role nouns (Misersky et al., 2014). Both grammatical gender and gender stereotypes have indeed been found to influence the process of ascribing gender to denote persons (Irmen & Roßberg, 2004), both contributing to the molding of the corresponding mental representation. Notice that *chirurghi* ‘surgeon.M.SG’ (1.6) and *medico* ‘doctor.M.SG’ (1.8) are stereotypically masculine nouns – just like the English *surgeon* – which also exhibit inherent

male gender inflection, hence providing access to a distinctive gender cue. An interaction between linguistic (i.e., grammatical gender) and nonlinguistic (i.e., gender stereotype) factors thus originates. The processing of this interaction induces with even greater force the prevalence of a male-biased mental representation in correspondence of gender-marked stereotypical nouns (Irmen & Roßberg, 2004). The absence of gender markers in English (1.7), on the other hand, makes the stereotypicality of the role noun the only bias responsible for strongly influencing speakers' mental representations (Gygax et al., 2021).

Having identified a margin of preference in terms of meaning activation for grammatical gender languages, this does not negate, however, that the generic masculine could still be activated; for instance, in cases where the presence of a verb inherently associated with the feminine world points to the generic interpretation, preventing an unambiguous identification with the male gender to take place (e.g., *Il chirurgo piange per aver passato l'esame* 'the surgeon cries over passing the exam'; cp. (1.7b)). It is thus safe to say that the masculine form in general may have an ambiguous referent that needs to be decoded by the reader's cognitive system (Irmen & Kurovskaja, 2010). Evidence shows that the activation of the opposition *specific vs generic meaning* brought about by the masculine form triggers greater cognitive effort in the solving of the semantic ambiguity (Gygax et al., 2021). Disambiguation must indeed occur in order to reach a coherent mental representation, required for each of the conveyed information we read (van den Broek et al., 1999; Graesser et al., 1994). Among the two possible alternatives (i.e., specific/exclusive or generic/inclusive reference) – as can be easily guessed from the reasoning provided above – recent studies demonstrate that the male-specific interpretation is the dominant one: “the specific meaning dictates readers' interpretation of the masculine form” (Gygax et al., 2021: 5).

One of the reasons underlying the unequal distribution across its possible interpretations is to be found in meaning frequency (Gygax et al., 2021). In polysemic words, meaning frequency correlates with predictability and corresponds to the rate at which one meaning is activated over time. The acquisitional factor is assumed to have contributed to regulating this process of activation. As a matter of fact, there is extensive literature showing that children acquire the Italian gender system and its two gender values at a very early stage (Velnić, 2020), thus unconsciously gaining access first to the specific meaning of the masculine form in a non-mediated way. In the study conducted by Velnić (2020), the youngest child to display

mastery of this two-way gender system is indeed 2;6 years of age, confirming indirectly that the masculine form is supposedly used only to refer to boys/men and the feminine form only to girls/women, hence enforcing – at least initially – an exclusive and fixed binary correspondence. Only later along the developmental trajectory are children supposedly introduced to the possibility of the generic masculine. The generic use indeed enters the scene with much delay and must soon come to terms with the fact that the specific/exclusive use has long been established, hence extensively implemented. In addition, longer exposure to the specific use (i.e., temporal precedence) can in turn contribute to boosting its meaning frequency. Therefore, meaning frequency and temporal precedence combined are deemed responsible for causing the more salient meaning to correspond to the specific meaning. Typological studies support the validity of this argument by reporting that the specific-generic learning sequence has been observed in many – if not all – different languages that provide both meanings (Gygax et al., 2009).

A cross-linguistic comparative perspective has further led to the identification of an “*asymmetrical treatment* of women and men” across different languages (Pauwels, 2003: 553). Having clarified that the masculine form has this ability to incorporate other genders (e.g., the female gender) by claiming their, albeit covert, representation through the selection of the generic meaning, the masculine is thus openly recognised as more general as opposed to the feminine. One needs only consider that the mere presence of a single man among a group of women imposes the selection of the masculine form (Gygax et al., 2021). It is well known that the masculine form has long taken the shape of the default value. Everything that deviates from the masculine, such as the feminine, becomes particular, in a way “marked”. This awareness leads to the emergence of a more complex opposition, one that sees the masculine embodying the universal in contrast to the particular embedded in the feminine. The same polarity is addressed by Wittig in positing that “the class of men have appropriated the universal for themselves [...] and gender by enforcing upon women a particular category represents a measure of domination” (Wittig, 1985: 5-6). The same hierarchical relationship is deconstructed by Pauwels (2003: 553) in the following passage by piecing together elements from male generics, morphological derivation and the lexical category of role nouns:

The practice of considering the man/the male as the prototype for human representation reduces the woman/female to the status of the “subsumed,” the “invisible,” or the

“marked” one: women are invisible in language when they are subsumed in generic expressions using masculine forms. Generic reference in many languages occurs via the use of forms which are identical with the representation of maleness (e.g. *he* as generic and masculine pronoun, generic nouns coinciding with nouns referring to males). When women are made visible in language, they are “marked”: their linguistic construction is often as a derivative of man/male through various grammatical (morphological) processes. This asymmetry also affects the lexical make-up of many languages. The structure of the lexicon often reflects the “male as norm” principle through the phenomenon of lexical gaps, that is, the absence of words to denote women in a variety of roles, professions, and occupations (e.g. Baron 1986; Hellinger 1990; Sabatini 1985; Yaguello 1978).

The disadvantaged position in which women have always found themselves – compared to the one attained by men – is thus still detectable at multiple levels of the language (e.g., morpho-syntactic, lexical...). Over the last decades, however, feminist battles have allowed for the improvement of their linguistic recognition in guaranteeing them, in most cases, an identifiable autonomous presence in language. The underlying processes that led to this result, however, are still questionable, and even more so the idea that female recognition in language comes from an operation of abstraction that nonetheless moves from the centrality of men.

All these reflections about the secondary nature of the feminine form in no way take into account those minorities who lie outside gender binarism. Such minorities are in fact seeking to make their way into the language system by advancing new forms of graphic representation whose employment, in some cases, would automatically hide the direct link to either the feminine or the masculine group. Depending on the proposal, they either attempt to enter the declensional system autonomously as a “third suffix”, specifically designating that class in particular, or strive to impose themselves as a single, unifying, common word-ending. The latter case would mark not only the disappearance of the dominant masculine category, but also that of the longed-for feminine one.

Chapter 2 is precisely devoted to this topic, namely an overview of all the strategies designed to claim visibility at the level of language. Whether they go in the direction of adding new suffixes or reducing to a single word-ending, the side-effects are easily predictable: on the one hand, encapsulating a multitude of minorities under a single suffix can be perceived as a limitation, which does not ensure adequate representation; on the other hand, the risk of a proliferation of forms is that none ends up being adopted because there are too many possible alternatives, causing much fuss.

2 Bucking the Trend: from Marking to Neutralizing the Difference

Two opposing trends can be detected within the set of proposed linguistic innovations specifically designed to respect each gender identity: “visibility of each gender vs neutralization of each gender” (Thornton, 2022: 35). While some languages seem to maintain as the preferred strategy the visibility of each gender, speakers of several languages are witnessing the transition from visibility to neutralization, as in the case of the use of the innovative suffix *-ə* for Italian, the focus of our study. The suffix *-ə* “went from being adopted to give visibility to nonbinary gender identities to being used to neutralize all gender distinctions, encompassing in a single form women, men and people with nonbinary identities” (Thornton, 2022: 35). The output of such a process appears to coincide with the employment of the suffix *-e* in Spanish by a broad community of users (Stetie & Zunino, 2022), as we shall see in detail in the following pages. The increasing overshadowing of minorities hiding in an indistinct “multitude” (Giusti, 2022: 16) is indeed a source of frustration for those who are not prepared to abandon the linguistic visibility almost obtained after years of hardships and struggle. Even more so, when considering those who could experience full recognition at the level of language, as the feminine conjugation is provided for by the language system *per se* (e.g., in Italian and Spanish). Hence, a substantial difference soon emerges between the female minority – which is immediately tied back to an existing specific declension class, whose prototypical declensional ending corresponds to *-a* (e.g., in Italian and Spanish) – and the nonbinary minority, which does not yet possess an iconic linguistic form that is compatible with the language system called upon to accommodate it. If, on the one hand, the feminine tends to enjoy a linguistic status, at times compromised as a consequence of deliberately omitting its distinctive forms, the nonbinary, on the other hand, is not yet traceable to an unambiguous form that has gained as much credibility. Note that this is a trend that can be observed across the great majority of languages, with the exception of Swedish, which seems to have found a viable solution. A shift in usage is thus needed to give equal representation to women, whereas a shift in the *system* is required to ensure equal representation to nonbinary people (Thornton, 2022). As explained by Thomason (2007: 45), the linguistic possibility of a deliberate change “is settled as soon as a single speaker produces a single instance of the change at a single time. Whether a deliberate change will become a permanent

part of [...] the speech community as a whole is then a matter of social and linguistic probability, not possibility”. Therefore, while a change has been proposed for the Italian language, i.e., the innovative suffix *-ə* to designate referents of unknown, unspecified or nonbinary gender, its grip on reality is still in doubt.

Within this framework, the most recent proposals entailing insertion of characters as suffixes – ranging from punctuation marks to orthographic markers – will be reviewed, along with their major limitations, in a cross-linguistic comparative perspective. Specifically, Section 2.1 will focus on the “degendering strategies” belonging to both neo-standard and sub-standard Italian (Pires, 2020: 116), whilst Section 2.2 will feature virtuous examples of gender-neutral language attested in other languages.

2.1 Degendering Strategies Available in Italian

Far from obtaining official guidance on the appropriate use of linguistic strategies to refer to others without specifying their gender, we are used to relying on vademecums outlining the strategies that are gaining momentum, which are, for this reason, deemed the most trusted sources to date. Looking at standard Italian, a number of prestigious institutions at the national (and even international) level have taken a stance on the matter, by redacting distinct vademecums which share several points (European Parliament, 2008; Giorcelli et al., 2015; Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2015; MIUR, 2018; Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, 2020; Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia, 2022²). The first set of recommendations was produced by Alma Sabatini in the volume entitled *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana* ‘Sexism in the Italian language’ to denounce the fact that the Italian language “is based on an androcentric principle” (Sabatini, 1987: 24) undermining the female representation in language. Besides offering practical solutions declined in each context, the work has contributed to bringing into focus specific uses that are to be avoided whenever possible, such as the unmarked masculine (e.g., the generic value of *man* in *rapporto uomo-macchina* ‘man-machine relationship’), the inclusive masculine (e.g., *gli studenti* ‘the.M.PL students.M.PL), and the masculine agreement (e.g., *i bambini e le bambine vengono sempre rimproverati* ‘boys and girls are always being scolded.M.PL’), to name a few. An alternative to masculine agreement is found in *closest*

² It should be specified that most of the Italian universities have adopted a position on this matter (e.g., Università degli studi di Verona, Università degli studi di Milano, Politecnico di Torino).

conjunct agreement, according to which the coordination of two nouns of a different gender requires that the adjective or past participle referring to both agrees in gender and number with the closest noun (e.g., *i bambini e le bambine vengono sempre rimproverate* ‘boys and girls are always being scolded.F.PL’) (Giusti, 2022). In putting the feminine first by trying to alternate the order of appearance in oppositional pairs (e.g., *donne e uomini* ‘women and men’ in place of *uomini e donne* ‘men and women’), however, the feminine noun, appearing first, would lose its influence on the mechanism of agreement (Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2015). With reference to the inclusive masculine, it is noteworthy that the latter is a defining strategy of the communication style adopted by the national academic environment, with the exception of a few universities (e.g., *Università IUAV di Venezia*, 2023)³ that have specifically chosen to pursue a gender-fair language policy in defense of all of those who advocate for something that goes well beyond gender binarism. Provided that one cannot always avoid all words that have only clearly masculine suffixes, the majority of female researchers are still inclined to personally choose to be called *ricercatore/ricercatori* ‘researcher.M.SG/PL’ precisely because the masculine labels boast a long-standing, more prestigious tradition and firm steadiness (Giorcelli et al., 2015). As to say, in so doing they act driven by the illusion of obtaining more solid recognition. This general tendency makes the masculine words even more frequent, further enhancing the magnitude of the phenomenon as a side effect. It is therefore a choice that responds to social and cultural contemporary dynamics that are deeply rooted in our tradition, which does not however abide by the rules of Italian grammar, as pointed out by Robustelli (2012) in her *Linee guida per l’uso del genere nel linguaggio amministrativo* ‘Guidelines for the use of gender in administrative language’. Robustelli’s claim is that profession nouns should behave like any other noun, instead of receiving a special treatment, meaning that the grammatical gender of profession nouns should coincide with the biological gender of the referent (i.e., *la ministra* ‘the.F.SG minister.F.SG’ as

³ In *Linee guida per una comunicazione inclusiva e accessibile* ‘Guidelines for inclusive and accessible communication’ (2023) – available at the following link https://www.iuav.it/Ateneo1/IUAV-SOSTE/DOCUMENTI/linee_guida_comunicazione_inclusiva_accessibile.pdf – the committee responsible for the drafting directed its attention not only to feminine visibility but also nonbinary visibility, by explicitly mentioning symbols such as the asterisk or -ə. The actual recommended context of use is however in doubt, as two different indications are reported: (i) “If allowed by the context (e.g., non-institutional email, chat), designations such as -ə or asterisk can be used. However, these designations present accessibility problems, so it is recommended to use them carefully. For rules on the use of -ə, in particular, you can consult www.italianoinclusivo.it”; (ii) “for a gender-sensitive language you should employ -ə and other symbols as long as you pay attention to the issue of accessibility and readability” (2023: 11,14). According to this second point, it appears that such use is allowed without being limited to non-institutional contexts.

opposed to *la ministro* ‘the.F.SG minister.M.SG’). As Giusti observes, supporting this practice should be dictated by the need to avoid having to deal with “agrammatical sentences like *Il direttore è stanca* ‘the.M.SG director.M.SG is tired.F.SG’, or difficult to interpret such as *Il direttore è arrivato. ##Era stanca* ‘the.M.SG director.M.SG is arrived.M.SG. ##(She) was tired.F.SG’” (Giusti, 2022: 17).

With respect to the use of the *reductive* suffix *-essa*, conflicting positions emerge. Owing to its earliest derogatory meaning (e.g., *sindachessa* ‘female mayor’; *deputatessa* ‘female deputy’), the suffix *-essa* should be spared from the process of noun derivation altogether, as argued by Sabatini (1987). Contrary to Sabatini’s (1987) recommendation, Robustelli (2012) urges her readers to keep the long-standing forms in *-essa*, e.g., *dottoressa* ‘doctor.F.SG’, *professoressa* ‘professor.F.SG’, precisely because of their linguistic tradition and the fact that the negative connotation that had marked them in the past has been removed by now. In Section 6.2.2 entitled *Uso del genere in riferimento a più persone* ‘The use of gender with reference to more than one person’ Robustelli (2012: 21-22) lists the strategies available to replace the inclusive masculine: the feminine-gender visibility strategy involving symmetrical use of gender, whose outcome is known as “binomials” (Pires, 2020: 111) (2.1a); the strategy of obscuring both genders by means of periphrases that include expressions without gender reference (2.1b), collective nouns (2.1c) or relative and indefinite pronouns (2.1d).

- (2.1) a. *Tutti i consiglieri e tutte le consigliere prendano posto nell’aula*
 ‘all councilors and councilwomen take their seat’
- b. *Persona, essere umano, individuo, soggetto*
 ‘Person, human being, individual, subject’
- c. *Personale dipendente/docente, magistratura, direzione, corpo docente, segreteria*
 ‘Teaching personnel/staff, judiciary, directorate, teaching body, secretary’
- d. *Chiunque arrivi in ritardo...*
 ‘Whoever gets here late’

At the level of syntax, the author promotes the passive form (2.2a), which allows for the omission of the agent, as well as the impersonal form (2.2b).

- (2.2) a. *La domanda deve essere presentata*
 ‘the application must be submitted’
 in place of
 I cittadini e le cittadine devono presentare la domanda
 ‘the.M.PL citizens.M.PL and the.F.PL citizens.F.PL must submit

- the application’
 b. *Si entra uno alla volta*
 ‘entrance is allowed one at a time’
 in place of
Gli utenti devono entrare uno alla volta
 ‘the.M.PL visitors.M.PL must enter one at a time’

Equally common strategies typically found in forms to fill out are the “abbreviated double form” employing “separation signs” (Elmiger, 2008: 130-1), also known as “splitting” (2.3a), often accused of “producing redundancy and complexity in discourse” (Giusti, 2022: 10), and epicenes as well as common gender nouns (2.3b) (Giorcelli et al., 2015).

- (2.3) a. *Il/La sottoscritto/a* ‘the.M/F.SG undersigned.M/F.SG’
 b. *La persona coinvolta* ‘the.F.SG person.F.SG involved.F.SG’,
la vittima accusata di... ‘the.F.SG victim.F.SG charged.F.SG with...’,
Gentile collega ‘dear colleague.SG’, *Firma docente* ‘lecturer.SG signature’

Many scholars do not distinguish between epicenes and common gender nouns. However, as explained by Thornton (2022), the former have a single form and are accompanied by a single, fixed article, although they can refer to individuals of any gender (e.g., *La persona* ‘the.F.SG person.F.SG’; *la vittima* ‘the.F.SG victim.F.SG’); the latter also have a single form, yet they are accompanied by the article indicating the gender of the referent (e.g., *Il collega / la collega* ‘the.M.SG / the.F.SG colleague.SG’; *il docente / la docente* ‘the.M.SG / the.F.SG lecturer.SG’). Moreover, the dative clitic *gli* (cf. § 1.2) is nearly used in writing to replace the feminine counterpart *le*, since it is increasingly perceived as an invariant form (D’Achille, 2021).

Turning now to sub-standard Italian, the most common procedure seems to be “the adoption or resemanticization of individual characters” (Pires, 2020: 115). An account of the most widely implemented characters acquiring this additional meaning is provided by Comandini’s (2021) *Corpus of Gender Neutralization Strategies in Italian* (CoGeNSI) – a collection of informal communications published on Facebook pages covering LGBTQIA+ topics, in which a total of 320 instances of gender neutralization strategies were identified. Table 2.1 is a readaptation of Table 1 in Comandini (2021), showing that the asterisk (2.4a) and the suffix *-ə* (2.4b) exhibit the highest frequency of occurrence, appearing 133 times (42%) and 128 times (40%), respectively. Much less frequent are the *-u* suffix (2.4c), with 34 occurrences (11%), the *-x* suffix (2.4d), with 18 occurrences (5%), and the “at” sign (@) (2.4e), with only 6 occurrences (2%). The underscore

(_) (2.4f) was not detected; nor were the following: -+ (2.4g), -y (2.4h), -æ (2.4i), together with the omission of the final vowel (2.4j), listed by Gheno online (2020b) as other possible options.

	“*”	“ə”	“u”	“x”	“@”	Tot.
Number of occurrences	133	129	34	18	6	320
%	42%	40%	11%	5%	2%	100

Table 2.1 - Frequency (%) of occurrence of each of the sub-standard gender neutralization strategies (i.e., asterisk, -ə suffix, -u suffix, -x suffix, at sign).

Among the proposed characters, it is worth noting that “changing the phonological as well as morphological function to a vowel” – in this particular case -*u* – is a very “radical” and invasive linguistic change involving “the attribution of a new morphological value (of gender and number) that can be interpreted semantically” (Giusti, 2022: 14-15). Its function is to “replace the binary gendered morphological inflections” in written language, in an attempt to refrain from making explicit the gender of the referent (Formato & Somma, 2023: 28). In (2.4), a sentence taken from the CoGeNSI corpus (2021) is reported and adapted to provide an example for each of the sub-standard gender neutralization strategies mentioned so far:

- (2.4) a. *Mi*figli* è un* liber* soggettività*
‘My.* son/daughter.* is a.* free.* subjectivity’
b. *Miəfigliə è unə liberə soggettività*
‘My.ə son/daughter.ə is a.ə free.ə subjectivity’
c. *Miufigliu è unu liberu soggettività*
‘My.u son/daughter.u is a.u free.u subjectivity’
d. *Mixfiglix è unx liberx soggettività*
‘My.x son/daughter.x is a.x free.x subjectivity’
e. *Mi@figli@ è un@ liber@ soggettività*
‘My.@ son/daughter.@ is a.@ free.@ subjectivity’
f. *Mi_ figli_ è un_ liber_ soggettività*
‘My._ son/daughter._ is a._ free._ subjectivity’
g. *Mi+ figli+ è un+ liber+ soggettività*
‘My.+ son/daughter.+ is a.+ free.+ subjectivity’
h. *Miyfigliy è uny libery soggettività*
‘My.y son/daughter.y is a.y free.y subjectivity’
i. *Miæfigliæ è unæ liberæ soggettività*
‘My.æ son/daughter.æ is a.æ free.æ subjectivity’
j. *Mi-figli- è un- liber- soggettività*
‘My.- son/daughter.- is a.- free.- subjectivity’

For most of the proposed strategies, it was not possible to trace their first appearance in the public sphere, and thus identify their actual proponents. There are specific instances, however, in which a public stance to embrace a particular strategy taken by a given movement has prompted its use, or otherwise encouraged the debate surrounding it. That is the case with the “at” sign (@), whose use has been publicly claimed by the transfeminist movement *Non Una di Meno* (NUDM) ‘Not One Less’, founded in Italy in 2016. On November 25, 2017, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the transfeminist movement presented the document *Piano femminista contro la violenza maschile sulle donne e la violenza di genere* ‘Feminist plan against male violence against women and gender-based violence’, in which, in addition to their political reflections, tools for action affecting also language were identified. The opening page reads as follows:

In questo Piano abbiamo scelto di svelare la non neutralità del maschile utilizzando non solo il femminile, ma anche la @ per segnalare l’irriducibilità e la molteplicità delle nostre differenze. Consapevoli che le lingue mutano e si evolvono, proviamo a rendere il nostro linguaggio inclusivo per avere nuove parole per raccontarci e per modificare i nostri immaginari.

For this Plan we have chosen to unveil the non-neutrality of the masculine by using not only the feminine, but also the @ to signal the irreducibility and multiplicity of our differences. We are well aware that languages change and evolve, and we seek to make our language inclusive so to have new words to tell our stories with and to modify our imaginaries (*Piano femminista contro la violenza maschile sulle donne e la violenza di genere*, 2017).

From these lines, the will to adopt a suffix that is representative of a real diversity – which by its very nature could not be ascribed to a single form – emerges forcefully. It is thus seen as a maximally open word-ending.

Having established that the use of these strategies is strictly confined to the written communication of online queer communities to refer to both themselves and others (Comandini, 2021), only the suffix -ə seems to contradict such generalization by invading, in a consistent manner, the field of publishing. In 2020, the Florence-based publishing house *effequ* for the first time indeed adopted the innovative suffix -ə to designate people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender in the translation of the Portuguese book written by Marcia Tiburi *Feminismo em comum. Para todas, todes e todos*. Faced with the translation problem posed by the use of the -e suffix in Portuguese as representative of a different gender and number value,

the same end-vowel could not be used in Italian as it is too overtly characterized as feminine (cf. Section 1.2). Therefore, it was necessary to identify a different suffix that could serve such function, without being compromised by an inherent feminine connotation. The choice fell on the symbol *-ə* initially proposed by Vera Gheno in her book *Femminili singolari* ‘Feminine singular’⁴ (2019), which sparked off an intense debate. No distinction was made between the singular and the plural, unlike what was stipulated by the model developed by *Italiano Inclusivo* ‘Inclusive Italian’, examined by Giusti (2022), which involves the introduction of a distinct form for the plural, i.e., *-3*.

In comparing the two solutions adopted for Italian and Portuguese, a substantial difference emerges: the major advantage brought about by the use of *-e* in Portuguese lies in the fact that it can be easily pronounced as it belongs to the vowel inventory of Portuguese and can therefore be read by any reading software, thus ensuring accessibility to written texts to visually-impaired people (Thornton, 2022). The same advantage cannot be found in Italian, as *-ə* is not part of the phonemic inventory of Italian⁵. It is a central vowel, found in a variety of languages, among which English, as the vowels of unstressed syllables are often phonetically reduced and realized as [ə]. Some speakers of Italian could be more familiar with its pronunciation, as [ə] is included in the vowel systems of southern Italian dialects, e.g., Neapolitan, in which all vowels in final position are realized as [ə], as shown in the example “bello/-a/-e [b'bellə] ‘beautiful.MSG/FSG/PL’” (Ledgeway, 2016: 251). Nonetheless, Giusti (2022: 14) raises the question of “articulatory proximity” whereby [ə] and [ɜ] risk being perceived as [e].

Before delving into the criticalities arising from adopting this form, it should be noted that a change in the editorial guidelines in 2021 marked a shift in the use of the innovative suffix *-ə* – originally conceived to give visibility to people of a nonbinary identity, as it was the case with Tiburi (2020) – now employed as a substitute for the unmarked masculine specifically to “neutralize whichever gender identity within a ‘multitude’” of referents (Thornton, 2022: 33). In other words, the change in use led to refer to groups including any possible gender identity, not just people with nonbinary identities.

⁴ Note that this is an intricate construction to be translated into English, as the adjective ‘singular’ is nominalized and pluralized in Italian. This operation is not available in English. An alternative translation, one that is closer to the original meaning, could be: *Feminine singular intended as a plurality*.

⁵ This remark on readability applies to all the other punctuation marks and orthographic markers as well.

The linguistic instances produced with the suffix *-ə* may vary in their internal structure among the different entities that have chosen to implement this form. Particularly, a minor variation has been observed in the formation of determiners. *Effequ* editorial guidelines only mention definite articles by prescribing the use of *lə* ‘the.NB.SG’ for the singular, perceived as closer to *la* ‘the.F.SG’ and *lo* ‘the.M.SG’, and *ə* for the plural, closer to *i* ‘the.M.PL’ (Thornton, 2022: 36). As for the indefinite article, in drawing from the recommendations published by *Italiano Inclusivo*, Giusti (2022) reports *unə bambinə* ‘a.NB.SG child.NB.SG’, recalling the feminine form only to some extent, as it can be distinguished from the feminine precisely by the replacement of the apostrophe with an asterisk when *unə* precedes a vowel, i.e., *un*artistə* (Giusti, 2022: 16). Furthermore, no regular relationship has been established between the orthography and phonology of words containing velar and palatal consonants followed by *-ə* (Thornton, 2022). A case in point is *unə astrofisicə* ‘an.NB.SG astrophysics.NB.SG’ (p.78) – read as *astrofisi/kə/* with */k/* just like its singular feminine and masculine counterparts – as opposed to the plural *autisticə* ‘autistic.NB.PL’ (p.70), which can either be read as *autisti/kə/* with */k/* or *autisti/tʃə/* with */tʃ/*, exhibiting a tighter association with either the feminine or masculine, respectively (Acanfora, 2021; Thornton, 2022). In Thornton’s view (2022), the failure to disambiguate between the two possible readings of the plural form is a proof of the fact that priority is given to the written language over the spoken language, for which the rules that are laid out obey, first and foremost, the needs of writing, as if the issue of sound articulation was somehow of subordinate importance. Equally problematic is the morpheme *-torə /-torə* in deverbal nominals, which shows a clear similarity to the masculine morpheme from which it is derived (Giusti, 2022), as opposed to the feminine form *-tricə /-tricə*. The aspects examined so far partly unveil the feminine or masculine form from which the resulting grammatical elements were originally molded. Therefore, they do not appear as totally independent, but rather, as if they were contaminated, in a sense, by the femininity or masculinity value of origin.

One must however consider the implications carried by the introduction of *-ə* on a larger scale, which can be summarized into the following: the introduction of (i) a new phoneme and (ii) a new gender value (Thornton, 2022). As Thornton (2022) observes, the new gender value requires defining its specific semantic core; as to say, a precise characterization is needed, one that clearly distinguishes between referring only to human beings who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender (*specific interpretation*) or all human beings, without mentioning any

gender information, be it unknown or deliberately omitted (*generic interpretation*). Studies in corpus linguistics attest that it is the second interpretation (i.e., generic) to prevail: namely, referring to “an individual without specifying their gender identity or to mixed groups of people of all identities” (Thornton, 2022: 42). Therefore, it is not a matter of introducing a third gender value or a neutral, but rather a gender-free form (Ghenot, 2022). Through this form, the supporters of this morphological innovation are attempting to undo the grammatical expression of an opposition between the masculine and feminine values by referring to humans without making use of the grammatical category of gender (Thornton, 2022). The problem is however that such a proposal does not extend to inanimate referents. In other words, the opposition between the two gender values would remain in place at least with referents found in the lower degrees of the animacy hierarchy (Comrie, 1983), thus giving rise to an anomalous system in which animate referents do not possess characterization by gender, while abstract nouns do (Thornton, 2022). Based on the evidence suggesting that the generic interpretation of the *-ø* suffix is more frequently activated, regardless of the fact that the novel form was originally conceived to represent the non-binary population only, it is the dual meaning triggered by this morphological innovation, namely the juxtaposition of these uses (specific *vs* generic), that stifles the specific interpretation. Precisely because the generic meaning by its definition encompasses the specific meaning, the latter does not stand a chance, it is doomed to disappear.

In light of the observations made up to here, Pires (2020: 116) identifies three major problems common to all the morphological innovations listed above: (i) “graphocentrism”; (ii) “inappropriateness for learners”; and (iii) “general complexity”, all pointing to heavy processing costs, not to mention that distinct devices “do not form an overall system for neutralizing gender in texts”. The author further stresses the “variable treatment of speech and writing” instantiated by such “unusual graphical features” by sustaining that they specifically “resist oralization”, as “texts containing such elements cannot even be read aloud” (Pires, 2020: 111, 115).

The solution put forward by Pires (2020) thus lies in the use of a systematic feminine for mixed reference (i.e., feminine generic), which guarantees perfect correspondence between written and spoken language by relying on the already available linguistic resources. The mixed-reference feminine for “activities in which females have historically had a prominent role” (e.g., female cashiers, primary-school teachers and nurses) is indeed generally recognized by speakers of French, German and Italian (Pires, 2020: 119). The choice of the feminine generic can be

justified not only by the need to reclaim visibility of women in language, but also, and more importantly, by the practice of “number genericity”, according to which the generic is molded on the basis of the numerically dominant group (Pires, 2020: 121). Aside from the feminine resolution in itself, number genericity establishes a rather impartial criterion for gender selection, one that depends entirely on the perceived majority of the group members.

2.2 Degendering Strategies Available Across Different Languages

Many of the strategies presented for Italian can be found in other languages as well, albeit exhibiting characteristic traits. French resembles Italian in the use of “separation signs” to put “graphical emphasis on the morphological boundary” in the abbreviated double form, with the only difference that there is much more variation in the signs to be used: *enseignant(e)*, *enseignant.e*, *einsegnant-e*, *enseignant·e*, *enseignantE* ‘teacher.M/F.SG’ (Elmiger, 2008: 130-1; Pires, 2020: 114). Unlike French and Italian, German resorts to capitalization, namely it “has internal capitals (*Binnengrossschreibung*) to mark off the beginning of the suffix: *LehrerIn*” ‘teacher.M/F.SG’ (Pires, 2020: 114-5). For this strategy to be implemented, the feminine form has to be longer than its masculine counterpart. In this sequence, however, the feminine is inevitably perceived as an extension of the masculine, emphasizing the dominance of the segment on the left of the boundary (Pires, 2020). Returning to the issue of “generic feminism”, the University of Leipzig resorts to the feminine exclusively to refer to all genders by inserting a footnote precisely to make clear that all genders are included (Todeskino, 2013). Alongside feminized forms, nominalization of verbs is another accessible strategy to make gender neutral nouns (e.g., “Lecturers are advised to address their students not as Studenten but Studierenden (‘those that study’), thus sidestepping the gender question altogether”) (Oltermann, 2014). As to the special characters replacing traditional suffixes, the *o/a* alternation in Spanish can be substituted by the “at” sign (@) (2.5a), -x also appears potentially in place of any letter (2.5b), whereas in French the *a/e* alternation can be changed in -æ (2.5c) (Pires, 2020: 115):

- (2.5) a. *MIS ALUMN@S NON SON NÚMEROS*
‘My students.@ are not numbers’
- b. *TODXS A LA HUELGA*
‘Everybody is taking part in the strike’
- c. *C’EST TOI LÆ MÉCANO*

‘You are th.æ machinist’

Even more popular as a nonbinary gender marker is the use of [-e] in Spanish (2.6), “which allows the projection to the spoken language and generates stronger restrictions on concordance” (Stetie & Zunino, 2022: 7).

- (2.6) a. *Elle es une niñe intelligentissime*
‘It.NB.SG is a.NB.SG very smart.NB.SG child.NB.SG’⁶

Well-established in many Spanish-speaking communities in America, the use of [-e] has also been attested in Iberian Spanish (Cardelli, 2018; Bonnin & Coronel, 2021). In Argentina, such a strategy has been deliberately fostered by many cultural and educational institutions responsible for drafting official documentation on the topic (Stetie & Zunino, 2022). In the *Guía para incorporar un uso inclusivo del lenguaje* ‘Guide to incorporate an inclusive use of language’ (2021) compiled by the *Universidad Nacional de San Martín*, it is possible to draw a sharp distinction in the use of [-e] as opposed to -x and -@. That is, as illustrated in the excerpts below, forms adopting the [-e] as a suffix stand for the generic, as they presuppose a multitude of genders, whereas forms with -x and -@ are nonbinary-specific in that they do not appear in isolation, but rather are juxtaposed to the feminine and masculine counterparts:

Desde hace un tiempo viene predominando el uso de la *e* ya que es morfológicamente claro y no afecta la economía del lenguaje. Su uso se ha popularizado [...] también en lo cotidiano de la comunidad universitaria. La ventaja de este recurso es que, a diferencia de los anteriores, incluye otros géneros más allá del femenino y el masculino. La desventaja es que en algunos grupos puede generar rechazo al punto de no lograr los fines comunicativos. Por eso, es necesario siempre tener en cuenta a qué público nos dirigimos y con qué fines (2021:10).

For some time now, the use of *e* has been predominant, since it is morphologically clear and does not affect the economy of language. Its use has become popular [...] also in the daily life of the university community. The advantage of this resource is that, unlike the previous ones, it includes other genders beyond the feminine and masculine. The disadvantage is that in some groups it can generate rejection to the point of not achieving the communicative purposes. For this reason, it is always necessary to keep in mind which audience we are addressing and for what purposes.

⁶A more appropriate English translation of the sentence would have the gender-neutral pronoun *they* to stand for *elle*. However, the third-person singular pronoun *it* was chosen in order to preserve the verb in the singular form, as it appears in the original Spanish sentence.

En algunas comunicaciones nos encontramos con la @ y la x. Mediante estos recursos la intención es visibilizar la presencia de otras identidades de género más allá de las masculinas o femeninas. Ejemplo: en lugar de utilizar “delegados” se refiere de manera escrita de la siguiente manera: delegadas, delegados, delegadx (2021:11).

In some communications we find the @ and x. By means of these resources, the intention is to make visible the presence of other gender identities beyond the masculine or feminine ones. For example, instead of using "delegates", the following is referred to in writing: delegates.F.PL, delegates.M.PL, delegatxs.NB.PL.

As with the remarks passed on Italian, emphasis is placed on the lack of phonetic realization attributed to such graphic devices, which poses non-negligible limitations that effectively hinder the accessibility of these proposals. The following excerpt further develops this crucial point.

Las dificultades en el uso de la @ y la x radican en que estas formas no son accesibles para personas con discapacidad visual, intelectual, psicosocial, entre otras, dado que dificultan o impiden la comunicación y la comprensión (no pueden reconocerse mediante lectores de pantalla, no tienen pronunciación oral). Es decir, su uso implica barreras para las personas que utilizan lectores de texto, lenguaje sencillo y otras formas alternativas de comunicación que no reconocen dichos caracteres (2021:11).

The difficulties in the use of @ and x lie in the fact that these forms are not accessible to people with visual, intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, among others, since they hinder or prevent communication and understanding (they cannot be recognized by screen readers, they do not have oral pronunciation). In other words, their use implies barriers for people who use text readers, simple language and other alternative forms of communication that do not recognize these characters.

The type of intervention analyzed so far can be explained in terms of substituting or recombining linguistic materials, something that can be achieved by means of different techniques. Introducing a brand new pronoun is quite another matter, as it is a “functional word”, subject to slow transformation by its very nature (Milles, 2013). Particularly significant is the Swedish experience with the third-gender neutral pronoun *hen* as a complement to the two already existing gendered pronouns, whose use, albeit initially rejected, has now been welcomed and adopted by the majority of language users (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015). Originally introduced in the 1960s to be later employed by LGBT-communities in the early 21st century, it appeared for the first time in 2012 in a children’s book to denote its main character, so that young readers could “visualize and develop their stories much more freely”, without being influenced by gender categories (Hord, 2016; Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015: 2). Adapted from the

gender-neutral Finnish pronoun *hän*, with which it also shares its meaning, *hen* in Swedish is used with human referents of unknown or undetectable gender as well as nonbinary people (Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012; Thornton, 2022). It can therefore be “used both generically, when gender is unknown or irrelevant, and as a transgender pronoun for people who categorize themselves outside the gender dichotomy” (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015: 1). As shown in Table 2.2⁷, the novel pronoun “very nicely fits into the Swedish system of pronouns, as being literally very close to, as well as alphabetically positioned between *han* (‘he’) and *hon* (‘she’)” (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015: 10).

<i>han</i>	<i>hen</i>	<i>hon</i>	<i>den</i>	<i>det</i>
Male human referent (<i>he</i>)	1. Nonbinary human referent (transgender pronoun) 2. Human referent of unknown or undetectable gender (generic pronoun)	Female human referent (<i>she</i>)	1. Inanimate referent of a syntactical common gender 2. Single plural form unmarked for gender	Inanimate referent of a syntactical neutral gender

Table 2.2 - Swedish system of pronouns.

The study carried out by Gustafsson Sendén and colleagues (2015) is proof of the overturning of an initial resistance to an initiative of gender-fair language into an accepted and viable solution. No matter how hostile reactions can be at the outset, “attitudes can normalize rather quickly” (Gustafsson Sendén et al., 2015: 1).

The quest for establishing a standard epicene pronoun lacking any gender reference in English goes as far as the eighteenth century, with at least eighty neo-pronouns being attested (Baron, 1986). Amongst the novel gender-neutral pronouns emerging in the scene is singular *ze* and plural *hir* – with its less productive derivatives *ze/zir* (Šincek, 2020) – promoted by the *University of Vermont* (Scelfo, 2015), whose use is however still confined to small numbers. Like other proposals that go in the same direction, they “tend to fade in and out of collective social consciousness rather quickly” (Hord, 2016: 23). Also the pseudo-generic use of *he* has been progressively abandoned (Hord, 2016). In fact, there appears to be a better candidate, boasting a

⁷ Table 2.2 was built on the basis of the information gathered in the study conducted by Renström and colleagues (2022) and Giusti (2022).

longer tradition (Balhorn, 2004), whose favorability has been empirically demonstrated by studies on formal student writing assignments with speakers of American English (Mitchell, 1994) and Australian English (Strahan, 2008), that is, singular *they*. One cannot however ignore that, at least from a prescriptive grammatical perspective, the claim that *they* can only be plural has been a source of criticism against this usage (Bodine, 1975). The above mentioned studies nevertheless suggest that “younger generations are inherently more used to using singular *they* as a generic pronoun, which makes them more inclined to accept its use with a singular referent” (Hord, 2016: 10), in line with Baron’s predictions championing singular *they* as the one doomed to dominate English gender neutral pronoun use, as it “is widely used in speech and writing and, despite the stigma of ungrammaticality that has become attached to it since the eighteenth century, the construction shows no signs of dying out” (1986: 193). Further experimental confirmation comes from Bradley and colleagues’ (2019a: 1) research, whose “results suggest that ‘they’ is interpreted as gender-neutral, including non-binary/gender-nonconforming referents”, whereas “‘ze’ does not appear to be recognized by enough English speakers to determine a definitive interpretation”. It follows that, unlike neo-pronouns, which have hardly caught on, singular *they* has the potential to achieve widespread use (Hord, 2016). Giusti (2022: 13) calls it a fully accepted alternative, describing it as the outcome of “a minimal variation of the referential property of *they*, which previously referred to generic human beings or whose gender was not to be specified (perhaps to maintain its anonymity) and now can refer to specific human beings manifesting their fluid identity”. It is no coincidence that in 2015, singular *they* was also selected as “word of the year” by the voting members of the American Dialect Society precisely to refer to a person’s choice to reject traditional gender binary pronouns *he* and *she* (Hord, 2016: 8). Comparatively speaking, no gender-neutral pronouns were found for German, with only one “isolated occurrence” being officially attested in French (Hord, 2016: 7), namely the use of the pronoun *ile*, located in between *he* and *she* in French, by an intersex individual who adopted this form to express their gender identity on government documents (Hord, 2016). Similarly to recommendations put forward for Italian, the alternatives to sexist language in English include *s/he* as a singular pronoun, alternation of *he* and *she*, avoidance of pronouns, pluralization of referents, the gender neutral title *Mx*, to name a few (Mitchell, 1994; Bahadur, 2013).

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. As a matter of fact, attempts at experimenting with novel strategies appear to be steadily increasing across languages. It is therefore difficult to grasp all the nuances of meaning and possible developments. Dwelling on the virtuous examples that have led to some kind of recognition thus seemed the best way to proceed, in an attempt to find commonalities with the language under study (i.e., Italian). The experiment designed to test the most widespread strategy toward an inclusive use of the Italian language i.e., the innovative suffix *-a*, is thoroughly described in the next chapter.

3 Testing the Efficacy of Adopting the Morphological Variant *-ə* to Achieve Grammatical Gender Inclusion

The present study constitutes one of the first attempts at investigating how nonbinary morphological innovations are processed in Italian. The experiment draws from various elements gathered across studies conducted on other languages (Bradley et al., 2019a; Stetie & Zunino, 2022), in an effort to contribute to the ongoing vigorous debate revolving on the so-called ‘inclusive language’. It is an exploratory study specifically focussing on the comprehension of sentences that contain the morphological variant *-ə* as a suffix to generate mixed, non-uniform or unknown gender identity reference.

3.1 Study Overview and Research Questions

Lexical access of a word depends on “its frequency (how often a given word appears in a text), the reader's familiarity with its meaning, and the time that has elapsed since the last encounter” (Wolf & Stoodley, 2008: 168). The intervention on the ending of a word may hinder its degree of familiarity, at least initially, yet continued exposure to the new form of the word may contribute to surmounting the apparent obstacle represented by the morphological variant *-ə* used as a suffix. Being Italian a highly inflected language, as illustrated in § 1.2, the selected morphological marking appears not only in noun phrases but also verb phrases containing a past participle. Hence, it is the inflectional system of the language itself that accounts for the pervasiveness of a suffix-based strategy. The redundancy with which the selected suffix appears throughout a piece of text might indeed result in an habituation effect leading to eventually considering the variant *-ə* – unusual and not immediately recognizable at first glance – an unambiguous form to represent groups of people of different genders as well as an individual of unknown or nonbinary gender, as a consequence of this habituation. With regard to this prediction, we formulated three research questions about the responsiveness to this form and the representations it activates.

The first concerns the specialization of *-ə* as a third form expressing nonbinary gender:

(I) Does the variant *-ə* manage to immediately refer to mixed groups (*Plural condition*) as well as to an individual who does not identify with the binary distinction of gender (*Singular condition*)?

The second question is about whether a novel form implies higher processing costs that translate into longer reaction times, although evidence from previous studies suggest the opposite trend (Stetie & Zunino, 2022). It is therefore a matter of ascertaining the following:

(II) Is the processing of *-ə* cumbersome? Does the nonbinary form *-ə* require longer reaction times as opposed to the traditional, long-established suffixes used to refer to feminine and masculine referents?

Here, too, the habituation effect could impact on reaction times, hence determining the processing costs attached to this variant. In other words, once participants get used to the variant, their reaction times will no longer be affected by its originally unusual appearance.

As to the third question, the generic masculine enters the scene. The study also sets out to measure the influence exerted by the masculine form in leaning towards the exclusive reference to men. In other words,

(III) Does the alleged generic masculine display a bias in favor of an interpretation that sees only men as the exclusive referents?

To examine how Italian speakers interpret referents that are indicated to with the variant *-ə*, i.e., to answer question (I), a sentence-picture matching task was developed based on the one used by Bradley and colleagues (2019a). The authors investigated “whether singular, specific ‘they’ and the novel singular gender-neutral pronoun ‘ze’ are interpreted as gender-neutral (silent on gender and the gender binary) or referring specifically to referents of nonbinary gender” (Bradley et al., 2019a: 1).

Notice that in order to replicate the experiment, gender marking had to take a different shape in the target language – being pro-drop (i.e., Italian) –, with the high number of pronouns typically present in the source language (i.e., they/them), owing to its non pro-drop status, being substituted with suffixes carrying the proposed innovation. We proceeded by adapting Bradley and colleagues’ (2019a) prompts and guidelines not only to the Italian language but also to the national academic context in which they were to be transferred, by taking into account those linguistic phenomena and trends that dominate the scenario at hand. Any adjustments or changes made with respect to the original materials will be illustrated in great detail in Section 3.3.

Before the actual experiment, we conducted a norming online survey, which is to be intended as preparatory to collecting the photographic material for the actual experiment. The authors of the study from which we draw our inspiration had opted for this preliminary procedure so that they would have photos to be considered adequately representative in the terms that will be made clear later on. For the same reason, we summoned a separate sample of participants ($N=90$) who rated a total of 24 stock photos using an independent 10-point scale by assigning each depicted person a perceived value of femininity-masculinity. Indeed, this study was aimed at forming the photo arrays used in the experiment.

The structure and results of the survey are reported in the following section (§ 3.2), whereas the main experimental procedure, together with participant description and material analysis, will be covered thoroughly in Section 3.3, with data analysis available in chapter 4.

3.2 Femininity-Masculinity Image Evaluation Survey – An Experimental Online Procedure

3.2.1 Participants and Procedure

An online questionnaire was distributed through a Google Form (Google platform) in the month of February 2023. To be able to access the form and proceed with the filling out, each prospective participant read and accepted an informed consent form, in compliance with the regulation (EU) 2016/679. 90 Italian native speakers participated in the study as an independent sample of participants, whose contribution was restricted to the completion of the questionnaire only, with no further involvement in later phases of the study. The data collected were anonymous, hence respondents' identity could not be traced in any way.

The opening demographic section allowed us to gather information about the composition of the sample. Of the total number of participants, 52 indicated being between 18-25 years of age (57.8%) and 36 between the ages of 26-50 (40%). Only 2.2% of the participants declared that they were over 50 years old. In terms of education, 21 participants reported having completed secondary school (23.3%), 46 had obtained a Bachelor's Degree (51.1%) and 22 were in a higher education program or had received a Master's Degree (24.4%). Only one participant referred to themselves as a PhD student (1.1%).

All participants rated 24 photos based on femininity-masculinity judgments using 10-point Likert scales. The purpose of the task was to come up with three distinct categories containing photos

depicting feminine, masculine or nonbinary referents, respectively. The set of photos to be evaluated came from stock photo libraries licensed for reuse shared by the American research team led by Bradley (2019a), responsible for the original selection.



Figure 1. Excerpt of a photo array used for photo selection in the experiment. These were rated by participants as feminine, nonbinary and masculine, respectively (following the order from left to right).

The following instructions preceded each photo in an attempt to guide the evaluation process in an unambiguous and uniform manner:

IT: *Indica su una scala da 1 (femminile) a 10 (maschile), il tuo giudizio di femminilità-mascolinità selezionando il valore che meglio rappresenta la persona raffigurata.*

EN: *Indicate on a scale from 1 (feminine) to 10 (masculine), your judgment on femininity-masculinity by selecting the value that best represents the depicted person.*

Based on the ratings assigned to each image by participants, photos were grouped into three different categories as a result of the application of the gender classification criterion: F (Feminine); M (Masculine); NB (Nonbinary), with each category including 8 photos. The criterion adopted here follows the one established by Bradley and colleagues (2019a), for which a detailed description is given in Box 1, thus allowing for a comparison with the ratings obtained by the American sample of participants⁸. The resulting classification (see Appendix A for a complete list) indeed reflects the one outlined by the authors of the study from which we draw

⁸ The criterion illustrated in Box 1 was determined by extrapolation from the numbers provided in the paper by Bradley and colleagues (2019a). In the absence of a dedicated section, we proceeded by reconstructing it and made it explicit here.

our inspiration, showing no difference that could possibly account for any cultural biases emerging from the image-assessing activity.

The Gender Classification Criterion
The gender classification criterion is established on the basis of the difference in the scores obtained by the photos. On a 1-10 scale, the threshold value is 6. Thus, to establish boundary values for each category, the score difference between the masculine and feminine category must be greater than 6 (> 6). The minimum score for a photo to be classified as masculine is obtained through the following calculation: $7.1 - 1 = 6.1$; where 7.1 is the first available score (smallest number) to provide a number greater than 6 when the all-feminine score (1) is subtracted from it. From 7.1 (boundary value) onwards (up to 10, included) photos are thus classified as masculine, as the subtraction gives a number greater than 6. The same calculation applies to the feminine category: up to which scores is the score difference between feminine and masculine greater than 6? ($7.1 - 1 = 6.1$; $8.1 - 2 = 6.1$ etc.). The boundary values that follow hence account for a valid tripartition: – Feminine (1-3) – Nonbinary (3.1-7) – Masculine (7.1-10) To sum up, for a photo to be classified as feminine it must obtain a mean score ranging between 1-3. For it to be classified as nonbinary it must be included in the interval 3.1-7, whereas the masculine range goes from 7.1 to 10, included.

Box 1. The gender classification criterion explained.

3.2.2 Results

The data obtained from our sample of participants were interpreted by applying the classification criterion posited by Bradley and colleagues (2019a), which led to the replication of the same exact tripartition outlined by the authors. In other words, the collected ratings turned out to fit into the intervals provided by the American researchers, responsible for dictating membership in a particular category, hence ensuring disambiguation. In no case were the boundary values exceeded. This proves that Italian respondents shared with the American experimental group the perception of the feminine-masculine profile of the depicted person for each single photo. As shown in Table 3.1, the mean score obtained from all the ratings assigned to feminine photos equals 2.09 ($SD = 0.185$), thus placing the mean score of the category within the range previously defined by Bradley and colleagues (2019a) as feminine (1-3). In addition, the value most frequently assigned to the photos that constitute the feminine category, i.e., the mode, is 1, coinciding with the maximum score for a photo to be classified as feminine. The same goes for the other two categories: the mean score for the nonbinary category is 4.64 ($SD = 0.078$), with the mode being 5, and for the masculine category is 8.58 ($SD = 0.164$), with the mode being 10,

corresponding to the maximum score for a photo to be classified as masculine. As a matter of fact both values fall within the specific range supplied by Bradley and colleagues (2019a).

	Mean	SD	Mode	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Feminine	2.0972222	0.185389	1	2	1	9
Non-binary	4.6416667	0.078336	5	4.5	1	10
Male	8.5916667	0.164385	10	9	1	10

Table 3.1 - Mean score, standard deviation, mode, median, minimum and maximum values are reported for each category.

Below is provided one example for each category showing – for the sample images – the obtained mean score and most frequent score.

Table 3.2 reports results for *Photo 2*: not only does the image fall within the range labeled as feminine, but its most frequent score coincides with the maximum value of femininity (1) available in the scale. Hence the photo was rated unanimously as full-fledged feminine. No conflicting scores pointing to a different direction were recorded. As displayed by the mode of the feminine category (see Table 3.1), the remaining 7 photos showed the same trend detected in *Photo 2*.

	Mean score	2.18
	Most frequent score (Mode)	1 (39.3% of participants)
	Photo rated as	Feminine

Table 3.2 - Mean score, most frequent score and assigned label are reported for Photo 2.

The same applies to *Photo 17* for the masculine category, whose details are reported in Table 3.3. 10 was the most frequent score (30.3%) corresponding to the maximum value of masculinity.

	Mean score	8.42
	Most frequent score (Mode)	10 (30.3% of participants)
	Photo rated as	Masculine

Table 3.3 - Mean score, most frequent score and assigned label are reported for Photo 17.

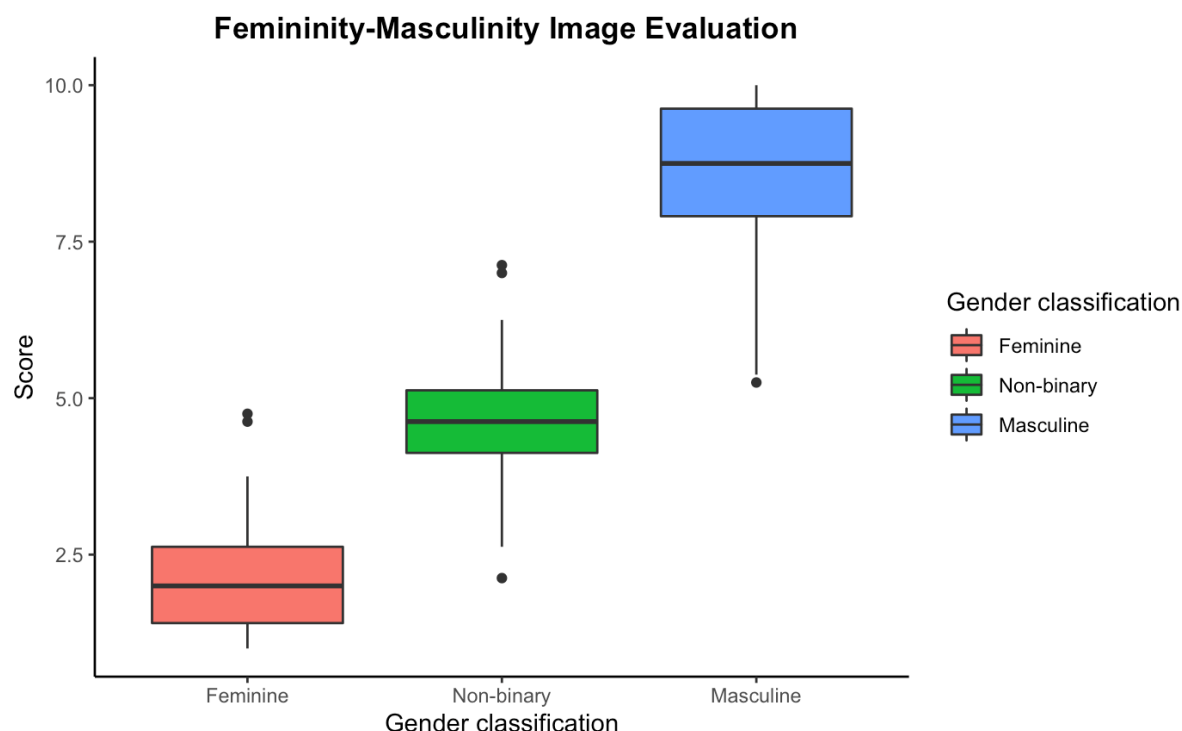
Photo 11 was instead rated as nonbinary with a most frequent score of 4 (27%) and a mean score of 4.09 (see Table 3.4). As the photos belonging to this *in-between* category require their positioning on central values along the scale, category assignment appears to be less visibly straightforward – having to necessarily move away from the extremes – yet, after careful look, it is of equally precise identification given that image ratings have to fall within the specific broader range of 3.1-7. Again, there were no contrasting ratings for this category either, thus uniform judging was established among nonbinary depicted subjects as well. Based on the aforementioned data, results confirmed predictions by replicating the same classification put forward by Bradley and colleagues (2019a).

	Mean score	4.09
	Most frequent score (Mode)	4 (27% of participants)
	Photo rated as	Nonbinary

Table 3.4 - Mean score, most frequent score and assigned label are reported for Photo 11.

If we look at the score distribution for each category (F, NB, M) as in Graph 3.1, the difference in score is clearly distinguishable, as each distribution, i.e., each box, is remarkably detached

from the others. This allows us to visualize how all respondents did indeed perceive the pre-identified photos labeled as feminine as actually being feminine. Same patterns are detectable for the other groups (M, NB). The central line marking the median value further stresses the point by placing itself in conjunction with the center of the established intervals.



Graph 3.1 - Distribution of the assigned scores for each category.

3.3 The Reference-Assignment Experiment Through Identification of Images

This experiment aims at testing whether sentences containing the *-ə* suffix are matched with photos of gender-diverse or -unspecified referents, so as to determine the feasibility of this strategy in achieving grammatical recognition of nonbinary gender. Besides the supposedly correct reference assignment, the sustainability of this strategy is equally tested, to be understood in terms of the practicability by the participant that is to master it. This will be determined by looking at the reaction times registered in correspondence of the stimuli presenting such morphological innovation, to be later compared with those containing the gender markers characterizing the Italian language. The experiment will be conducted to determine whether the strategy's viability is real or whether it enters into a conflict with the language system, which is manifested through longer reaction times accounting for higher processing costs.

We simulated an assessment procedure in which participants were invited to assist the appointed committee members by reviewing the application materials and returning a preliminary evaluation of the candidates' profiles. Specifically, participants were asked to read the descriptions of the candidates, gauge their academic profiles based on three parameters and select the photos that match the described candidates.

The profile of our sample of participants is first presented in Section 3.3.1. Textual and visual materials are treated consecutively, in two adjacent subsections within the same major Section 3.3.2 – the first containing descriptions of the verbal stimuli (Section 3.3.2), the second displaying the set of images used for the experiment (Section 3.3.2.2). Some notes on the English translations of the stimuli are also included in Section 3.3.2.1. Descriptions of the two online questionnaires – i.e., *Sexist/Inclusive Language Use in Italian* (SILUI) and the *Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits* – are provided in Sections 3.3.3 & 3.3.4, respectively. The chapter ends with a comprehensive account of the adopted procedure in Section 3.3.5.

3.3.1 Participants

81 native Italian speaking participants (44 F, 36 M, age range 18-30 years, mean age 24;8 years) took part in the experiment. Interestingly, no participants selected “nonbinary” or “other” as the gender in which they identify themselves. As to their geographical origin, 49 participants indicated Emilia Romagna as their region of origin, 14 participants indicated Veneto, whereas the remaining indicated Lazio (4 participants), Toscana (3 participants), and Calabria (2 participants). Campania, Lombardia, Piemonte, Puglia, Sardegna, Sicilia, Trentino, and Umbria count one participant each.

All participants were either recruited through in-person invitation on campus at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice or through a request for participation received via email (in this case relying on personal connections). All participants gave informed consent to participate. 42 participants (F=24; M=18) were randomly assigned to the singular-plural tasks' sequence of administration and 38 (F=20; M=18) participants were randomly assigned to the opposite sequence (i.e., plural-singular).

One participant was excluded from the study due to their task performance error (i.e., selecting more than one required element at a single item). Hence, 80 participants are considered for the statistical analysis.

3.3.2 Textual and Visual Materials

Two sets of eight items were constructed to be run in two separate experimental tasks (*Task 1*; *Task 2*). The aim of the first task was to investigate whether the *-ə* suffix can be applied to a single nonbinary referent, whereas the purpose of the second task was to determine whether it can be used to refer to mixed groups (of male, female and nonbinary composition). Hence, the overall goal was to establish the inclusive nature of the *-ə* suffix with both singular and plural referents. Therefore, number discriminates between the two tasks, with singular being confined to *Task 1* – having feminine singular, masculine singular and nonbinary singular as its conditions – as opposed to plural being used in *Task 2* – where feminine plural, masculine plural and nonbinary plural are labeled as its conditions.

To fully understand what each task investigates, we need to take a closer look at the variables involved.

In both tasks, the independent variable is grammatical gender. The levels of the independent variable are three (feminine, masculine, nonbinary). Each of the three conditions (i.e., the three levels of the independent variable) are repeated twice, so as to obtain two feminine stimuli, two masculine stimuli and two nonbinary stimuli (two descriptions for each level of the independent variable). Each participant thus received six singular descriptions for *Task 1*, and six plural descriptions for *Task 2*.

Additionally, there were two filler items lacking gender marking in each set, referred to as the *zero condition*. With fillers entering the experimental trial, we set to detect any difference in terms of reaction times by comparing the participant's behavior when engaging with the gender-marked conditions as opposed to the unmarked condition (i.e., *zero condition*). Distractors in this experiment were the parameters by which we asked participants to gauge candidates' academic profiles (e.g., 'academic preparation'), responsible for shifting the focus away from the object of investigation, being the issue of grammatical gender.

The set of items was thus composed of six target descriptions and two fillers (see Table 3.5 for the inner structure of each task's set of items). The order in which the items appear was randomized. Below, the construction of the stimuli and the linguistic choices adopted are discussed.

<i>Items</i>	<i>Task 1</i>	<i>Task 2</i>
2 F	SG	PL
2 M	SG	PL
2 NB	SG	PL
2 <i>fillers</i>	SG	PL

Table 3.5 - Inner structure of the set of items that make up each task.

Each participant was provided with the same sets of items – with presentation order randomized across sessions – along with instructions that were presented in the form of an official notice issued by a hypothetical Italian university. The starting point for drafting this text coincides with what was produced by Bradley and colleagues (2019a) (Evan D. Bradley, personal communication, November 29, 2022), which took the shape of the final guidelines that can be found in the Box 2 below.⁹

The following students have applied for a scholarship designed to help students complete their education.

The scholarship committee would like to award scholarships to students who are academically talented, motivated, who show promise in their intended course of study, and are deserving of support.

The scholarship committee has prepared summaries of each of the students' application materials.

Your job is to rate each student on various qualities, and to decide whether to recommend them for a scholarship.

- 1) Academic ability (Poor Average Good Outstanding)
- 2) Motivation (Poor Average Good Outstanding)
- 3) Recommendation (Strongly Discourage Discourage Recommend Strongly Recommend)

Which photo do you think matches the applicant?

Six photo array (M M X X F F)

Box 2. Instructions provided by Bradley et al. (2019a).

⁹ The original guidelines were attained through personal communication with Evan D. Bradley.

In light of the authors' proposal, the call designed for *Task 1* (to be referred to as *Instruction 1*) launches the opportunity to apply for a mentoring programme, whereas the call conceived for *Task 2* (labeled as *Instruction 2*) is for funding research projects. They both served the function of guidelines for the experiment. Since the purposes are distinct, the type of evaluation activity carried out by participants was set to slightly different parameters. The original Italian version of *Instruction 1* used for the experiment is provided below (Box 3), followed by its English translation (Box 4).

Bando per l'affidamento di attività tutoriali

SELEZIONE PER L'AFFIDAMENTO DI ATTIVITÀ TUTORIALI, DIDATTICO-INTEGRATIVE,
ATTIVITÀ PROPEDEUTICHE E DI RECUPERO

Il Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Culturali indice una selezione per titoli per l'affidamento a studenti capaci e meritevoli, iscritti ai corsi di dottorato, di attività tutoriali, didattico-integrative, propedeutiche e di recupero da svolgere nel primo semestre dell'a.a. 2022/2023. I tutor dovranno assicurare la propria disponibilità in tutto il periodo in cui si svolgerà il servizio. In particolare è possibile presentare domanda per le seguenti attività: linguistica generale, lingua inglese I, e linguistica applicata.

La selezione verrà svolta da una Commissione appositamente nominata dalla Direttrice del Dipartimento con successivo provvedimento. Per agevolare l'intervento della Commissione, la segreteria ha preparato dei riassunti dei materiali di candidatura degli studenti che hanno partecipato al concorso.

A partire da questi materiali, il tuo compito sarà quello di esprimere, per ciascun candidato, un giudizio in termini di:

1. Preparazione accademica (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente)
2. Esperienza pregressa (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente)
3. Idoneità al ruolo (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente)

Una volta conclusa questa prima fase di valutazione, ti verrà chiesto di selezionare l'immagine raffigurante il candidato descritto.

Box 3. Instruction 1 (Italian).

Mentoring Programme Call for Applications

Recruitment procedure for educational and remedial courses

The Department of Linguistics and Cultural Studies announces a merit based selection process for the assignment of mentoring educational and remedial activities. This is awarded to capable and deserving students enrolled in Ph.D. programs, to be carried out in the first semester of the academic year 2022/2023. Mentors must ensure their availability for the entire period during which the service will be carried out. In particular, applications may be submitted for the following activities: General Linguistics, English Language 1, and Applied Linguistics.

A special committee appointed by the dean at a later time is in charge of the selection procedure. To facilitate the committee's work, summaries of the application materials for each student were provided by the administrative office.

Your job is to read the summary and rate each student on various qualities, and to decide whether to recommend them for the position.

- 1) Academic Preparation (Poor Average Good Outstanding)
- 2) Previous Experience (Poor Average Good Outstanding)
- 3) Suitability for the Role (Strongly Discourage Discourage Recommend Strongly Recommend)

Once this initial assessment phase has been completed, you are asked to select the photo that matches the description of the candidate.

Box 4. Instruction 1 (English translation).

In adapting the original experimental materials shared by Bradley and colleagues (2019a) to the Italian academic context, the resulting notice takes on the appearance of an actual document issued – plausibly – by an existing university. This served the goal of making it more credible to participants that they were actually working on something real, that they were making a contribution to the university administrative procedures having to do with allocating funds, causing, as anticipated, the gender issue to take a back seat. To this end, the instruction emphasized the importance of reviewing the application material extensively so as to optimize the whole selection process.

The formal nature of the notice further stresses the level of reality behind the task, in that it resorts in the linguistic choice of the “unmarked” masculine (Pires, 2020) – a defining strategy of the communication style adopted by the national academic environment introduced in Chapter 1.

Instances of the “unmarked” masculine in the plural or in the generic singular are found in the Italian version whenever the person to whom the formal notice is addressed is being overtly mentioned – be it referred to as the candidate, the mentor or simply the student. More precisely, the following gender-bearing referents were underlined in the text: *studenti capaci e meritevoli* ‘capable.M.PL and deserving.M.PL students.M.PL’; *i tutor* ‘the.M.PL mentors’; *per ciascun candidato* ‘for each.M.SG candidate.M.SG’.

As noted above, there are three parameters that act as distractors by redirecting the reader's attention to the corresponding identified aspects constituting the core of the evaluation. For *academic preparation* (parameter 1) to be defined, reference must be made to the academic level achieved, expressed not only in the degree of education attained but also in the scores obtained. *Previous experience* (parameter 2) is assessed in terms of whether or not similar work experience has taken place in the past. Lastly, to determine *suitability for the role* (parameter 3), participants must rely on the pertinence of the candidate's assimilated knowledge, indicated by the degree to which the proposed research project resonates with the kind of expertise required by the notice, to be established on the basis of the actual topic of the doctoral dissertation as well as the chosen leading discipline and the number of publications. All information that meets these three parameters must therefore necessarily be among the details disclosed for each candidate, as will be confirmed shortly.

We shall now look at the composition of each condition, proceeding in the following order: masculine singular, feminine singular and nonbinary singular; in other words, from the alleged least marked to the most marked and/or innovative. Only at the end of the analysis will the zero condition (i.e., filler) – devoid of gender markers – be presented. By delving into the details, a whole series of linguistic considerations will emerge, which have forced, in some cases, precise decisions with consequences on several levels (i.e., phonological), the reasons for which will not be spared.

With respect to where gender information can be retrieved, there are four grammatical categories present in the stimuli that dispose of such specification. Having established that Italian is a highly-inflected language (ref. § 1.2), gender markers are hosted by nouns (e.g., *candidato* ‘candidate.M.SG’), determiners (e.g., *il* ‘the.M.SG’), past participles (e.g., *laureato* ‘graduated.M.SG’) and articulated prepositions (e.g., *del* ‘of+the.M.SG’) found in each item¹⁰.

¹⁰ The reported examples are all taken from the male singular condition 1.

The amount of occurrences in each item is 15. By contrast, pronouns – also carrying the gender feature – will not appear, as their omission is permitted in accordance with the linguistic status of Italian as a pro-drop language.

Before dwelling on the peculiarities of each item, there is one property whose value is shared by them all: that of length. As a matter of fact, each item, including fillers, counts a total number of 238 syllables. Controlling the variable of length by equipping each stimulus with the same syllable count has enabled us to establish that length cannot interfere with any potential *different* processing of the stimuli. Should we witness slower processing at any condition, supposedly reflected in reading times, we will be inclined to rule out with certainty the possibility that the variable of length has contributed to this result, thus shifting attention to other factors. It should be noted that since the experiment was built in Italian, only the Italian conditions share the exact same number of syllables, being the English versions provided here for the sole purpose of this analysis, hence not used in the lab.

Another common characteristic is the one related to their inner structure. The backbone on which each marked condition was built is given by the scheme put forward by Bradley and colleagues (2019a, p. c.), reproduced in Box 5. Replicated across all conditions – with the exception of fillers whose nature has forced the reformulation of some passages and related restructuring – it consists of a sequence of key information, being identified as the year, major, GPA, career plans, extracurriculars, interesting facts and hobbies.

Applicant X

This student is a __ (year) __ majoring in __ (major) __.
They/She/He/The student has a cumulative GPA of __ (GPA) __.
They/She/He/The student would like to pursue a career in __ (career) __.
They/She/He/The student are/is __ (extracurricular) __, and
they/she/he/the student __ (interesting fact) __.
In their/her/his/the student's spare time, they/she/he/the student enjoys __ (hobby) __.

Box 5. The backbone-scheme of each marked condition proposed by Bradley et al. (2019a).

The components of the original scheme were replaced in the Italian version of the constructed and modified experiment with the details listed as follows: enrolment year, doctoral programme, passing grade, weighted average mark, leading discipline, dissertation proposal, number of publications, and number of courses as a mentor. These facts are considered absolutely crucial in Italy when gauging academic profiles, hence the reason for the replacement. Beyond being of

general validity, such a consideration is validated by what the parameters guiding the evaluation procedure actually requires, calling for the explicit mention of these data in order to ensure a complete assessment. The following scheme is so derived:

Candidate X

The candidate is a _____(*enrolment year*) PhD student in _____(*doctoral programme*).
 He graduated from the MA programme with _____(*passing grade*).
 The weighted average mark of the candidate during the master was _____(*weighted average mark*).
 The leading discipline of the candidate in the academic arena is _____(*leading discipline*).
 The topic of the doctoral dissertation is _____(*dissertation proposal*).
 The candidate has _____(*number of publications*) publications in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, he mentored in _____(*number of courses as a mentor*) courses.
 The candidate is duly enrolled in the current academic year.

Box 6. The backbone-scheme of each marked condition – here applied to the male singular condition – used for the experiment conducted in Italian.

To fill out candidates' profiles, we adhered to multiple criteria. Moving from the need to produce realistic descriptions, the drawing from existent degree programs and universities was deemed imperative for choosing the characteristics of each candidate. Specifically, we opted for a matching criterion that would ensure the following chain to be formed: the leading disciplines in postgraduate studies were matched with doctoral programmes representing their natural continuation, which, in turn, were assigned plausible project proposals reflecting the content stipulated in the PhD course syllabus. Analogously, the passing grade depended on the weighted average mark, and so on. This consistency in matching information to construct appropriate, realistic profiles can be verified by consulting the table reported in Appendix B, gathering all the chosen elements and relevant groupings.

A functional criterion was also applied, one that had to do with guaranteeing that the items all shared the exact same number of syllables. An attempt was made to counterbalance the various characteristics in terms of their syllable-count. Take as a reference the enrollment year, which coincides with either *primo* 'first' or *secondo* 'second' (year). Such a selection is determined on the basis of the syllables composing the name of the doctoral programme. As to say, since there is one syllable discriminating between *primo* 'first' and *secondo* 'second', those who are enrolled in a PhD programme that carries a name made up of 19 syllables will happen to be enrolled in

the first year of the doctoral programme, whereas those who are enrolled in a 18-syllables-PhD-programme label will be automatically enrolled in the second year. In doing so, the number of syllables involved in these two features is equal, although distributed differently. By proceeding with completion of the missing information, we obtain the first male singular condition, the result of which can be seen in Box 7 for the original Italian version, followed by Box 8 reporting its translation in English. The latter contains interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses that provide information about specific grammatical properties – being gender and number – of single words as well as parts of words. The implemented tag system adheres to the Leipzig Glossing Rules, taken as the standard set of conventions adopted by the largest community of linguists (Comrie et al., 2008). The purpose of inserting morpheme-by-morpheme glosses stems from the urge to visualize such features (i.e., gender and number) each time they appear, in correspondence of whichever word class, in an effort to make such data accessible to a wider audience of non-Italian speakers.

Il candidato è uno studente dottorale del *primo* anno in *Filologia classica, italianistica e linguistica*. In magistrale, si è laureato con un voto di *110L*. La media ponderata del candidato, in magistrale, era di *29.2*. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento del candidato è *Lingua, Letteratura, Filologia Latina*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *La traduzione di Omero in Virgilio: sondaggi dal primo libro dell'Eneide*. Il candidato vanta 3 pubblicazioni nella disciplina di interesse ed esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico; nello specifico, è stato tutor di 2 corsi. Il candidato risulta regolarmente iscritto per l'anno accademico in corso.

Box 7. Male singular condition 1 (Italian).

The.M.SG candidate.M.SG is a.M.SG first-year PhD student.M.SG in Classical Philology, Italian Studies and Linguistics. [He] graduated.M.SG from the MA programme with 110 cum laude. The weighted average mark of the.M.SG candidate.M.SG during the master was 29.2. The leading discipline of the.M.SG candidate.M.SG in the academic arena is Latin Language, Literature and Philology. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *The translation of Homer in Virgil: surveys from the first book of the Aeneid*. The.M.SG candidate.M.SG has 3 publications in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, [he] mentored.M.SG in two courses. The.M.SG candidate.M.SG is duly enrolled.M.SG in the current academic year.

Box 8. Male singular condition 1 (English translation).

When looking at noun classification, the noun *studente* ‘student’ is categorized as epicene by Italian normative grammar, due to its *-e* ending. However, our opting for the ending *-essa* for the feminine condition, and *-ə* for the third gender nonbinary condition, as it will be illustrated

shortly, allows us to interpret *studente* as masculine in our experimental design, so as to attain the same number of gender-specific occurrences (amounting to 15) across all conditions.

Rejection of pronouns serves two complementary purposes: on the one hand, it enables us to ignore the need to identify a pronominal form, which is a problematic operation for the nonbinary condition, on the other hand, it guarantees the reiteration of the noun phrase in its full form, hence imposing a certain representation of the referent, which repeatedly returns in the identified form. In the specific instance examined here, the full noun phrase *il candidato* ‘the.M.SG candidate.M.SG’ is forced to be a constant presence throughout the stimulus.

The female singular condition reported in Box 9, with the English translation in Box 10, shares the same characteristics of the masculine stimuli (singular task), i.e., repetition of the full DP and related omission of pronouns. It reflects, in all of its aspects, the regularities introduced by the male condition.

La candidata è una studentessa dottorale del *primo* anno in *Scienze linguistiche - Curriculum Linguistica educativa*. In magistrale, si è laureata con un voto di *104*. La media ponderata della candidata, in magistrale, era di *26.3*. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento della candidata è *Psicologia cognitiva e dello sviluppo*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *Lo sviluppo della teoria della mente in contesti di privazione*. La candidata vanta *1* pubblicazione nella disciplina di interesse ed esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico; nello specifico, è stata tutor di *1* corso. La candidata risulta regolarmente iscritta per l’anno accademico in corso.

Box 9. Female singular condition 1 (Italian).

The.F.SG candidate.F.SG is a.F.SG first-year PhD student.F.SG in Language Sciences - Educational Linguistics Curriculum. [She] graduated.F.SG from the MA programme with *104*. The weighted average mark of the.F.SG candidate.F.SG during the master was *26.3*. The leading discipline of the.F.SG candidate.F.SG in the academic arena is Cognitive and Developmental Psychology. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *The Development of the Theory of Mind in Cases of Environmental Deprivation*. The.F.SG candidate.F.SG has *1* publication in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, [she] mentored.F.SG in one course. The.F.SG candidate.F.SG is duly enrolled.F.SG in the current academic year.

Box 10. Female singular condition 1 (English translation).

It is no surprise that the nonbinary condition (see Box 11 & 12), – unlike the female condition regarded as conventional – corresponds to the synthesis of a series of inventive, yet informed linguistic decisions. The latter deserve much attention, as they have to do with the choice of the gender of the root to which to bind the innovative suffix *-a*.

Lə candidatə è unə studentə dottorale del *primo* anno in *Linguistica applicata all'ambito clinico infantile*. In magistrale, si è laureatə con un voto di *108*. La media ponderata dellə candidatə, in magistrale, era di *28.7*. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento dellə candidatə è *Linguistica per l'acquisizione patologica*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *L'insegnamento esplicito delle frasi relative in bambini con DPL*. Lə candidatə vanta *3* pubblicazioni nella disciplina di interesse ed esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico; nello specifico, è statə tutor di *2* corsi. Lə candidatə risulta regolarmente iscrittə per l'anno accademico in corso.

Box 11. Nonbinary singular condition 1 (Italian).

The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG is a.NB.SG first-year PhD student.NB.SG in Clinical Linguistics Applied to Language in Childhood. [They] graduated.NB.SG from the MA programme with *108*. The weighted average mark of the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG during the master was *28.7*. The leading discipline of the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG in the academic arena is Linguistics for Atypical Language Acquisition. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *The explicit teaching of relative clauses in children with DLD*. The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG has *3* publications in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, [they] mentored.NB.SG in two courses. The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG is duly enrolled.NB.SG in the current academic year.

Box 12. Nonbinary singular condition 1 (English translation).

Articulatory simplicity and reading fluency were the guiding principles for selecting the gender on which we modeled the nonbinary condition. It was a delicate choice in that it determined the identification of the word root (intended in a broad sense) to be combined with the suffix under investigation. As it turned out, formation of determiners and nouns had to take different paths to ensure maximum articulatory accessibility.

As to determiners, despite wide fluctuations (Giusti, 2022; Thornton, 2022) – even among the social community (Comandini, 2021) – between the two possible forms *ə* and *lə* (where the former is built on *i*.M.PL., and the latter on *le*.F.PL) we opted for the form *lə* for both singular (and plural) nonbinary referents in an effort to facilitate, as opposed to complicate, the reading aloud of such stimuli (cf. Box 11 & 21). Selection of this particular form was thus dictated by phonological restrictions, impacting sound articulation and production. It is reasonable to assume that, by welcoming the first option, the reading aloud would be indeed particularly hampered precisely because of having chosen the most difficult alternative, namely, that consisting of vowels alone.

The discussion centered around noun formation, and the rationale for using a different starting root compared to determiners, is postponed to *Task 2*, as the phenomenon is most visible in the plural conditions.

In view of the critical issues that had to be addressed in creating the nonbinary condition, we now move on to the condition whose distinctive criticality is to be found precisely in the avoidance of including any gender-related information (i.e., the zero condition). We therefore find ourselves on the opposite pole of the issue at hand.

So far we have looked at several strategies to uncover gender details. One of them was certainly the use of the masculine as a generic reference, particularly debated in recent years, which, in our experiment, makes its appearance in the guidelines. We therefore return to this strategy specifically to emphasize the distance that is generated between the resulting instructions, deemed highly connotated, and a condition denuded of gender markers, thus having opposite features. In fact, whilst instructions deliberately reflect the most traditionalist views embraced by the academy by welcoming the “unmarked” masculine on credibility grounds (cp. Box 3 & 4), fillers overtly display an alternative route free from gender specification. Their neutrality emerges with immediacy, ensuring an equally smooth reading, as can be seen in the filler reported below (See Box 13 & 14).

L'aspirante tutor frequenta il primo anno di dottorato in Scienze del linguaggio - Curriculum Letterario editoriale. Ha conseguito la laurea magistrale con un voto di 98. La media ponderata dell'aspirante tutor era di 23.9. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento dell'aspirante tutor è Elementi di editoria informatica. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *Dalla carta al digitale: gli effetti sulle piccole case editrici*. L'aspirante tutor non vanta pubblicazioni nella disciplina di interesse ma esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico di 1 corso.
L'iscrizione all'anno accademico in corso risulta regolarmente registrata.

Box 13. Filler 1 – singular (Italian).

The applicant for the position of mentor is carrying out the first year of doctoral research in Language sciences - Literary Publishing Curriculum. Having graduated from the MA programme with 98, the weighted average mark of the applicant during the master was 23.9, whose leading discipline in the academic arena is Elements of Digital Publishing. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *From paper to digital: the effects on small publishing houses*. The applicant has no publications in the discipline of interest but past experience as a specialized mentor for 1 course. Enrollment in the current academic year appears to be duly registered.

Box 14. Filler 1 – singular (English translation).

As far as the process of item construction is concerned, this instance proves that it is possible, albeit with effort, to produce descriptions omitting any indication with respect to gender. Among the strategies consenting to the building of such bare accounts are epicenes and ungendered terms – a class of words in Italian for which “no gender assignment is predictable from either the word ending or the article” that accompanies it (e.g., *l’erede*, “the heir”) (Cacciari et al., 1997: 517). Analogously, epicenes prevent the exact identification of a specific gender to be attributed to these “functionally ambiguous words” or semantically common-gender terms by granting permission for a mismatch to occur between morphosyntactic gender and semantic gender (e.g., *la vittima*, “the victim”) (Cacciari et al., 1997: 517; Giusti, 2022). In both cases, the referent could either be a female, a male or a nonbinary individual and there is no way to infer that information from the mere juxtaposition of the determiner and the noun alone. The same goes for our chosen periphrasis *l’aspirante tutor* ‘the aspiring mentor’. Although the noun *tutor* ‘mentor’ that appears in isolation can be easily disambiguated by means of the determiner e.g., *il/la tutor* ‘the.M/the.F mentor’ – thus allowing for the overt manifestation of morphosyntactic gender – the presence of the adjective stands in contrast to such determination owing to its initial vowel and the *-e* ending. The latter is ungendered by its very nature as it contrasts with first-class feminine (*-a*) and masculine (*-o*) endings. Second-class adjectives, conversely, share a single form (*-e*) for both masculine and feminine. Therefore, the noun-adjective agreement provides no clue as to the gender of the referent, nor does the determiner, forced to drop its unaccented gender-specifying final vowel as a consequence of being followed by a word starting with a vowel. As a result of the phenomenon of elision, the determiner becomes underspecified for gender, hence contributing, to some extent, to neutralizing the periphrasis.

A redundancy effect is exerted by repetition of the full noun phrase *l’aspirante tutor* ‘the aspiring mentor’, which appears insistently throughout the stimulus to prevent insertion of pronouns, as they are bearer of gender and number features. As opposed to languages like English – being non pro-drop, hence requiring explicit mention of the subject at all times, be it the full noun phrase or a pronoun – Italian is compatible with the possibility of having a null subject, thus allowing to keep gender-marked pronouns from entering the description while ruling out even the appearance of full DPs. The subject pronoun placed within square brackets in the English translation indeed stands for the presence of a null subject in the Italian equivalent.

The repetitive aspect appears to be a recurring element across all conditions. The choice of having the full noun phrase imposing itself is also motivated in terms of the already mentioned habituation effect, which particularly concerns the nonbinary condition seeking to establish itself. This moves from the assumption that repeated exposure within the same condition – achieved even through the contribution of word endings alone – leads to a more likely consolidation of the referent to be assimilated in the form in which it is presented. Habituation to forms that are unexpected only at first glance but which, as the reading unfolds, end up being discernible and not foreign, is so promoted.

Having thoroughly examined the set of items pertaining to the first experimental task (i.e., *Task 1*), all that remains is to delineate the linguistic decisions underlying the plural conditions that make up for the second task (i.e., *Task 2*), before moving on to the next part of the experiment, concerning questionnaires.

As specified earlier, *Instruction 2* announces the possibility of obtaining funding for certain research projects through a selection procedure whose main criteria are listed at the end of the notice. The original Italian version of *Instruction 2* used for the experiment is provided below (Box 15), followed by its translation in English (Box 16).

Bando per il finanziamento di progetti di ricerca nel campo di Scienze della Vita

*Con il presente bando si intende promuovere il potenziamento della ricerca e dell'innovazione nel settore di Scienze della Vita attraverso il sostegno a progetti di ricerca che **contribuiscono alla creazione di condizioni di benessere duraturo e sostenibile in termini di salute e crescita per gli esseri umani e l'ambiente**. A tale scopo, il programma si prefigge di finanziare progetti che per complessità e natura richiedono la collaborazione di più unità di ricerca. La costituzione del gruppo di ricerca è dunque flessibile, purché veda la partecipazione di più unità provenienti dallo stesso ateneo: LS - Scienze della vita.*

La selezione verrà svolta da una Commissione appositamente nominata che si pronuncerà a partire dai seguenti materiali di candidatura preparati dalla segreteria. Il tuo compito sarà quello di visionarli ed esprimere, per ciascun progetto, una valutazione sulla base dei tre parametri proposti:

1. pertinenza della proposta progettuale rispetto all'obiettivo in grassetto (cioè quanto questa proposta risponde all'obiettivo) (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente)
2. originalità e impatto sociale del progetto di ricerca (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente);

3. qualità del profilo scientifico del gruppo di ricerca (basandoti su bandi vinti, esperienza, pubblicazioni) (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente)

Una volta terminata questa prima fase, ti si chiede di selezionare l'immagine che pensi possa raffigurare il gruppo di ricerca descritto.

Box 15. Instruction 2 (Italian).

Call for proposals:

Grant funding opportunities for research projects in the field of Life Sciences

*The purpose of this call is to promote research and foster innovation in the field of Life Sciences by supporting research projects that **contribute to creating conditions of lasting and sustainable well-being in terms of health and growth for both human beings and the environment**. To this end, the programme aims at funding projects that by their complexity and nature require the collaboration of multiple research units. Group composition is therefore flexible, as long as it sees the participation of more than one unit from the same university: LS - Life Sciences.*

A specially appointed committee is in charge of the selection procedure, whose work is based on the following application materials that were provided by the administrative office. Your job is to go through them, one by one, and rate each project on the basis of the three proposed parameters:

1. Relevance of the project proposal to the objective in bold (i.e., how well this proposal meets the objective) (Poor Average Good Outstanding);
2. Originality and social impact of the research project (Poor Average Good Outstanding);
3. Quality of the research team's scientific profile (based on previous grants, experience, publications) (Poor Average Good Outstanding);

Once this initial assessment phase has been completed, you are asked to select the photo that matches the described research team.

Box 16. Instruction 2 (English translation).

The assessing activity here focuses on the research project per se, being the object of scrutiny. In fact, the first parameter demands an evaluation in terms of project-orientation, with the second parameter calling for a judgment about its originality as well as social implications. Only in the third and last parameter concerning the quality of the scientific profile are the proponents called upon. However, they are referred to explicitly through the collective noun *gruppo di ricerca* 'research group'. The distinguishing feature of collective nouns such as 'group' or 'team' (as in 'research team's scientific profile'), particularly relevant for the purposes of this study, is that they allow to make reference to a community of people, whether large or small, while

circumventing the gender issue (cf. § 2.1). In other words, by adopting this strategy no assumption can be made as to the gender of the group's components. The same rationale applies to the periphrasis *unità di ricerca* 'research unit'. This kind of reasoning also underlies the shaping of the referents found in plural fillers (see Box 23 & 24), which go by the name of 'members of the research team'. The zero condition for the plural will be further explored later on.

As for the male and female plural conditions, two items are provided as examples in Box 17 & 19, respectively.

I candidati sono *ricercatori a tempo determinato di tipo A*. Negli anni precedenti, sono già risultati vincitori di 1 bando. I candidati propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Analisi genetica di persone con Corea di Huntington*; la cui finalità è di *proporre nuove strategie farmacologiche e cellulari per rallentarne il decorso o bloccarne l'insorgenza*. I candidati saranno impegnati nell'attività di ricerca per un periodo di 24 mesi, e il progetto prevede la collaborazione con l'ateneo di *Santa Barbara, California*.
Tutti i candidati si sono dedicati a questo settore di ricerca per 5 anni. Sono autori di 5 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Box 17. Male plural condition 1 (Italian).

The.M.PL candidates.M.PL are fixed-term type A researchers.M.PL. In previous years, [they] were announced.M.PL winners.M.PL of a funding programme. The.M.PL candidates.M.PL are proposing the following research project: *Genetic testing for Huntington's chorea*; the aim of which is to come up with new pharmacological and cellular strategies to slow down its course or block its onset. The.M.PL candidates.M.PL will be engaged.M.PL in the research activity for a period of 24 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of Santa Barbara, California.
All.M.PL (the.M.PL) candidates.M.PL have been committed.M.PL to this field of research for 5 years. [They] have authored.M.PL 5 scientific publications on the subject.

Box 18. Male plural condition 1 (English translation).

Le candidate sono *professoressse ordinarie*. Negli anni precedenti, sono già risultate vincitrici di 2 bandi. Le candidate propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Studio delle interazioni tra specie e uomo-ambiente*, la cui finalità è di *studiare le risposte delle comunità biologiche ai cambiamenti globali a tutela della loro sopravvivenza e del mantenimento della biodiversità*. Le candidate saranno impegnate nell'attività di ricerca per un periodo di 24 mesi, e il progetto prevede la collaborazione con l'ateneo di *Lima, Perù*.
Tutte le candidate si sono dedicate a questo settore di ricerca per 7 anni. Sono autrici di 6 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Box 19. Female plural condition 1 (Italian).

The.F.PL candidates.F.PL are full.F.PL professors.F.PL. In previous years, [they] were announced.F.PL winners.F.PL of two funding programmes. The.F.PL candidates.F.PL are proposing the following research project: *The study of organism-environment and human-environment interactions*; the aim of which is to study the responses of biological communities to global changes for the safeguard of biodiversity conservation. The.F.PL candidates.F.PL will be engaged.F.PL in the research activity for a period of 24 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of Lima, Peru. All.F.PL (the.F.PL) candidates.F.PL have been committed.F.PL to this field of research for 7 years. [They] have authored.F.PL 6 scientific publications on the subject.

Box 20. Female plural condition 1 (English translation).

The structure of plural items follows the one designed for the singular, with a change in content. The identifying entries for the plural descriptions are the following: academic status, number of research grants awarded, research proposal, project relevance, expected duration of the project in months, international collaborations, temporal engagement in the research area, number of publications¹¹. In compiling the profiles, the same criteria established for *Task 1* were applied¹². The choice of the characteristics of every research team was thus made according to the criterion of reality, the matching criterion and the functionality one related to syllable count. It should be specified that the selection of academic status was random, so as not to run the risk of gender-biased recognition.

Following these general remarks, the linguistic peculiarities characterizing the nonbinary condition in *Task 2* are here presented. For the formulation of this condition, we stuck to the basic principles established for the nonbinary singular condition, picking up the thread earlier traced in relation to the equivalent in *Task 1*.

Lə candidatə sono ricercatorə post doc. Negli anni precedenti, non sono risultatə vincitorə di bandi. Lə candidatə propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Analisi economica del consumatore sul piano comportamentale*, la cui finalità è di *potenziare l'etichettatura dei prodotti alimentari, nonché i consumi sostenibili e salutistici, contro l'obesità*. Lə candidatə saranno impegnatə nell'attività di ricerca per un periodo di 12 mesi, e il progetto prevede la collaborazione con l'ateneo di Londra, Regno Unito. Tuttə lə candidatə si sono dedicatə a questo settore di ricerca per 3 anni. Sono autorə di 2 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Box 21. Nonbinary plural condition 1 (Italian).

¹¹ The identifying entries listed here are molded on the information needed to profile a research group.

¹² The established criteria are those of reality, consistency (i.e., the matching of the identifying information) and shared syllable count (i.e., the functional criterion).

The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL are postdoctoral researchers.NB.PL. In previous years, [they] were never announced.NB.PL winners.NB.PL of a funding programme. The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL are proposing the following research project: *Consumer Behavior Analysis*; the aim of which is to enhance food labeling, as well as sustainable and healthy consumption, in order to fight obesity. The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL will be engaged.NB.PL in the research activity for a period of 12 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of London, Great Britain. All.NB.PL (the.NB.PL) candidates.NB.PL have been committed.NB.PL to this field of research for 3 years. [They] have authored.NB.PL 2 scientific publications on the subject.

Box 22. Nonbinary plural condition 1 (English translation).

While we deliberately drew from the feminine inventory for the creation of the determiner, because of an increased phonological accessibility is so provided, as previously demonstrated, for the formation of nouns (mostly names of occupations that end with a different suffix depending on whether they are masculine or feminine), we settled on the masculine form as the basis for the modeling, inasmuch it is more easily disguised, as can be seen from the nouns that appear in the description reported in Box 21. Hence, with regards to the choice of the basic suffix to be molded (cf. § 2.1), it was deemed necessary to avoid the construction from the feminine suffix *-trice*, the result of which – *ricercatrice* ‘researchers.NB.PL’ – would have indeed directed toward a feminine reading and interpretation of the referent. *Ricercatore* ‘researchers.NB.PL’ as well as *vincitore* ‘winners.NB.PL’ indeed seemed the most appropriate alternative, in that they are less connotated, as to say, less directly attributable to the original suffix.

Lastly, the linguistic considerations underlying the choice of the referent for the zero condition of the plural are examined, by referring to Box 23 & 24.

I membri del gruppo di ricerca beneficiano di un assegno di ricerca. Negli anni precedenti, non hanno vinto alcun bando. Tali membri propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Studio di nuovi alimenti ed ingredienti alimentari*, la cui finalità è di *promuovere la salute attraverso il miglioramento dell'alimentazione e dello stile di vita*. L'attività di raccolta dati di ricerca richiederà un impegno complessivo pari a un periodo di 12 mesi, e per il loro progetto è prevista la collaborazione con l'ateneo di *Amsterdam, Paesi Bassi*. Tutti i membri si sono dedicati a questo settore di ricerca per 3 anni e vantano un numero di 4 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Box 23. Filler 1 – plural (Italian).

Members of the research team are currently conducting research by means of a research grant. They have never won a funding programme before. Members are proposing the following research project: *Study of new foods and new ingredients*, the aim of which is to promote health through improved nutrition and lifestyle. The research activity of data collection will require a total commitment of 12 months. The project involves collaboration with the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. All members have been working in this field of research for 3 years and count 4 scientific publications on the topic.

Box 24. Filler 1 – plural (English translation).

I membri del gruppo di ricerca ‘members of the research team’ is the formula chosen for the referents in this particular condition. *Membri* ‘members’ has a single form that applies to both feminine and masculine in Italian, leaving no room for gender disambiguation, not even through the determiner, also predefined (i.e., *i* ‘the.M.PL’). During the referent-selection process, we considered *gli aspiranti* ‘the.M.PL aspirant.F/M.PL’ as an alternative, a noun derived from the present participle. With this noun, the determiner would be gender marked, thus discriminating between feminine and masculine (with the female equivalent being *le aspiranti* ‘the.F.PL aspirant.F/M.PL’). The presence of this feature, albeit limited to the determiner, hence caused this option to be discarded.

3.3.2.1 Some Notes on the English Translations of the Stimuli

The act of translating from Italian to English the materials we produced for the present experiment by adapting those provided by Bradley and colleagues (2019), configures itself as a process of new adaptation per se. Our attitude toward the rendering of the new experimental material in English was indeed shaped by the understanding that word-for-word translation only rarely succeeds in fully capturing the tone and intent of the stimuli, thus leading us to an output that turned out to be as comparable as possible to the originals, though not entirely overlapping. Within this context, attention is drawn to the periphrasis *l’aspirante tutor* ‘the aspiring mentor’, being substituted with *the applicant for the position of mentor*, later reduced to *the applicant* to avoid redundancy as well as verbosity (see Box 13 & 14). The full version that appears only in the opening – chosen to frame the position thoroughly – was deemed more accurate as opposed to the adjective ‘aspiring’, which better relates to the individual’s own calling, be it acted or unacted.

Redundancy was nevertheless obtained by repetition of the full noun phrase *the applicant*, in line with the structuring of the other conditions. In cases where the subject was not detectable on the surface of secondary clauses – as in participle clauses formed using perfect participles (i.e., *Having graduated*, reported in Box 14) – subject identification was allowed by the main clause, with which it shared the expressed subject. Such structures hence make limited mention of the subject possible, thus favoring the realization of the zero condition.

The relative pronoun *whose* (found in Box 14) is an additional element enabling the bypassing of gender specification, as it presents a single form devoid of the gender feature (cf. § 1.2). It is therefore another component that contributes to a genderless description.

The kind of agreement established by possessive adjectives draws a substantial difference between the two languages. Whereby in Italian, gender-number agreement is between the possessive adjective and the possessed – irrespective of the possessor’s gender – declension in English occurs on the basis of the possessor. Hence, the elimination in English of the possessive adjective *suo* ‘his/her/its’ in the phrase *il suo argomento di tesi dottorale* ‘his/her/its topic of doctoral dissertation’ (see Box 7 & 8) becomes necessary in order to avoid the inclusion of an additional gender marker that would result in the surpassing of the total of 15 provided by the original Italian version. As anticipated, the reason is to be found in the required realization of the gender of the possessor expected from English, by contrast unexpressed in Italian given the different mechanisms of agreement established by this class of adjectives.

Speaking of pronouns, there is a rather sensitive issue that deserves in-depth discussion, namely the choice of the subject pronoun for the nonbinary condition. This is a matter that did not arise for the Italian language as we were able to resort to their omission, hence causing the frequency with which subject pronouns appear throughout each stimulus to undergo an inevitable cutback in the Italian version when compared to the English translation. Given the mandatory inclusion of subject pronouns in English whenever DPs are excluded, our choice fell on the gender-neutral pronoun “they” (see Box 12) precisely because it is “silent on gender” and it is used when referring to “specific individuals of unknown or nonbinary gender” (Bradley et al., 2019a: 1; 2019b: 52) (cf. § 2.2). Thus, with respect to pronouns, we decided not to resort to a particularly invasive word-inflicting intervention, but rather we favored the adoption of a well-established and recognizable form to which a new function, a new meaning, was attributed. It was preferably the outcome of an operation of *semantic relocation* – a practice that has already found solid

recognition (Mitchell, 1994; Strahan, 2008; Hord, 2016). Additionally, adopting the specific singular they/them subject pronoun served as the crucial distinguishing mark plotting the distance from the male and female conditions (Bradley et al., 2019b).

As to the English translations of the male and female plural conditions, we marked the forced addition of the determiner given within round brackets precisely to show that the corresponding structure in Italian requires the presence of the declined determiner in the masculine plural (or feminine, accordingly), where English does not. The reference phrase first reported in Box 17 & 18 is the following: *Tutti i candidati* ‘All.M.PL (the.M.PL) candidates.M.PL’.

3.3.2.2 Visual Materials

As we are dealing with a sentence-picture matching task, we shall now address the issues that regard the images, ranging from the grouping criteria to the display modes.

The visual part of *Task 1* involves groupings of six total images following the descriptions. More specifically, each verbal stimulus was assigned six images, each one depicting a person. Two of the six images portray a person rated as male, two depict a female person, the remaining a nonbinary. Images were taken from the photo array used by Bradley and colleagues (2019a) and shared with us by Evan D. Bradley, later rated by our sample of participants in the first online study, which led to the same classification as in the original experiment.

We randomly assigned six images – in compliance with the composition illustrated above – to each condition, making sure that no image appeared more than twice throughout the experiment. The order of appearance of the images was also randomized across items.

The structure of the experimental item in *Task 1* is thus composed of the verbal stimulus (indicated as *prompt* in Table 3.6) – coinciding with either the female, male, or nonbinary condition or else with a filler –, and the set of identified images, as shown in the box below for male singular condition 2.

PROMPT		
The.M.SG candidate.M.SG is a.M.SG first-year PhD student in Cultural Heritage Marketing. [He] graduated.M.SG from the MA programme with 101. The weighted average mark of the.M.SG candidate.M.SG during the master was 25.2. The leading discipline of the.M.SG candidate.M.SG in the academic arena is Anthropology of Art. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is <i>Digitization and virtual experience of museums: a case study of the Uffizi</i>. The.M.SG candidate.M.SG has no publications in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, [he] mentored.M.SG in three courses. The.M.SG candidate.M.SG is duly enrolled.M.SG in the current academic year.		
SET OF IMAGES		
		
		

Table 3.6 - The structure of the complete experimental item corresponding to male singular condition 2 (English translation).

As to the display modes, pictures of the same size are shown in sequential order, equally distant from one another. Depending on the device used, the size of the images will necessarily vary. A letter appears under each photo as its identifier. This way, participants can enter the letter corresponding to the selected image as an answer, as will be illustrated in Section 3.3.5. Figure 2 shows the set of images taken from item 1 of Task 1.

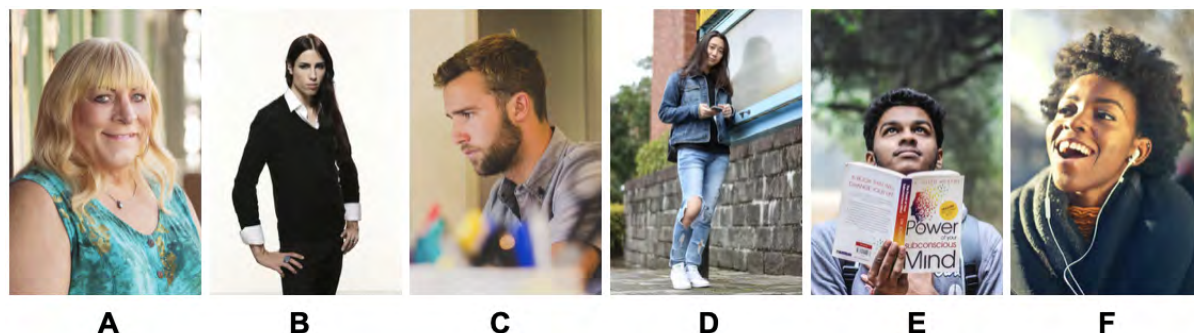


Figure 2. Screenshot of the set of images found in Item 1 of Task 1 as it appears on *Gorilla*.

In *Task 2* exposure to the same image increases significantly, as six different groups are assigned to each condition while still drawing from the same array of photographs, which amounts to 24 (8 for each of the three categories). Every group is composed of three people embodying a specific gender. Group composition with respect to gender is illustrated in detail in the table below (see Table 3.7). The same person never appears more than once within the same item, yet every image belonging to the male and female categories shows up again seven times throughout the experiment, as opposed to the nonbinary photos appearing only four times.

<i>Group</i>	<i>Gender Composition</i>
Male Group	M, M, M
Female Group	F, F, F
Nonbinary Group	NB, NB, NB
Mixed Group	M, F, NB
Two-gender Group A	M, M, F
Two-gender Group B	M, F, F

Table 3.7 - Display of the gender composition of the set of images accompanying each plural condition.

The grouping criterion in *Task 2* is twofold, as to the need to achieve a certain gender representation, calibrated among groups, academic position must be added, which dictates, to some extent, certain combinations that must take into account factors such as seniority. As to say, in assigning the images, attention was therefore devoted to certain aspects related to physical features, such as age range. This way, higher academic positions (e.g., full professors as opposed to postdoctoral researchers) could be preferably matched with people of older age. In practical

terms, this meant that in the presence of descriptions concerning full professors, for instance, we made sure that among the proposed groups, more adult-looking subjects were possibly present. As with *Task 1*, a table showing the structure of an item made up of the verbal stimulus (i.e., prompt) and the sets of images to be selected follows.

PROMPT			
The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL are postdoctoral researchers.NB.PL. In previous years, [they] were never announced.NB.PL winners.NB.PL of a funding programme. The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL are proposing the following research project: <i>Consumer Behavior Analysis</i>; the aim of which is to enhance food labeling, as well as sustainable and healthy consumption, in order to fight obesity. The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL will be engaged.NB.PL in the research activity for a period of 12 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of London, Great Britain. All.NB.PL (the.NB.PL) candidates.NB.PL have been committed.NB.PL to this field of research for 3 years. [They] have authored.NB.PL 2 scientific publications on the subject.			
SETS OF IMAGES			
Group 1 (M, M, M)			
Group 2 (F, F, F)			
Group 3 (NB,NB,NB)			

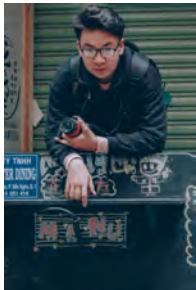
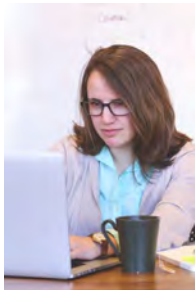
Group 4 (M, F, NB)			
Group 5 (M, M, F)			
Group 6 (M, F, F)			

Table 3.8 - The structure of the complete experimental item corresponding to nonbinary plural condition 1 (English translation).

Having tripled the number of images appearing in each item with respect to *Task 1*, the spatial arrangement of images was designed differently for *Task 2*. No longer distributed along a single horizontal line, photos of the same size were visually grouped into two vertical blocks, standing one next to the other, each hosting three independent groups. There is no space between photos of the same group; white lines are instead used to visually separate groups, so as to facilitate immediate recognition of the 6 components, as shown in Figure 3. Photo identifiers are again letters placed next to the opening image of each group. Groups' positioning was randomized across items. However, once the spatial arrangement of images was established for each of the eight items, this was replicated across sessions, with only the order of appearance of the items being randomized.



Figure 3. Screenshot of the sets of images found in Item 1 of Task 2 as it appears on *Gorilla*.

3.3.3 Assessing the Relationship Between the Usage of Sexist Language and the Attitudes Toward it: Is There Room for an Inclusive Language?

This section will present the structure of the first online questionnaire administered to participants. The starting point for the construction of the questionnaire on the *Sexist/Inclusive Language Use in Italian* (SILUI) is the 21-item *Inventory of Attitudes Toward Sexist/Nonsexist Language-General* (IASNL-G), designed, tested and distributed by Parks and Robertson (2000), aimed at measuring (i) the usage of sexist language, (ii) the attitudes toward sexist language and (iii) the willingness to use inclusive language. The IASNL-G was translated into Italian, and the questions were adapted to the Italian political and socio-cultural context. All due modifications will be illustrated, item by item.

The present questionnaire consists of three sections, which will be detailed in the following section: 1. *Convinzioni personali sull'uso sessista della lingua italiana* 'Beliefs About the Sexist Use of the Italian Language'; 2. *Riconoscere la lingua sessista* 'Recognition of Sexist

Language’; 3. *Apertura all’uso del linguaggio inclusivo* ‘Willingness to Use Inclusive Language’.

The complete list of items can be found in Appendix C, where the Italian version will appear first, followed by its English translation.

3.3.3.1 Structure of the SILUI

A definition of sexist language opens the questionnaire, preceding all sections. The inclusion of an unambiguous definition of the concept, otherwise subject to multiple possible interpretations, forces the formulation of all responses based on a common explication. The answers are thus interpretable precisely because they refer to a shared, well-defined framework (Parks & Robertson, 2000).

An addition was made to the original definition: a specification concerning the explicit mention of all those who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender. A sexist use of language is in fact also identified in the failure to recognize this population that does not fit in either one of the two canonical categories (i.e., male and female). Therefore, it is a deliberate attempt to include nonbinary people among the populations affected by sexist language use. The new version of the guiding definition reads as follows¹³:

Per la compilazione del questionario si prega di utilizzare la seguente definizione:

L’uso sessista della lingua concerne parole, frasi ed espressioni che tracciano distinzioni superflue tra maschi e femmine o che escludono, ridicolizzano o sminuiscono uno dei generi e ignorano completamente la possibilità che ci siano persone che non si identificano nella distinzione binaria del genere (non binary).

(EN) Please use the following definition in completing this questionnaire:

Sexist language includes words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender and completely ignore the possibility that there are people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender (nonbinary).

The first section of the SILUI (i.e., Beliefs About the Sexist Use of the Italian Language) sets out to explore the respondents’ “thoughts and opinions about sexist/nonsexist language” (Parks & Robertson, 2000: 419), so as to draw a picture of the individual’s view on the phenomenon under investigation. Among the 13 items contained in the beliefs section there are some general

¹³ The original definition is reported here: “Sexist language includes words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males *or* exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender” (Parks & Robertson, 2000).

questions that have remained unchanged – apart from replacing the reference language or inserting it where missing –, as they explore the participant's position with respect to broader issues applicable to any language. Here respondents are asked to indicate how much they agree or disagree with statements concerning the scope of the examined phenomenon, its importance, its entrenchment, its dependencies on society, and its connection with politics. Table 3.9 shows the final item (i.e., SILUI Item) juxtaposed with its original version (i.e., IASNL-G Item). In the first column, the arguments are reported which were identified by Blaubergs (1980). From these arguments, Parks and Robertson (2000) drew for drafting the items, hence constituting the conceptual framework¹⁴, which are still advocated to justify the presence of sexist language use.

<i>Argument</i>	<i>Identifier</i>	<i>SILUI Item</i>	<i>IASNL-G Item</i>
<i>It would destroy historical authenticity and literary works</i>	(3.1)	[Item 2] Non dovremmo cambiare il modo in cui la lingua italiana è stata tradizionalmente scritta e parlata.	We should not change the way the English language has traditionally been written and spoken.
<i>Language is a trivial concern*</i>	(3.2)	[Item 3] Il linguaggio inclusivo è una questione di poco conto.	Worrying about sexist language is a trivial activity.
<i>Change is too difficult, inconvenient, impractical or whatever</i>	(3.3)	[Item 6] La lingua italiana non verrà mai cambiata perché è troppo radicata nella cultura.	The English language will never be changed because it is too deeply ingrained in the culture.
<i>Language is a trivial concern</i>	(3.4)	[Item 7] L'eliminazione dell'uso sessista della lingua italiana è un obiettivo importante.	The elimination of sexist language is an important goal.
<i>Appeal to authority*</i>	(3.5)	[Item 8] Dal momento che le norme editoriali impongono agli autori di articoli di giornale di evitare l'uso di insulti di carattere etnico-razziale dovrebbero imporre un divieto anche sull'uso	Most publication guidelines require newspaper writers to avoid using ethnic and racial slurs. So, these guidelines should also

¹⁴ The arguments identified by Blaubergs (1980) are classified as follows: “(1) the ‘cross-cultural’ arguments; (2) the ‘language is a trivial concern’ arguments; (3) the ‘freedom of speech/unjustified coercion’ arguments; (4) the ‘sexist language is not sexist’ arguments; (5) the ‘word-etymology’ arguments; (6) the ‘appeal to authority’ arguments; (7) the ‘change is too difficult, inconvenient, impractical or whatever’ arguments; and (8) the ‘it would destroy historical authenticity and literary works’ arguments” (Blaubergs, 1980: 135).

		sessista della lingua.	require writers to avoid sexist language.
<i>Cross-cultural</i>	(3.6)	[Item 9] L'uso sessista della lingua italiana ha a che fare con il trattamento sessista delle persone nella società italiana.	Sexist language is related to sexist treatment of people in society.
<i>Freedom of speech / Unjustified coercion</i>	(3.7)	[Item 11] Tutti quei professori che pretendono che i loro studenti evitino un uso sessista della lingua italiana non fanno altro che imporre le loro idee politiche sulla classe.	Teachers who require students to use nonsexist language are unfairly forcing their political views upon their students.
<i>Change is too difficult, inconvenient, impractical or whatever*</i>	(3.8)	[Item 12] Anche se il cambiamento è difficile, dovremmo comunque cercare di eliminare l'uso sessista della lingua italiana.	Although change is difficult, we still should try to eliminate sexist language.

Table 3.9 - The table presents the SILUI items juxtaposed with their corresponding original versions (i.e., IASNL-G items), resulting, in turn, from the arguments identified by Blaubeurgs (1980), listed in the first column. The table was adapted and modified from Table I reported in Parks and Robertson (2000: 421).

It should be noted that the presence of the asterisk signals that the assignment of that particular argument in Blaubeurgs (1980) is arbitrary, namely the result of personal reflection, not confirmed by the original authors, as the items in question are not present in the original table taken as a model (see Table I in Parks & Robertson, 2000: 421). The latter were added to Table 3.9 – hence the forced assignment of the argument – so as to have all the adapted items grouped together.

A general trend can be detected in the process of item adaptation: explicit reference is always made to the Italian language in the statements that comprise SILUI, even where the corresponding IASNL-G item reports a general consideration, without openly referring to a specific language (see items 7 (3.4), 9 (3.6), 11 (3.7), 12 (3.8)). Item 3 (3.2) undergoes a different change shown in the overturning of the internal perspective, in that the focus is shifted directly to inclusive language, testing respondents' urgency with respect to this issue.

The items that deviate the most from the remaining that belong to the first section of the IASNL-G are those developed *ad hoc* for the purpose of our study, which will be analyzed below, in order of appearance.

(3.9) [Item 1] Il fatto che Giorgia Meloni si faccia chiamare “il signor presidente” è da considerarsi una scelta sessista.

Giorgia Meloni goes by “Mr President”. That is to be considered a sexist choice.

Item 1 (3.9) overtly displays a sexist language error attributable to the use of the epicene term *presidente* ‘president.F/M.SG’ preceded by the male noun *il signor* ‘(the.M.SG) Mr’¹⁵. In considering gendered forms of address – “the formal titles used to address an individual in social and professional interactions” (Hord, 2016: 15) – the masculine form is therefore preferred over its feminine counterpart (i.e., *la signora presidente* ‘the.F.SG Mrs president.F/M.SG’). In dealing with an epicene, it would have been sufficient to replace what preceded the role noun *presidente*, namely the determiner and the noun *signor*-, which would have meant no overload in terms of phonological material to be processed. The item is placed in the political context precisely to stress the pervasiveness of the sexist use of language that has long found fertile ground in the political sphere.

(3.10) [Item 4] Il maschile plurale non è davvero inclusivo, ma dovremmo comunque continuare a usarlo per riferirci a gruppi misti di persone (es. maschi, femmine e persone non binary) perché risulta più immediato.

The masculine plural is not really inclusive, still we should continue to use it to refer to mixed groups of people (e.g., males, females, and nonbinary people) because it is more immediate.

Item 4 (3.10) raises the question of the immediacy of language, as to say, that of favoring non inclusive instances of language that are straightforward over ones that are truly representative of the entire population, including minorities, and that most times result in more elaborate forms. This stance moves from the function of effective communication that language is called upon to perform. In the present case, we are dealing with the adoption of a unique form that incorporates a multiplicity that is not visible, namely that of gender diversity. While admitting that the implemented strategy is not inclusive, but rather belongs to the category of false generics, its ease and instantaneousness could still justify its use. Hence, Item 4 (3.10) sets out to establish which of these two sides should prevail (e.g., the representative vs utilitarian aspect), once the existence of this dual nature is recognised.

¹⁵ Note that the male noun *il signor* is not an indicator of marital status in Italian.

(3.11) [Item 5] Se una persona non si identifica nella distinzione binaria del genere è giusto che ci si riferisca a quella persona con ə: per es. *studentə*.

When a person does not identify with the binary distinction of gender, it is only fair that we refer to that person with ə: e.g., *studentə*.

(3.12) [Item 10] Se in un gruppo di persone ci sono maschi, femmine e persone non binary, è giusto che ci si riferisca a loro con ə: per es. non *gli studenti* ma *lə studentə*.

If there are males, females, and nonbinary people in a group of people, it is appropriate to refer to them with ə: e.g., not the.M.PL students.M.PL but *lə.NB.PL studentə.NB.PL*.

Items 5 (3.11) and 10 (3.12) are closely intertwined in that they both address the use of the innovative suffix *-ə* in singular and plural contexts. In item 5 (3.11), the function of this suffix can be traced to the singular exclusive representation of the nonbinary population. In item 10 (3.12), the suffix *-ə* is representative of a mixed group, including male, female and nonbinary people, hence presenting itself as the inclusive plural ending.

(3.13) [Item 13] E' giusto che sulla carta d'identità dei minori restino le diciture "madre" e "padre" e saltino le qualifiche neutre "genitore 1" e "genitore 2".

It is only fair that "mother" and "father" remain on children's ID cards blowing up the neutral qualifiers "parent 1" and "parent 2".

In an attempt to frame the content of this item, a premise must be made that draws again from the political arena¹⁶. Much has been said about the wording to be included in the birth certificate of children of transgender and homosexual couples. There is in fact no consensus among European states on how to indicate persons who have transgender parental status in civil records relating to a child. Item 13 (3.13) reflects the proposal put forward on this issue, which was never approved by the Italian government. Replacing long-standing terms such as *madre* 'mother' and *padre* 'father' with *genitore 1* 'parent 1' and *genitore 2* 'parent 2' forms the core of the proposal. The latter indeed qualify as generics in all respects, as such terms do not impose identification with the role of mother and father by those involved in the care of the child. Mother and father also dictate, at the same time, a precise gender classification, which is problematic to manage in the event that the composition of the family does not fully embody the concept of a traditional family. Since these are terms well entrenched in the collective imagination, proposing their

¹⁶ What follows that serves as context was taken from the article published on April 14, 2023, available at this link: corte-edu-no-genitore-1-e-genitore-2-sostituzione-padre-e-madre-la-transizione-genere-AE1OZOHD

replacement with neutral terms is but a daunting task. It is precisely because the topic raises so many tricky questions that we are curious to see what the respondents' stand is on the issue.

The second section (i.e., Recognition of Sexist Language) is built on four “designation errors” (APA, 1983). Respondents to the SILUI are instructed to express the degree of sexism underlying each highlighted linguistic form. The first error reported in item 14 (3.14) has to do with incorrect gender selection.

(3.14) [Item 14] Marta è una donna transgender. E' nato nel 1986.

Marta is a trans woman born.M.SG in 1986.

Item 15 (3.15) shows the assignment of a binary gender marker – which is in agreement with the feminine given name (i.e., Lucia) – to a person who does not identify with the binary distinction of gender.

(3.15) [Item 15] Lucia non si identifica nella distinzione binaria del genere. Lucia è cresciuta a Modena.

Lucia does not identify with the binary distinction of gender. Lucia was raised.F.SG in Modena.

Items 16 (3.16) and 17 (3.17) are the first to engage with the domain of social stereotypes. Here, traditionally male and female occupations are introduced separately (i.e., attorney and teacher), as opposed to gender neutral occupations being spared. More specifically, an instance of occupational prestige is reported in item 16 (3.16), for which we opted for a masculine term (i.e., *avvocato* ‘attorney.M.SG’) to designate the position of prestige of a feminine referent, identified with the feminine given name of *Serena*. Item 17 (3.17), in contrast, sees the inclusion of “the feminine generic” (cf. § 2.1) – a phenomenon that fits within the framework of the “feminine resolution” (Pires, 2020: 119, 117) – which reflects “the gendered nature of the workplace” (i.e., primary school) showing a statistically significant female predominance (Crawley, 2014: 2). In other words, the presence of male teachers in primary schools hides behind the female majority, hence allowing for reasonably favoring a female representation, which, while reversing the canonical course, is still discriminating against the male population, being a minority in this particular case.

(3.16) [Item 16] Serena ha superato con successo l'abilitazione all'avvocatura. Adesso Serena è un avvocato.

Serena passed the bar exam. Serena is now an.M.SG attorney.M.SG.

(3.17) [Item 17] Le maestre delle scuole elementari tendono a dare tanto spazio alle attività ludiche.

Elementary school teachers.F.PL tend to give so much space to recreational activities.

The third section (i.e., Willingness to Use Inclusive Language) does not introduce new uses of the suffix being studied; rather, it taps into what has been advanced so far in an attempt to measure the individual's predisposition to accommodate these uses. The prompt is to indicate how willing they are to adopt the following strategies under the three conditions outlined. The use of the innovative suffix *-ə* as representative of the solely nonbinary population is in this instance applied to the case of the plural. Previously introduced with reference to the singular (cf. (3.11)), item 18 (3.18) shows the plural exclusive nonbinary ending along with the *splitting* strategy, which involves the explicit mention of all three gender categories sequentially (Giusti, 2022).

(3.18) [Item 18] Quanto saresti disponibile a iniziare una mail con: *cari studenti*, *care studentesse* e *carə studentə* se sai che tra i destinatari sono presenti maschi, femmine e persone che non si identificano nella distinzione binaria del genere?

How willing are you to start an email with *cari studenti* 'dear.M.PL students.M.PL', *care studentesse* 'dear.F.PL students.F.PL' and *carə studentə* 'dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL' knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender?

As opposed to the exclusive use of the suffix *-ə* to designate a particular population found in item 18 (3.18), item 19 (3.19) shows an inclusive usage of the suffix *-ə*, thus encompassing multiple specific representations (i.e., male, female, nonbinary). The result is a single, short form that opts for the nonbinary ending precisely to indicate its integral participation. Such a function coincides exactly with the one that appeared in item 10 (3.12).

(3.19) [Item 19] Quanto saresti disponibile a iniziare una mail con: *carə studentə* se sai che tra i destinatari sono presenti maschi, femmine e persone che non si identificano nella distinzione binaria del genere?

How willing are you to start an email with *carə studentə* ‘dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL’ knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender?

When it comes to the function assigned to the innovative suffix *-ə*, there is also exact correspondence between item 5 (3.11) and item 20 (3.20), in that they both adopt the suffix to refer to the singular exclusive representation of the nonbinary population only.

(3.20) [Item 20] Quanto saresti disponibile a utilizzare il termine “*candidatə*” al posto di “*candidato*” quando il referente non si identifica nella distinzione binaria del genere?

How willing are you to use the term *candidatə* ‘candidate.NB.SG’ instead of *candidato* ‘candidate.M.SG’ when the referent does not identify with the binary distinction of gender?

As for the implemented scoring system – also borrowed from Parks and Robertson (2000: 423), all items “were scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale. High scores (4–5) indicated a positive attitude toward inclusive language; low scores (1–2) indicated a negative attitude toward inclusive language. A score of 3 indicated neutrality or uncertainty”. Items 2 (3.1), 3 (3.2), 4 (3.10), 6 (3.3), 11 (3.7) and 13 (3.13) were reverse-scored.

3.3.4 Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits

Having determined (i) respondents’ personal view on the sexist use of language, (ii) their ability to detect instances of this particular use and (iii) their openness to inclusive language by means of the SILUI, a further level of analysis is added by looking into their reading preferences and habits, in an attempt to uncover their actual exposure to the phenomenon of inclusive language. Through these data, we could indeed potentially establish a correlation between the degree of familiarity with inclusive language and the intention and commitment to employ it or, conversely, to reject it.

For the construction of the 14-item questionnaire on reading preferences and habits, some of the elements were borrowed from existing, validated instruments, others were created *ex novo* for the purposes of our research. Items 1-8 of the questionnaire, given in (3.21)-(3.28), are the result

of the *ad hoc* design, or, where specified otherwise, the adaptation of questions taken from standardized surveys, operated by Cerutti (2023). The items 9-14, given in (3.29)-(3.34), were instead formulated by building on the structure of some of the questions proposed by Cerutti (2023), in line with the principles identified by Caselli (2005). The internal structure of the questionnaire thus consists of two separate, albeit interconnected parts: the first (3.21)-(3.28) is confined to the reading practice at large, the second (3.29)-(3.34) revolves around the strategies of inclusive language available in Italian.

The items that make up the first part can be further classified into three categories – reflecting the three areas explored by Smith (1990) in the *Adult Survey of Reading Attitudes* (ASRA) – namely Reading Habits (i.e., items 1-6, given in (3.21)-(3.26)), Reading Attitudes (i.e., item 7 (3.27)), and Perceptions About Reading (i.e., item 8 (3.28)).

Item 1 (3.21) uncovers the reasons underlying the act of reading, distinguishable into obligation (i.e., for studying purposes / for work) or pleasure (i.e., for leisure, in one's spare time). As attested by literature, reading in one's spare time correlates positively with the improvement of text comprehension skills (Benevides & Peterson, 2010; Mol & Bus, 2011; McGeown et al., 2015).

(3.21) [Item 1] Per quali motivi leggi? Puoi indicare una o due opzioni.

- ☐ Per studio / Per lavoro
- ☐ Per svago, nel tempo libero

Why do you read?

- ☐ For studying purposes / for work
- ☐ For leisure, in my spare time

Adapted from Smith's (1990) survey, item 2 (3.22) digs into readers' familiarity with different text types. Respondents are asked to indicate on a 5 Likert-scale item with 8 answers how often they are confronted with different text types, ranging from school/university textbooks and scientific literature to technical documentation, fiction, nonfiction, periodical press, online information or other. Should a certain degree of familiarity with the same type of text presented in this experiment be found (i.e., technical documentation), it will be considered a factor of advantage in text processing, which could partially disguise the interference exerted by the innovative suffix introduced.

(3.22) [Item 2] Con che frequenza leggi le seguenti tipologie di testo?

1. Libri di testo scolastici / manuali universitari	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
2. Letteratura scientifica (pubblicazioni/ articoli scientifici)	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
3. Documentazione tecnica (circolari, normative, manuali d'uso...)	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
4. Narrativa (romanzi, racconti...)	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
5. Saggistica	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
6. Stampa periodica (quotidiani, riviste...)	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
7. Informazioni online (argomenti vari: attualità, cucina, sport, cultura, viaggi, moda...)	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
8. Altro (specificare):	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)

How often do you read the following types of text?

1. School / university textbooks	never (1)	very often (5)
2. Scientific literature (academic papers)	never (1)	very often (5)
3. Technical documentation (regulations and regulatory circulars, how-to guides...)	never (1)	very often (5)
4. Fiction (novels, tales...)	never (1)	very often (5)
5. Nonfiction	never (1)	very often (5)
6. Periodical press (newspaper, magazine...)	never (1)	very often (5)
7. Online information (various topics: current affairs, cooking, sports, culture, travel, fashion...)	never (1)	very often (5)
8. Other (please specify):	never (1)	very often (5)

Time spent reading is one of the factors contributing to profiling the expert reader. According to their level of expertise, readers will indeed presumably treat linguistic innovations differently, and be drawn by them in different ways. Item 3 (3.23) looks at the overall time spent reading on average each day (including reading for study, work and pleasure), by asking respondents to

think in terms of hours. A multiple-choice question was selected to provide an idea of the level of detail required in answering the question (Caselli, 2005).

(3.23) [Item 3] Quanto tempo dedichi alla lettura, in media, in un giorno?

- ☐ Meno di un'ora
- ☐ Da una a due ore
- ☐ Da due a tre ore
- ☐ Da tre a quattro ore
- ☐ Più di quattro ore

How much time do you spend reading each day?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 2-3 hours
- ☐ 3-4 hours
- ☐ More than 4 hours

Item 4 (3.24) alludes to the size of respondents' reading pile. As a matter of fact, reading in one's free time, with particular reference to novels, has been found to discriminate between expert and nonexpert readers, as reported in several studies (Mol & Bus, 2011; McGeown et al., 2015).

(3.24) [Item 4] Quanti libri hai letto, nel tempo libero, nell'ultimo anno?

How many books have you read this year (in your spare time)?

Items 5 (3.25) and 6 (3.26) explore the hotly debated opposition: print vs digital reading. Frequency of use with respect to different media is first addressed in item 5 (3.25), with item 6 (3.26) being confined to the preferences for the media to read from. Among the listed digital media there are e-readers, computers, tablets and smartphones, in that they differ in screen size, brightness, and ability to interact with the text and modify its layout to make reading smoother (Cerutti, 2023). One of the most relevant aspects of digital reading is its being subject to linguistic experimentation, as a consequence of its increased diffusion and greater responsiveness to the emerging sociolinguistic phenomena. For this reason, digital reading is particularly interesting for the purpose of our study. In addition, since the experimental procedure we adopted relies entirely on onscreen reading, it is deemed necessary to investigate respondents' habits, as previous experience or mere preference for either mode could indeed affect performance¹⁷.

¹⁷ This consideration reflects, in its entirety, the one reported in Cerutti's work (2023).

(3.25) [Item 5] Con che frequenza leggi su queste tipologie di supporto?

Carta stampata	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
Smartphone	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
Computer	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
Computer	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
E-reader	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)

How often do you read from the following media?

Print media	never (1)	very often (5)
Smartphone	never (1)	very often (5)
Computer	never (1)	very often (5)
Tablet	never (1)	very often (5)
E-reader	never (1)	very often (5)

(3.26) [Item 6] In generale, preferisci leggere:

- ☐ su supporto cartaceo
- ☐ su supporto digitale
- ☐ non ho preferenze

In general, you would rather read:

- ☐ on paper
- ☐ on screen
- ☐ I don't have a preference

Item 7 (3.27) inquires into respondents' attitudes toward reading, by putting forward four statements with which respondents are asked to express their agreement. The act of reading is here being evaluated from a personal perspective.

(3.27) [Item 7] Quanto sei d'accordo con queste affermazioni? (scegli un'opzione da 1 = per niente d'accordo a 5= molto d'accordo)

Leggere è un'attività piacevole	per niente d'accordo (1)	molto d'accordo (5)
Leggere è un'attività noiosa	per niente d'accordo (1)	molto d'accordo (5)
Leggere è utile	per niente d'accordo (1)	molto d'accordo (5)
Leggere è faticoso	per niente d'accordo (1)	molto d'accordo (5)

Indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) how much you agree with the following statements:

Reading is an enjoyable activity	strongly disagree (1)	strongly agree (5)
Reading is a boring activity	strongly disagree (1)	strongly agree (5)
Reading is important	strongly disagree (1)	strongly agree (5)
Reading is hard	strongly disagree (1)	strongly agree (5)

Metacognitive in nature, item 8 (3.28) was adapted from Smith's (1990) survey. It urges respondents to make a self-assessment of their own competence by drawing from a given definition. Complex as it is, the question is narrowed down to the aspect of integrating multiple pieces of knowledge – the one resulting from the act of reading and that which one already possesses – crucial skill in profiling the expert reader.

(3.28) [Item 8] “Un lettore esperto ha la capacità di integrare le informazioni di un testo con ciò che già conosce.”

In base a questa affermazione, che tipo di lettore ti consideri?

poco esperto molto esperto

1 2 3 4 5

“An expert reader has the ability to integrate information from a text with what they already know.”

Based on this statement, what kind of reader do you consider yourself to be?

inexperienced					very experienced
1	2	3	4	5	

As previously anticipated, items 9-14, given in (3.29)-(3.34), were designed *ad hoc* to measure exposure to the inclusive use of the Italian language. Albeit at different levels, zooming in and out on respondents' familiarity with inclusive language depending on the specificity of the question, item 9 (3.29) tests respondents' prior knowledge of the examined phenomenon to prepare the ground for the specific strategies addressed in items 10 (3.30) and 11 (3.31). It serves to crucially establish whether or not it is the first time respondents are confronted with these innovations on the level of language. The binary response format thus imposes immediate categorization (i.e., first exposure *vs* multiple exposures).

(3.29) [Item 9] Prima di prendere parte a questo esperimento, avevi già sentito parlare di linguaggio inclusivo?

sì / no

Have you ever heard of inclusive language before taking part in this experiment?

yes / no

With items 10 (3.30) and 11 (3.31) respondents are encouraged to take a closer look at the strategies proposed for Italian. They are indeed asked to indicate if, and how often, they have encountered each of the strategies listed in the table on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often) and then add, in item 11 (3.31), whichever strategy they know of that does not appear in the list provided above¹⁸.

(3.30) [Item 10] Hai già incontrato le seguenti strategie di linguaggio inclusivo nelle tue precedenti letture?

Coordinazione di termini femminili e maschili (<i>splitting</i>)	<i>Salve a tutte e a tutti</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
Nomi collettivi (<i>oscuramento</i>)	<i>Salve a tutte le persone qui presenti</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
“*” come terminazione finale	<i>Salve a tutt*</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
“@” come terminazione finale	<i>Salve a tutt@</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
“_” come terminazione finale	<i>Salve a tutt_</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
“x” come terminazione finale	<i>Salve a tutt_x</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
“u” come terminazione finale	<i>Salve a tuttu</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
“ə” come terminazione finale	<i>Salve a tuttə</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)

¹⁸ Please refer to Chapter 1 for the reasons underlying the identification of the strategies shown in the table, part of item 10.

Have you ever come across the following strategies of inclusive language in your previous readings?

Coordination of feminine and masculine terms (<i>splitting</i>)	<i>Hello everyone.F.PL and everyone.M.PL</i>	never (1)	very often (5)
Collective nouns (<i>oscuramento</i>)	<i>Hello to all the people here</i>	never (1)	very often (5)
“*” as the word ending	<i>Hello everyon*</i>	never (1)	very often (5)
“@” as the word ending	<i>Hello everyon@</i>	never (1)	very often (5)
“_” as the word ending	<i>Hello everyon_</i>	never (1)	very often (5)
“x” as the word ending	<i>Hello everyonx</i>	never (1)	very often (5)
“u” as the word ending	<i>Hello everyonu</i>	never (1)	very often (5)
“ə” as the word ending	<i>Hello everyonə</i>	never (1)	very often (5)

(3.31) [Item 11] Conosci altre strategie riconducibili al linguaggio inclusivo?
.....

Do you happen to know any other strategies attributable to inclusive language?
.....

From the compilation of the table¹⁹, we expect greater recognition of the innovative suffix -ə, as it is by far the most debated strategy, and, accordingly, the more widely used compared to others. Therefore, we identified it as the most interesting linguistic innovation to test among the ones proposed.

In line with the central role played by the -ə suffix in the present study, the remaining items 12-14, given in (3.32)-(3.34), refer exclusively to this strategy. In an attempt to measure its outreach, we opted for including another table listing several text types (cp. (3.22)) for each of which respondents had to mark whether they had witnessed the presence of the -ə suffix.

¹⁹ Notice that in Italian *tutti.M.PL* ‘everyone’ bears a gender marker, with its feminine counterpart being *tutte.F.PL*.

(3.32) [Item 12] Indica in quali tipologie di testo hai già incontrato il simbolo “ə” (inserendo una x in corrispondenza della categoria d’interesse):

1. Libri di testo scolastici / manuali universitari	
2. Letteratura scientifica (pubblicazioni / articoli scientifici)	
3. Documentazione tecnica (circolari, normative, manuali d’uso...)	
4. Narrativa (romanzi, racconti...)	
5. Saggistica	
6. Stampa periodica (quotidiani, riviste...)	
7. Informazioni online (argomenti vari: attualità, cucina, sport, cultura, viaggi, moda...)	
8. Social media	
9. Altro (specificare):	

Indicate in what types of text you have already come across the "ə" symbol by placing an x in the corresponding category:

1. School / university textbooks	
2. Scientific literature (academic papers)	
3. Technical documentation (regulations and regulatory circulars, how-to guides...)	
4. Fiction (novels, tales...)	
5. Nonfiction	
6. Periodical press (newspaper, magazine...)	
7. Online information (various topics: current affairs, cooking, sports, culture, travel, fashion...)	
8. Social media ²⁰	
9. Other (please specify):	

²⁰ It was deemed necessary to distinguish between online information, which can refer to either websites or blogs, and social media, by adding this entry to the original list of text types presented in item 2.

Items 13 (3.33) and 14 (3.34) are strictly intertwined and both present a metacognitive nature. Item 13 (3.33) directly addresses the perception of the respondent who is dealing with the symbol -ə, by asking whether it is considered an obstacle to the reading of the word. The same question is further explored by item 14 (3.34), which, in turn, consists of two sub-questions, committed to dig a little deeper: the opposition silent *vs* aloud reading is introduced, and with it, the distinction between performativity and meaning. The multiple-choice format employed here is to avoid making the question difficult to manage, as this is a rather complex question *per se*. Without a specific focus – made explicit and precisely delimited, the questions would open up a whole range of considerations that go beyond the scope of our study.

(3.33) [Item 13] Nel complesso, reputi l’inserimento del simbolo “ə” a fine parola un elemento di ostacolo alla lettura della parola stessa?

assolutamente no				decisamente sì	
1	2	3	4	5	

Overall, do you find the inclusion of the "ə" symbol at the end of the word to be an obstacle to reading the word itself?

absolutely no				absolutely yes	
1	2	3	4	5	

(3.34) [Item 14] Prova a leggere questa frase ad alta voce: *Lə candidatə è unə studentə dottorale del secondo anno in Scienze del linguaggio - Percorso in Linguaggio e cognizione*. Ti risulta difficile da pronunciare per via dell’inserimento del simbolo "ə"? Ti è chiaro a cosa si riferisce?

- ☐ è difficile da pronunciare ed è difficile capire il suo significato quando leggo
- ☐ è difficile da pronunciare, ma è facile capire il suo significato quando leggo
- ☐ è facile da pronunciare, ma è difficile capire il suo significato quando leggo
- ☐ è facile da pronunciare ed è facile capire il suo significato quando leggo

Try reading this sentence aloud: *The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG is a.NB.SG second-year PhD student.NB.SG in Language Sciences - Language and Cognition Curriculum*. Do you find it difficult to pronounce because of the inclusion of the "ə" symbol? Do you know what it refers to?

- ☐ It is difficult to pronounce and it is difficult to understand its meaning as I read
- ☐ It is difficult to pronounce, but it is easy to understand its meaning as I read
- ☐ It is easy to pronounce, but it is difficult to understand its meaning as I read
- ☐ It is easy to pronounce and it is easy to understand its meaning as I read

The last item (3.34) represents the only data we collect with respect to the viability of the proposal on the level of phonetic production, in an attempt to measure – although indirectly, by asking for a personal judgment – the articulatory accessibility when confronted with the innovative suffix -ə.

3.3.5 Procedure

The experimental paradigm, adapted from Bradley and colleagues (2019a), consists of one major task (i.e., a sentence-picture matching task) which, in turn, is composed of three internal subsequent phases, i.e., (i) reading of the prompts, (ii) rating of the academic profiles, (iii) photo selection of the described candidates. In addition, two online questionnaires, i.e., SILUI and the Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits, were administered to the participants. The experiment and the online questionnaires were generated and administered through *Gorilla Experiment Builder* (www.gorilla.sc), an open-source platform capable of running online behavioral studies while also measuring reaction times. Each participant was involved in a one-shot experimental trial, with no time limitation, comprising the sentence-picture matching task splitted into two contiguous tasks (i.e., one testing the singular condition, the other the plural condition), the SILUI questionnaire and the Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits. The singular-plural tasks' sequence of administration was counterbalanced among participants, by randomly assigning each participant to either one of the two possible sequences (i.e., singular-plural, plural-singular). Participants' responses were automatically recorded and subsequently manually transcribed by the experimenter in order to create summary worksheets on which to run statistical analyses.

The experiment was carried out autonomously by each participant, who received the access link on their email address, and after reading and accepting an informed consent form, in compliance with the regulation (EU) 2016/679, went through the study at their own pace. Therefore, the experimenter had no control over the environment. The experiment lasted about 30 minutes, with remarkable differences in the actual execution time, as it was up to participants to make sure to ignore any possible interruption. Participants were highly recommended to use a laptop given the abundance of visual and textual stimuli that each screen contains in the sentence-picture matching task. As shown in Figures 4 and 5, every item indeed includes (i) the verbal stimulus (i.e., prompt); (ii) the three rating questions each accompanied by their corresponding slider (on which to express their judgment by placing the cursor on the detected value); (iii) the single-text entry where to insert the letter corresponding to the selected image, found in the set of six images placed at the foot of the page. The English translations of the instructions and the verbal stimuli are given in Appendix C.

RICORDA
Le attività da svolgere come tutor sono relative a questi corsi:
– linguistica generale
– lingua inglese 1
– linguistica applicata

La candidato è una studenta dottorale del secondo anno in *Scienze del linguaggio - Percorso in Linguaggio e cognizione*. In magistrale, si è laureata con un voto di 110. La media ponderata della candidato, in magistrale, era di 27.3. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento della candidato è *Semantica e linguistica computazionale*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *I frame semantici dei verbi di moto. Prime annotazioni su FrameNet*. La candidato vanta 1 pubblicazione nella disciplina di interesse ed esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico; nello specifico, è stata tutor di 1 corso. La candidato risulta regolarmente iscritta per l'anno accademico in corso.

Come valuteresti la preparazione accademica della candidato? scarsa eccellente

Come valuteresti l'esperienza pregressa della candidato? scarsa eccellente

Come valuteresti l'idoneità al ruolo della candidato? scarsa eccellente

Ora puoi selezionare l'immagine della candidato, inserendo la lettera corrispondente nel riquadro:

 Invio


A



B



C



D



E



F

Figure 4. Screenshot of one of the two items testing the nonbinary singular condition as it appears on *Gorilla*.

RICORDA
I progetti devono contribuire al benessere duraturo e sostenibile degli esseri umani e dell'ambiente
(LS - Scienze della vita)

Le candidate sono professori ordinari. Negli anni precedenti, sono già risultate vincitrici di 2 bandi. Le candidate propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Studio di psicologia clinica per il sostegno psicologico di pazienti con diagnosi di malattie rare*, la cui finalità è di combattere le difficoltà psico-emotive di adattamento a carico di famiglie e pazienti. Le candidate saranno impegnate nell'attività di ricerca per un periodo di 18 mesi, e il progetto prevede la collaborazione con l'ateneo di Lisbona, Portogallo. Tutte le candidate si sono dedicate a questo settore di ricerca per 7 anni. Sono autrici di 6 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Esprimi un giudizio in termini di:

1. Pertinenza della proposta progettuale

scarsa

1

2

3

4

5

ottima

2. Originalità e impatto sociale del progetto di ricerca

scarsa

1

2

3

4

5

ottima

3. Qualità del profilo scientifico del gruppo di ricerca

scarsa

1

2

3

4

5

ottima

Quale gruppo di ricerca corrisponde alla descrizione fornita?

Invio

A

B

C

D

E

F

Figure 5. Screenshot of one of the two items testing the nonbinary plural condition as it appears on *Gorilla*.

91

4 Data Analysis and Results

This chapter is dedicated to the presentation of the results of the main experiment carried out in this thesis. The results of the sentence-picture matching task (SPMT) are presented in Section 4.1. Section 4.2 focuses on the data collected through the questionnaire on the *Sexist/Inclusive Language Use in Italian* (SILUI). Whereas the data concerning the Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits are reported in Section 4.3. Finally, Section 4.4 is devoted to the discussion of the results.

4.1 Results of the Sentence-Picture Matching Task

Response coding is first outlined in subsection 4.1.1. The quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data are treated separately, in § 4.1.2 and § 4.1.3, respectively. Subsection 4.1.2 is further articulated in three separate parts, each one devoted to a single analysis. Accuracy is given in *Analysis 1*, which is built on an all-inclusive, mixed-gender representation of the plural suffix *-ə* (cf. § 4.1.2.1). Accuracy also constitutes the output of *Analysis 2*, with the only difference being in the scoring system, by adopting a minimum nonbinary-specific representation of the plural suffix *-ə* (cf. § 4.1.2.2). Reaction times are the object of *Analysis 3* (cf. § 4.1.2.3). A focus on distractors is provided in subsection 4.1.3.1.

4.1.1 Response Coding

As we assessed the process of gender assignment via a sentence-picture matching task in which participants were asked to match each verbal stimulus with a picture (depicting the gender of the described referent), deciding what counted as a correct selection was pivotal. We thus resorted to accuracy as the main parameter to test our hypothesis.

With respect to the singular condition, response correctness was determined by a perfect match between the gender information found in the verbal stimulus and the gender of the depicted subject appearing in the selected picture. For instance, when the verbal stimulus describing a single male referent (e.g., *Il candidato è uno studente dottorale del primo anno* ‘The.M.SG candidate.M.SG is a.M.SG first-year PhD student.M.SG’) was matched with one of the pictures that were previously rated from a different sample of participants as “masculine” (cf. § 3.2.2), the response scored one point. Analogously, a verbal stimulus introducing a feminine candidate must

be associated with a picture rated as “feminine” in order to be scored as correct. The same procedure applies to the nonbinary condition: the verbal stimulus presenting a nonbinary candidate must find perfect correspondence with one of the two pictures labeled as “nonbinary” displayed in the six-image array. This way, the exclusive use of the innovative *-ə* suffix – solely representative of a nonbinary individual – is being tested. Whenever a mismatch is found (e.g., a picture rated as “feminine” is selected to represent the male referent described in the verbal stimulus), the score is zero. As for the fillers, whichever picture gets assigned to the verbal stimulus leads to a correct response (i.e., one point), as fillers represent the neutral condition, which can thus be fairly associated with any gender.

With the exception of fillers, only one picture representative of one particular gender is thus scored as correct in the case of the singular condition. With regards to the plural, however, the feminine plural condition is the only one to admit one correct answer, namely the selection of the female-only group (i.e., FFF). The masculine plural condition, in contrast, can refer to both a male-only group (i.e., MMM) – recalling the specific meaning of the masculine form (cf. § 1.3) – as well as a mixed-gender group which still has the presence of a male member within it (i.e., MMF, FFM, MFNB). This second choice serves as a measure of the generic meaning of the masculine form. When compared to its singular counterpart, the situation becomes considerably more complicated as various options are admissible here, namely there is no one-to-one correspondence. Four possible answers can indeed score one point for the masculine plural condition (i.e., the selection of the following groups of pictures: MMM; MMF; FFM; MFNB). Just as many alternatives are available for the nonbinary plural condition: namely, selection of a nonbinary-only group (i.e., NBNB), or one that is composed of a nonbinary individual together with a male and female members (i.e., MFNB), or groups that see the presence of both masculine and feminine members only (i.e., MMF, FFM) would all count as correct. It must be noted, however, that we run two separate analyses: in the first analysis, the selection of groups with only female and male members (i.e., MMF, FFM) for the nonbinary plural condition was scored as correct, in the second analysis the same groups were instead excluded, thus scored as incorrect. Depending on the analysis, these two groups may in fact be excluded or included – hence their appearing in brackets in Table 4.1.1. – precisely to be able to gauge the actual impact of the presence of a nonbinary member in the very choice of associating the group to which it belongs with the morphological innovation proposed. This criterion thus enables us to properly

distinguish the activation of an all-inclusive, mixed-gender meaning from that of a nonbinary-specific one. As a matter of fact, selection of a group that is deprived of nonbinary members stands for the adoption of the quintessential generic interpretation, activated when referring to mixed-gender, without any direct reference to the nonbinary condition. Contrary to what happens with the singular, the nonbinary plural condition was indeed designed to test both the inclusive as well as the exclusive usage of the innovative *-ə* suffix, as representative of the nonbinary population in isolation as well as in the company of binary people, in the latter case, proving to be a rather open suffix, that can sometimes even refer to male and female members alone²¹. As with the singular, plural fillers can be matched with any gender, which means that any image is allowed. Table 4.1.1 provides a more effective visualization of the output of the implemented response coding process.

<i>Condition</i>	M.SG	F.SG	NB.SG	filler.SG	M.PL	F.PL	NB.PL	filler.PL
<i>Gender (compos.) of the image</i>	M	F	NB	M;F;NB	M,M,M; M,M,F; F,F,M; M,F,NB	F,F,F	NB,NB,NB; (M,M,F); (F,F,M); M,F,NB	M,M,M; F,F,F; NB,NB,NB; M,M,F; F,F,M; M,F,NB

Table 4.1.1 - The correct gender represented in the image to be assigned to the corresponding condition.

4.1.2 Quantitative Analysis of the Data

To the purpose of answering the questions in (I) and (II) (cf. § 3.1) – concerning the referents assigned to the variant *-ə* and the actual duration of the assignment process when dealing with such a morphological innovation – three different analyses were carried out. Response accuracy was tested by means of *Analyses 1* and *2*. More specifically, these two analyses were performed to check whether there is a difference in response accuracy (scores) that depends on (i) the gender of the item (i.e., masculine, feminine, nonbinary), (ii) the number of the item (i.e., singular, plural), (iii) the order of administration of the tasks (i.e., the singular-condition task preceding the plural-condition task and vice versa). The formulation of a slightly different scoring system with respect to the nonbinary plural condition is what distinguishes *Analysis 1* from *Analysis 2*. As hinted at in the previous section, a response that matches mixed groups

²¹ Although this even broader use of the suffix originally was probably not put forward, we wanted to explore it, as the inclusive interpretation can still arise when the suffix is used as a plural gender marker.

consisting of only female and male members (i.e., MMF and FFM groups) with the nonbinary plural condition was scored as correct, in addition to those that contain a nonbinary referent (i.e., MFNB), in *Analysis 1*. Conversely, in *Analysis 2* the presence of at least one nonbinary person within groups was thus appointed as the discriminating factor for establishing response correctness. That is, only responses assigning groups containing at least one nonbinary member to the nonbinary plural condition were scored as correct. It follows that whenever a MMF or FFM group was selected to represent the nonbinary plural condition, such a response was scored as incorrect, as it does not satisfy the criteria outlined above. *Analysis 3* set out to detect any effect exerted by (i) the gender of the item (i.e., masculine, feminine, nonbinary), (ii) the number of the item (i.e., singular or plural condition), and (iii) the order of administration of the tasks, on participants' reaction times. The underlying assumption here is that the conditions at which the longest times were recorded might have imposed interpretational problems for participants to resolve. An overview of the three analyses is provided in Table 4.1.2.

	Analysis 1	Analysis 2	Analysis 3
<i>Measure</i>	Accuracy	Accuracy	Reaction Times
<i>Scoring system specificity</i>	MMF-FFM inclusion in NB.PL condition	MMF-FFM exclusion from NB.PL condition	MMF-FFM inclusion in NB.PL condition

Table 4.1.2 - Measure and scoring system specificity are indicated for each of the three analyses that were conducted.

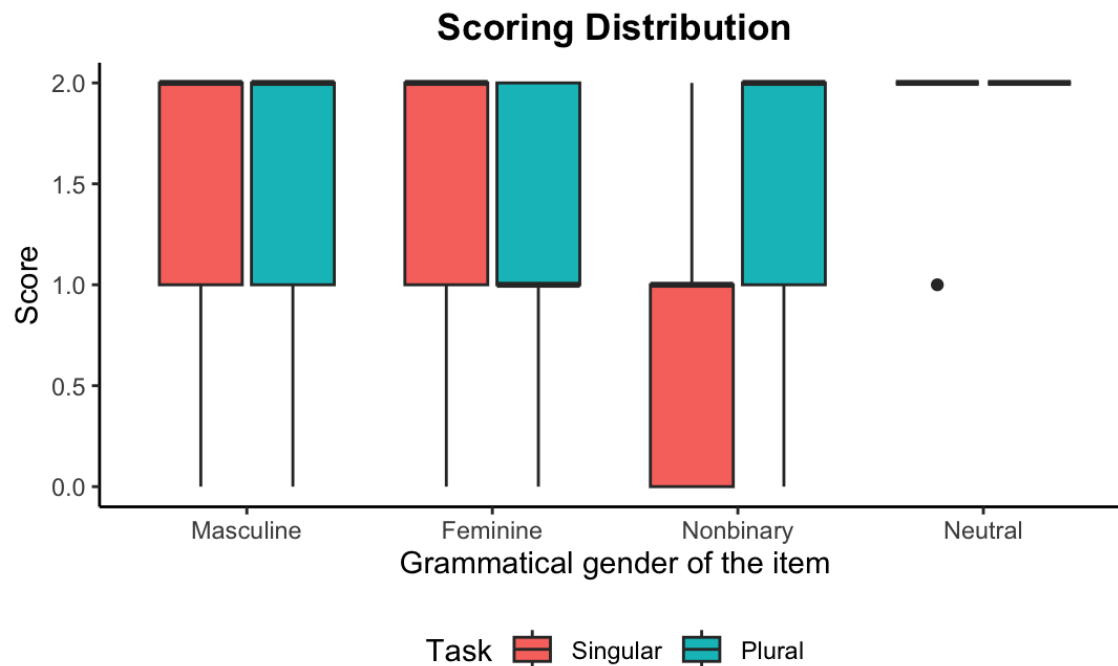
4.1.2.1 Analysis 1: Measuring Accuracy with an All-Inclusive, Mixed-Gender Representation of the Plural Suffix -ə

Considering the two tasks, participants performed differently depending on the gender and number of the item, showing decreasing scores in the nonbinary condition. In Table 4.1.3, descriptive statistics for all items are shown, with respect to the sentence-picture matching task (hereafter referred to as “SPMT”).

Items (gender & number)	Mean	SD	Median	Maximum	Minimum
<i>M.SG</i>	1.4875	0.6363215	2	2	0
<i>F.SG</i>	1.4875	0.6363215	2	2	0
<i>NB.SG</i>	0.7250	0.7626569	1	2	0
<i>neutral.SG</i> (filler)	1.9875	0.1118034	2	2	1
<i>M.PL</i>	1.6625	0.5498849	2	2	0
<i>F.PL</i>	1.1750	0.7758213	1	2	0
<i>NB.PL</i>	1.5250	0.6157223	2	2	0
<i>neutral.PL</i> (filler)	2.0000	0.0000000	2	2	2

Table 4.1.3 - Mean, SD, median, maximum, and minimum values for the SPMT, all conditions.

Graph 4.1.4 shows the mean distribution of the scores, depending on the grammatical gender and number of the item.



Graph 4.1.4 - Distributions of the SPMT scores, both tasks, all conditions.

As can be seen in Table 4.1.3 and Graph 4.1.4, participants obtained the lowest mean score in the nonbinary singular condition (0.7250). On the contrary, the scores obtained in the masculine and feminine singular conditions are higher and identical to each other (1.4875). Scores for feminine and masculine conditions, however, differ from one another in the plural condition, as masculine plural items still obtained a rather high score (1.6625), as opposed to feminine plural items (1.1750), whose score is lower than that of the nonbinary plural condition (1.5250), as shown in Table 4.1.3. Performance with singular and plural fillers is considered as “ceiling”, as all responses were scored as correct.

In order to establish whether the gender of the item (i.e., item gender) and(/or) the number of the item (i.e., task) are significant predictors of the obtained score, we analyzed our data with a generalized mixed model, with item gender and task as fixed effects, and participants and items as random effects.

The grammatical gender of the item is a significant predictor of score ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$), whereas the number of the item is not, although very close to significance ($p=0.053$). A significant interaction between gender and number of the item is found ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$). The main effect of grammatical gender and the interaction between grammatical gender and number of the item are shown in Table 4.1.5 below.

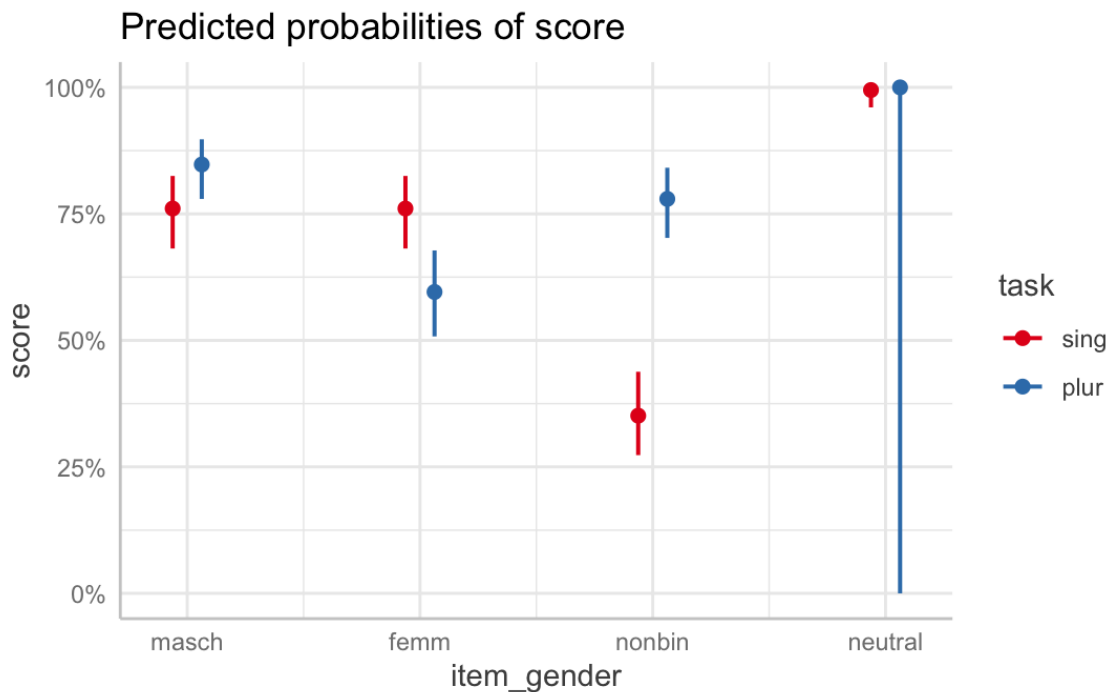
Predictors	Odds Ratios	score	p
		CI	
(Intercept)	3.18	2.13 – 4.74	<0.001
item gender [femm]	1.00	0.59 – 1.69	1.000
item gender [nonbin]	0.17	0.10 – 0.29	<0.001
item gender [neutral]	59.81	8.14 – 439.26	<0.001
task [plur]	1.75	0.99 – 3.09	0.053
item gender [femm] × task [plur]	0.26	0.12 – 0.57	0.001
item gender [nonbin] × task [plur]	3.73	1.73 – 8.06	0.001
item gender [neutral] × task [plur]	3368158.88	0.00 – 2735183241570092908194301263528284393942829686832969844201918961603754065920.00	0.853

Table 4.1.5 - Main effect of grammatical gender and interaction with number, all conditions.

As can be seen in Table 4.1.5, the nonbinary condition significantly differs from the masculine one (p-value < 0.001), whereas the feminine condition does not significantly differ from the masculine condition (p-value = 1.000). The significant difference also reported for the neutral condition is not taken into account, as whichever image gets assigned to fillers is considered correct. As anticipated, no main effect of number was detected (p=0.053). Hence, excluding the influence exerted by gender, participants' performance did not vary according to changes in number alone (i.e., considering only whether it is a singular or plural condition).

The generalized mixed model revealed a significant interaction between number condition and gender (p=0.001). Namely, as shown in Graph 4.1.4., the scores for feminine items are significantly lower in the plural than in the singular condition. Moreover, the scores for nonbinary items are significantly higher in the plural than in the singular condition (p=0.001). This raise in accuracy is to be traced back to the fact that the nonbinary plural condition was designed to include more correct answers, compared to its singular counterpart (cf. Table 4.1.1) – hence the exponential increase. This is to say, the higher the number of possible correct alternatives, the higher participants' score.

The effects of the interactions observed are reflected in the predicted probabilities of score displayed in Graph 4.1.6. Considering the feminine gender, when combined with the plural condition, lower predicted probabilities of score are expected compared with the same gender presented in the singular. Even more pronounced is the distance that separates the singular from the plural nonbinary condition. The difference between singular and plural in the masculine condition is, on the contrary, barely noticeable, in line with the results presented above.



Graph 4.1.6 - Predicted probabilities of SPMT scores, both tasks, all conditions.

Prior to the analysis we just presented, we analyzed the data by including the order of administration of the tasks (i.e., the singular-condition task preceding the plural-condition task and vice versa) as an additional factor. Since the order of administration had neither a main effect ($p=0.868$), nor a significant interaction with the other factors (i.e., gender and number of the item) was found, it was excluded from the analysis. It is thus safe to conclude that order by no means affects the results obtained.

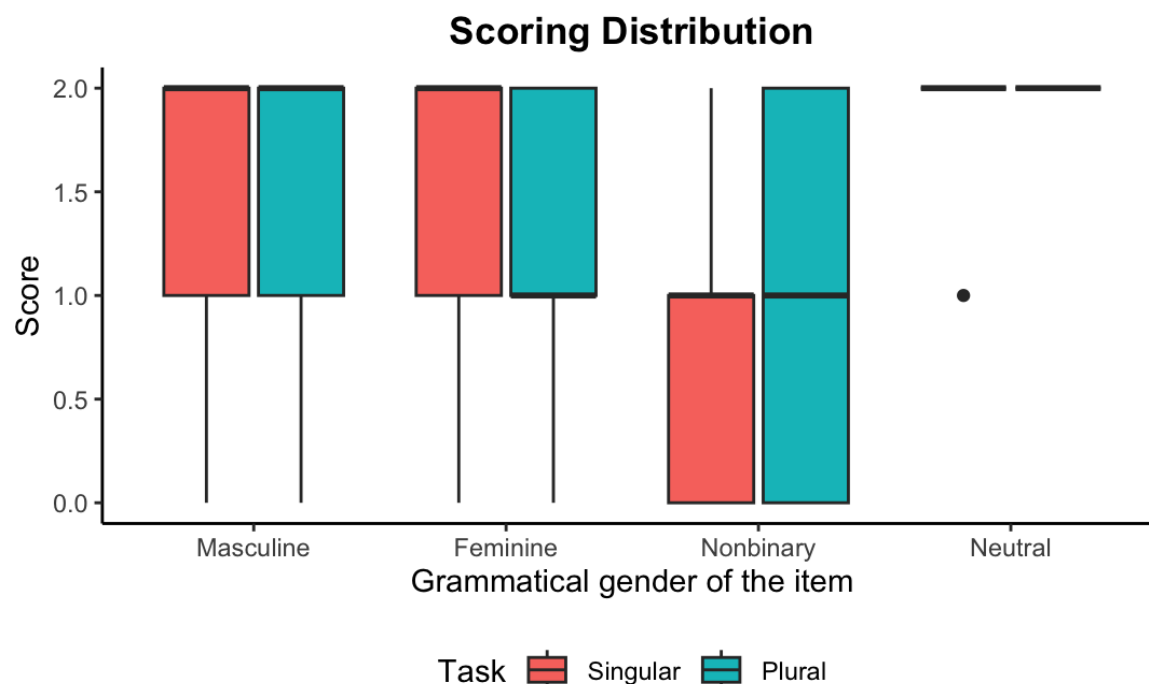
4.1.2.2 Analysis 2: Measuring Accuracy with a Minimum Nonbinary-Specific Representation of the Plural Suffix -ə

Analysis 2 is structured like analysis 1. Nonetheless, a difference that emerges from analysis 2 is the score obtained by participants in the nonbinary plural condition, which drops significantly as a result of the exclusion of two groups (i.e., MMF, FFM). In Table 4.1.7, descriptive statistics for all conditions are shown, with respect to the SPMT. Data for the plural nonbinary condition are shown in blue.

Items (gender and number)	Mean	SD	Median	Maximum	Minimum
<i>M.SG</i>	1.4875	0.6363215	2	2	0
<i>F.SG</i>	1.4875	0.6363215	2	2	0
<i>NB.SG</i>	0.7250	0.7626569	1	2	0
<i>neutral.SG</i> (filler)	1.9875	0.1118034	2	2	1
<i>M.PL</i>	1.6625	0.5498849	2	2	0
<i>F.PL</i>	1.1750	0.7758213	1	2	0
<i>NB.PL</i>	1.0125	0.7546271	1	2	0
<i>neutral.PL</i> (filler)	2.0000	0.0000000	2	2	2

Table 4.1.7 - Mean, SD, median, maximum, and minimum values for the SPMT, all conditions.

In Graph 4.1.8 the distributions of the scores obtained for each condition are shown:



Graph 4.1.8 - Distributions of the SPMT scores, both tasks, all conditions.

In comparing all the scores obtained by plural conditions, what emerges is that the nonbinary plural condition obtained the lowest score of all, as shown in Table 4.1.7 and Graph 4.1.8. As for the rest, the remarks passed on the other conditions – including the singular – reported in *Analysis 1* (cf. § 4.1.2.1) remain unchanged, as a result of replicating the same analysis, except for the change made in the scoring of the nonbinary plural condition, which in fact led to a different result.

As can be seen in Table 4.1.9, another difference detectable in this second analysis concerns the influence exerted by the factor known as the number of the item (i.e., singular or plural condition), which turns out to be a significant predictor of score ($p=0.048$). As a matter of fact, with no alteration of gender, in sticking to the nonbinary condition, participants' performance happened to vary according to manipulation of number alone, marked by the achievement of a statistically lower score for the nonbinary plural condition. The main effect of number is indeed manifested in the drop in score that occurs when a slightly more exclusive interpretation is chosen for the plural variant -ə, one that sees the inclusion of a nonbinary individual as a minimum requirement for group formation.

Predictors	Odds Ratios	score	p
		CI	
(Intercept)	3.24	2.17 – 4.85	<0.001
item gender [femm]	1.00	0.59 – 1.68	1.000
item gender [nonbin]	0.17	0.10 – 0.28	<0.001
item gender [neutral]	60.92	8.29 – 447.96	<0.001
task [plur]	1.76	1.00 – 3.09	0.048
item gender [femm] × task [plur]	0.26	0.12 – 0.55	<0.001
item gender [nonbin] × task [plur]	1.09	0.52 – 2.27	0.813
item gender [neutral] × task [plur]	38150604.28	0.00 – 30906194124918486397272241788109864686198645845365795962870806350309359616000.00	0.829

Table 4.1.9 - Main effect of number and interaction with gender, all conditions.

As for *Analysis 1*, no main effect of the order of administration of the tasks (i.e., the singular-condition task preceding the plural-condition task and vice versa) was found ($p=0.867$). For this reason, it was excluded from the analysis.

4.1.2.3 *Analysis 3*: Reaction Times with an *All-Inclusive*, Mixed-Gender Representation of the Plural Suffix -ə

Considering the two tasks, differences in reaction times depending on the gender and number of the item were detected, showing a rather gradual increase from the gender-marked to the unmarked conditions. In Table 4.1.10, descriptive statistics for the reaction times are shown, with respect to the SPMT.

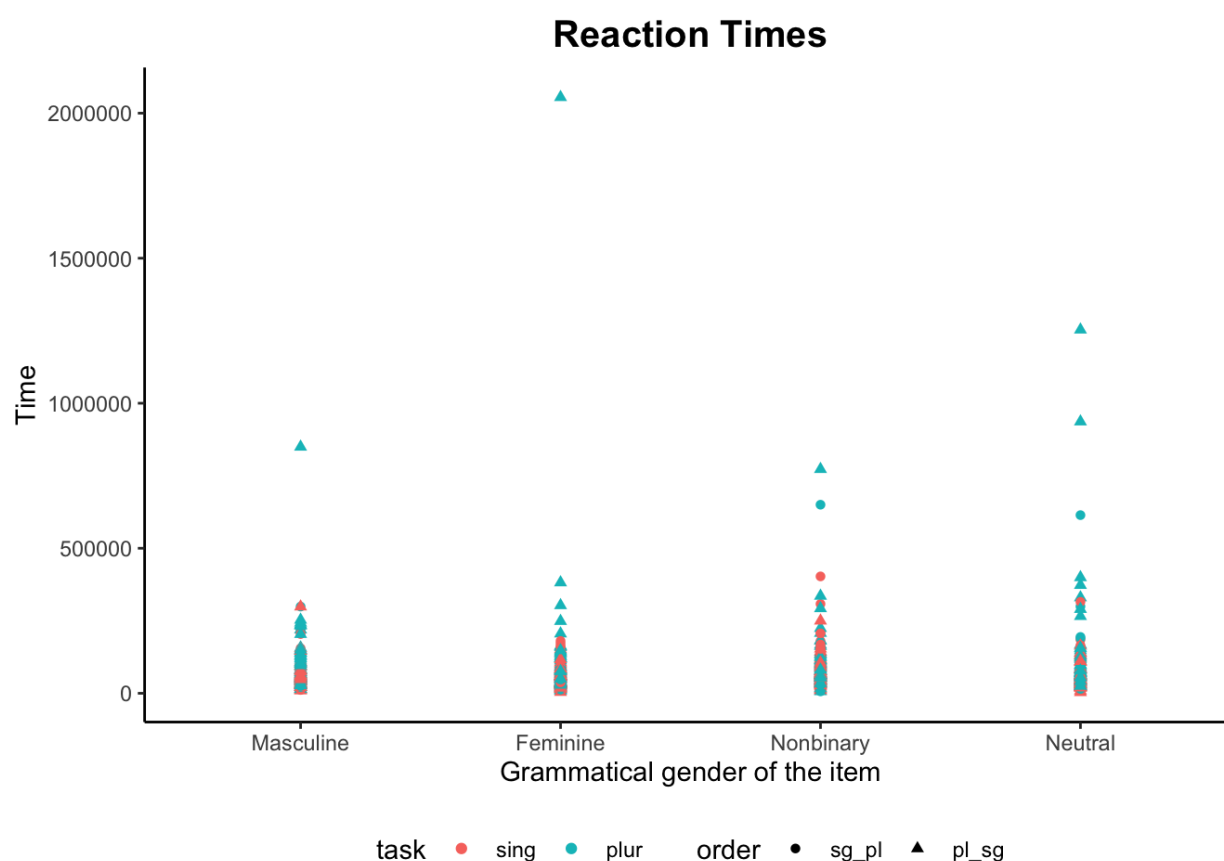
Items (gender & number)	Mean	SD	Median	Maximum	Minimum
<i>M.SG</i>	59787.75	33146.89	54436.0	186398	11661
<i>F.SG</i>	54093.90	26054.74	49311.5	171511	16104
<i>NB.SG</i>	70309.11	39688.70	61966.0	249645	13546
<i>neutral.SG</i> (filler)	62251.40	33119.29	52332.5	212141	16483
<i>M.PL</i>	79352.73	62051.33	67727.5	475896	17705
<i>F.PL</i>	76826.52	118528.77	58772.0	1069299	13192
<i>NB.PL</i>	76182.84	64141.88	60459.0	408148	17316
<i>neutral.PL</i> (filler)	89990.45	99654.89	66467.5	658778	20777

Table 4.1.10 - Mean, SD, median, maximum, and minimum values of the reaction times recorded for each of the SPMT conditions listed.

As can be seen in Table 4.1.10, in the singular-condition task participants' reaction times vary depending on the gender of the item. Namely, the feminine condition is the one in which participants exhibited the fastest mean reaction time (54093.90ms), followed by the masculine condition (59787.75ms), the neutral condition (62251.40ms) and the nonbinary condition (70309.11ms). In the plural-condition task, however, participants recorded the fastest mean reaction time in the nonbinary condition (76182.84ms), followed by the feminine condition (76826.52ms), the masculine condition (79352.73ms) and the neutral condition (89990.45ms). In confronting the two tasks, the fastest mean reaction time was thus recorded with the feminine condition. Unlike the feminine, the masculine condition presents two very different reaction times depending on whether it is the singular or plural condition: in the singular it recorded the second-fastest mean reaction time of all when introduced in the case of a singular-plural order of administration of the tasks; conversely, a rather slow mean reaction time was detected in the masculine plural condition. Remaining within the singular-condition task, as we move along the trajectory of gender to approach the lowest level of markedness, we observe a gradual increase in the mean reaction time reaching the unmarked condition, also known as the zero condition. This finding is also confirmed by the plural condition-task, in which the plural neutral condition

displays the slowest mean reaction time. The most irregular pattern is nevertheless to be attributed to the nonbinary condition, registering the slowest mean reaction time in the singular-condition task, as opposed to the fastest mean reaction time in the plural-condition task.

In order to establish whether the gender of the item (i.e., item gender) and(/or) the number of the item (i.e., task) and(/or) the order of administration of the tasks (i.e., order) significantly impact participants' reaction times, we analyzed our data with a multiple linear regression: analogously to the analyses presented above, gender and number of the item, together with the order of administration, are treated as independent variables, whereas the dependent variable consists of the reaction times of participants. Graph 4.1.11 shows the participants' reaction times for each item, depending on the grammatical gender and number of the item, and the order of administration of the tasks.



Graph 4.1.11 - Distributions of participants' reaction times across all the conditions.

A multiple linear regression revealed a significant general effect of the factors involved (i.e., gender and number of the item as well as the order of administration of the tasks) on reaction times. Moreover, a significant interaction between the order of administration of the tasks and number is found ($p=0.0317$), particularly concerning the plural-condition task when the latter is administered before the singular-condition task – an interaction responsible for increasing reaction times across all SPMT items. This is especially visible in the neutral condition (cf. Graph 4.1.11), where gender is neutralized.

4.1.3 Qualitative Analysis of the Data

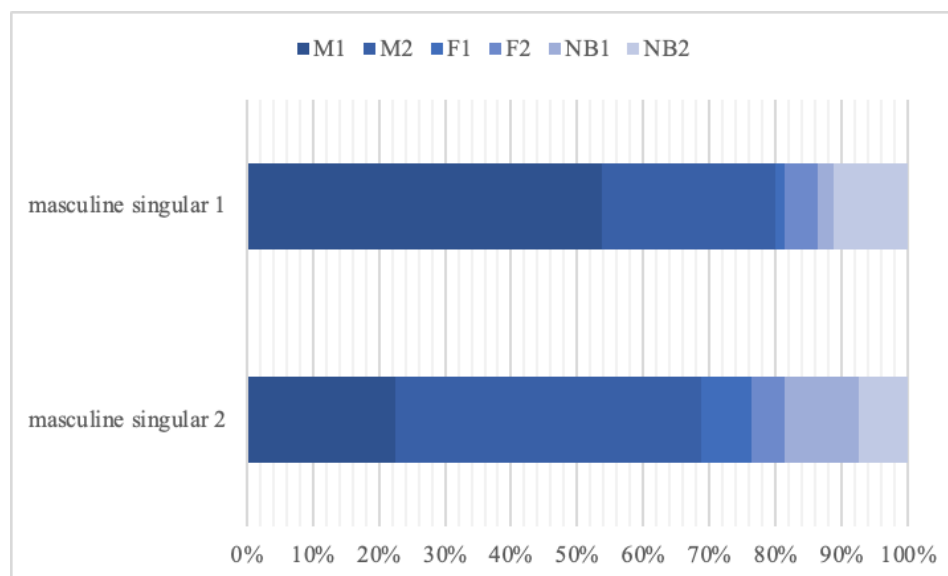
This section explores the internal distribution of the assigned genders found in each condition, so as to unveil the different percentages of participants selecting pictures with contrasting-gender referents. Precisely, the aim is to uncover whether in the case of the most potentially ambiguous conditions, relatively close percentages emerge, for which no gender really stands out among the ones selected. The analysis will thus be restricted to the masculine and nonbinary conditions, deemed particularly interesting as potentially conflicting meanings can be activated through them, of an inclusive or exclusive nature. Furthermore, the neutral condition will be analyzed, as this is the only way we can identify the gender most frequently assigned to a condition deprived of any marker of grammatical gender. Hence, only the feminine condition is omitted.

Beginning with the masculine condition, the images selected by most participants to match *il candidato* ‘the.M.SG candidate.M.SG’ in both items (i.e., masculine singular 1; masculine singular 2) are those labeled as masculine (i.e., M1, M2). In the first of the two items, the great majority of participants chose the image with a male referent that first appeared in the six-image array (M1: 53.75%), as opposed to only 26.25% of the participants selecting the second image with a male referent (M2) as shown in Table 4.1.12a and Graph 4.1.12a. The opposite trend is observed for the second item (i.e., masculine singular 2) with only 22.50% of the participants selecting the first-appearing image with a male referent (M1) and 46.25% opting for the second-appearing image with a male referent. Note that in both items, the feminine gender presents the lowest frequency of occurrence, as it is placed at the opposite pole of the binary line. Hence, a clear preference for a male-depicted referent described as *il candidato* ‘the.M.SG candidate.M.SG’ strongly emerged, which is even more visible through the aggregate data displayed in Table 4.1.12b and Graph 4.1.12b. For item masculine singular 1, 80% of the

participants selected a male referent, in contrast with 6.25% of the participants opting for a female referent and 13.75% of the participants choosing a nonbinary one. The item masculine singular 2 recorded instead 68.75% of the participants selecting a male referent, as opposed to 12.50% designating a female and 18.75% a nonbinary one. The specific meaning of the masculine form in the singular is thus activated.

Condition	M1 (%)	M2 (%)	F1 (%)	F2 (%)	NB1 (%)	NB2 (%)
<i>Masculine singular 1</i>	53.75	26.25	1.25	5.00	2.50	11.25
<i>Masculine singular 2</i>	22.50	46.25	7.50	5.00	11.25	7.50

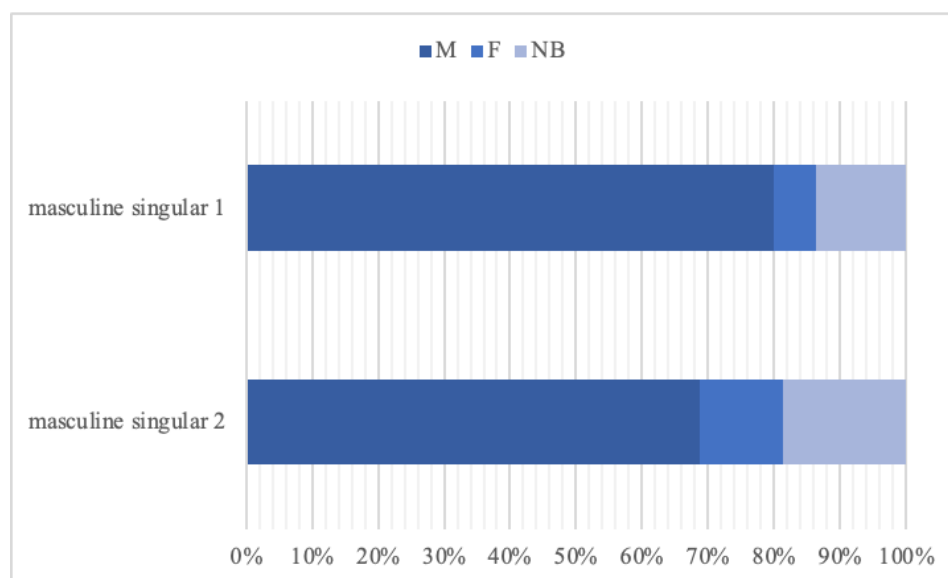
Table 4.1.12a - Frequency (%) of occurrence of each of the three genders (masculine, feminine, nonbinary) in the masculine singular condition *il candidato* ‘the.M.SG candidate.M.SG’. Two separate percentages are reported for each gender, referring to the first and second images appearing in the six-image array.



Graph 4.1.12a - Visual distribution of the selected genders for masculine singular condition *il candidato* ‘the.M.SG candidate.M.SG’ (response rates; disaggregate data).

Condition	M (%)	F (%)	NB (%)
<i>Masculine singular 1</i>	80.00	6.25	13.75
<i>Masculine singular 2</i>	68.75	12.50	18.75

Table 4.1.12b - Percentages of participants selecting each of the three genders (masculine, feminine, nonbinary) in the case of the masculine singular condition *il candidato* ‘the.M.SG candidate.M.SG’.

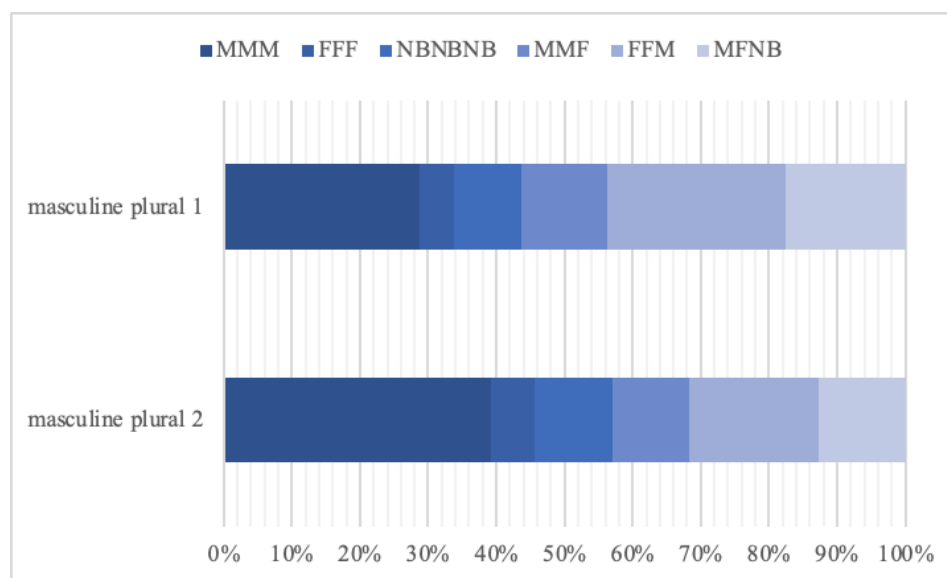


Graph 4.1.12b - Response rates of the selected genders for masculine singular condition *il candidato* ‘the.M.SG candidate.M.SG’, aggregate data.

Also for the plural, the specific meaning of the masculine form seems to be favored over the generic one, hence confirming that the alleged generic masculine actually displays a bias in favor of an interpretation that sees only men as the exclusive referents, answering the question in (III) (cf. § 3.1). As a matter of fact, for both items (i.e., masculine plural 1; masculine plural 2) the highest percentage of participants chose, as a visual representation of the referents *I candidati* ‘the.M.PL candidates.M.PL’, the depicted male-only group with 28.75% in the first item and 38.75% in the second item, hence showing that the specific interpretation of the masculine form is activated, i.e., one that only considers male referents. Looking at the percentages reported in Table 4.1.13, the only-male group (MMM) is followed by the one composed of two female members and one male member (i.e., the FFM group), which was chosen by 26.25% of the participants in the first item, and 18.75% of the participants in the second item. Note that the preference expressed for a female majority is far from random, as will be illustrated later in the discussion section. In comparing gender distribution of the two items – visually displayed in Graph 4.1.13 – a general trend that can be detected is that groups with at least one male member in the group were chosen more frequently as opposed to groups deprived of the male presence. The lowest percentages indeed occur at the only-female group (5%; 6.25%) and the only-nonbinary group (10%; 11.25%).

Condition	MMM (%)	FFF (%)	NBNBNB (%)	MMF (%)	FFM (%)	MFNB (%)
<i>Masculine plural 1</i>	28.75	5.00	10.00	12.50	26.25	17.50
<i>Masculine plural 2</i>	38.75	6.25	11.25	11.25	18.75	12.50

Table 4.1.13 - Frequency (%) of occurrence of each of the six groups distinguished by their gender composition (MMM, FFF, NBNBNB, MMF, FFM, MFNB) in the case of the masculine plural condition *i candidati* ‘the.M.PL candidates.M.PL’. It should be noted that one participant’s response could not be retrieved for the second item.



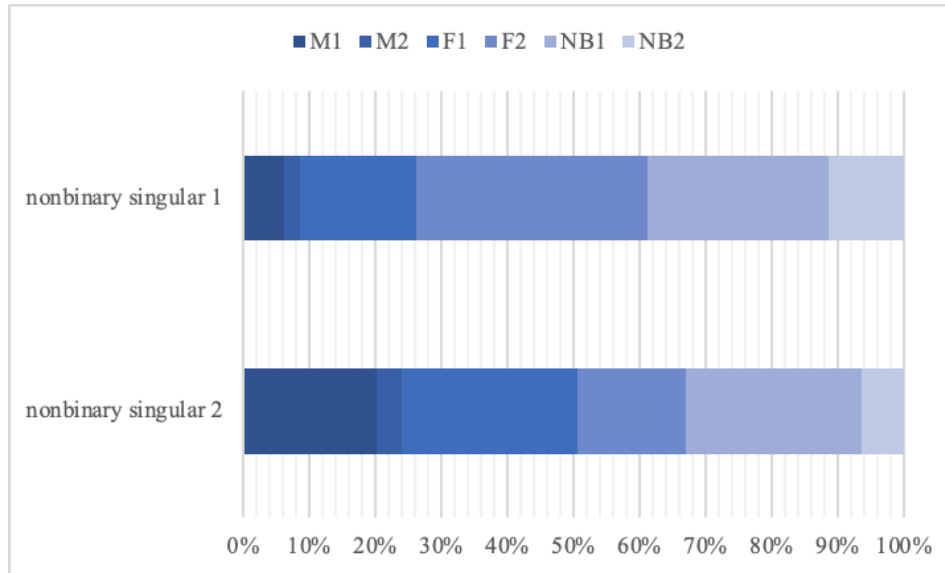
Graph 4.1.13 - Visual distribution of the selected gender-diverse groups for masculine plural condition *i candidati* ‘the.M.PL candidates.M.PL’ (response rates).

In an attempt to answer the first research question (cf. § 3.1) seeking to establish whether the variant $\rightarrow$ manages to immediately refer to an individual who does not identify with the binary distinction of gender, what emerges instead is that the feminine gender exhibits the highest frequency of occurrence when it comes to the nonbinary singular condition. In the first of the two nonbinary singular items, 35% of the participants identified the second image to appear in the six-picture array that has a female referent (i.e., F2) to visually represent *la candidata* ‘the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG’, with 17.5% of the participants choosing the first-appearing image with a female referent (i.e., F1). In the second item, 26.5% of the participants opt for the first-appearing feminine image and 16.25% choose the second-appearing feminine image, as Table 4.1.14a shows. Nonetheless, the preference for a female referent is visible in both items. Looking at the single images, there is an equally high percentage of participants (26.25%) who chose the first-appearing image with a nonbinary referent in the second item (cf. NB1 and F1 in nonbinary singular condition 2 reported in Table 4.1.14a) and, in the first item, the percentage of

participants opting for the first-appearing nonbinary image exceeds the percentage of participants selecting the first-appearing feminine image (cf. 27.5% vs 17.5%). Nonetheless, the aggregate data reported in Table 4.1.14b show the distinct preference for a female referent indicated as *l̥a candidat̥a* ‘the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG’, as it was selected by 52.5% of the participants in the first item, and by 42.5% in the second; as opposed to 38.75% and 32.5% of the participants choosing nonbinary referents instead in the first and second item, respectively. Overall, there was a fairly restrained selection of male referents, amounting to only 8.75% in the first item and 23.75% in the second. Graphs 4.1.14a and 4.1.14b show both the disaggregated and aggregated data.

Condition	M1 (%)	M2 (%)	F1 (%)	F2 (%)	NB1 (%)	NB2 (%)
<i>Nonbinary singular 1</i>	6.25	2.50	17.50	35.00	27.50	11.25
<i>Nonbinary singular 2</i>	20.00	3.75	26.25	16.25	26.25	6.25

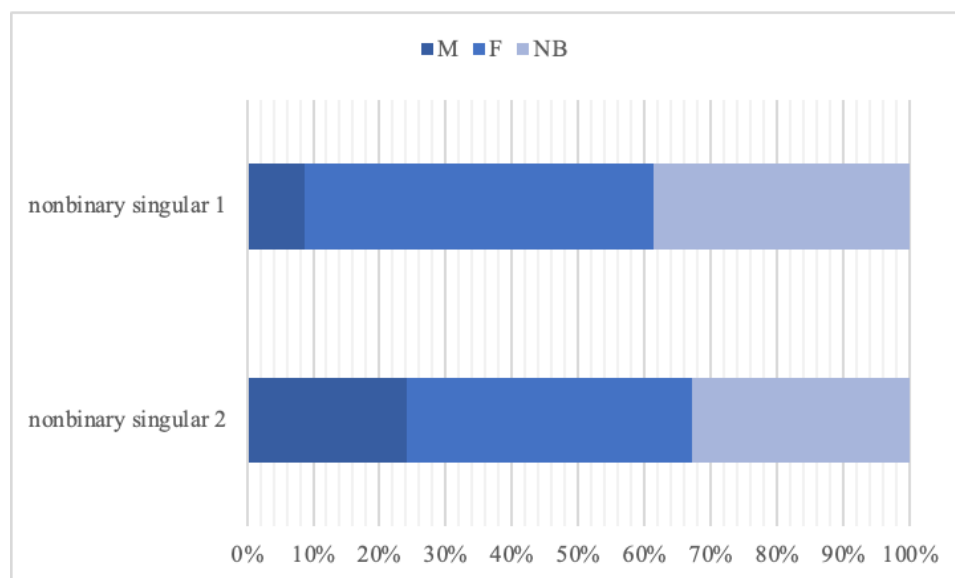
Table 4.1.14a - Frequency (%) of occurrence of each of the three genders (masculine, feminine, nonbinary) in the nonbinary singular condition *l̥a candidat̥a* ‘the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG’. Two separate percentages are reported for each gender, referring to the first and second images appearing in the six-image array. It should be noted that one participant’s response could not be retrieved for the second item.



Graph 4.1.14a - Visual distribution of the selected genders for nonbinary singular condition *l̥a candidat̥a* ‘the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG’ (response rates; disaggregate data).

Condition	M (%)	F (%)	NB (%)
Nonbinary singular 1	8.75	52.50	38.75
Nonbinary singular 2	23.75	42.50	32.50

Table 4.1.14b - Percentages of participants selecting each of the three genders (masculine, feminine, nonbinary) in the case of the nonbinary singular condition *lǎ candidatǎ* ‘the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG’.

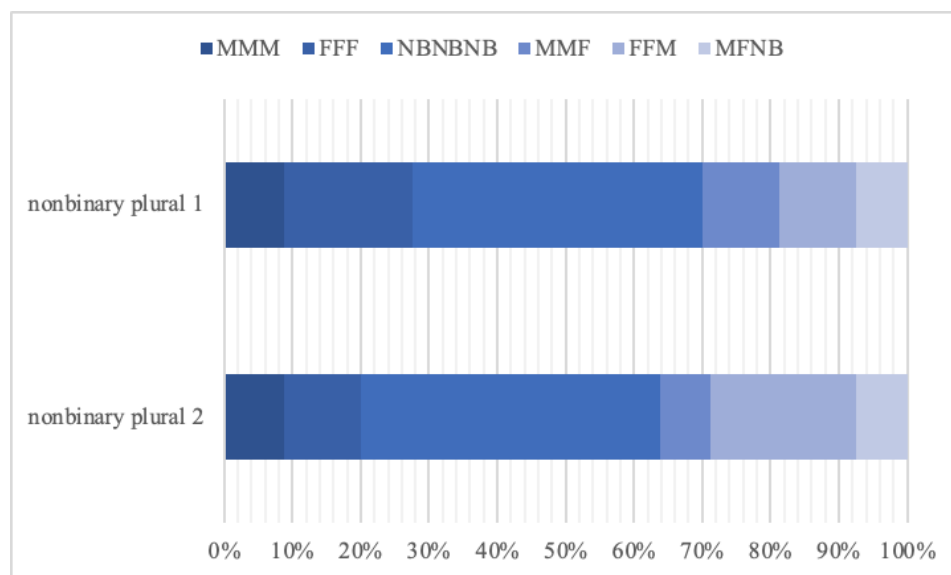


Graph 4.1.14b - Response rates of the selected genders for nonbinary singular condition *lǎ candidatǎ* ‘the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG’, aggregate data.

As to the nonbinary plural condition, it can be observed that the nonbinary-only group (i.e., the NBNBNB group) stands out for being the most frequently selected by participants. 42.5% of the participants in the first nonbinary plural item decided that *lǎ candidatǎ* ‘the.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL’ was used to refer to nonbinary people only; 43.75% of the participants behaved accordingly with the second item, as reported in Table 4.1.15. Crucially, mixed-gender groups (i.e., MMF, FFM, MFNB) present altogether low percentages of occurrence. More specifically, the gender-mixed group *par excellence* (i.e., MFNB) turned out to be the least selected of all in both nonbinary plural items, recording the lowest percentage of occurrence (i.e., 7.5%). Such a trend allows for the establishment of the exclusive use of the innovative suffix *-ǎ*, deployed by the majority of participants solely to refer to nonbinary groups.

Condition	MMM (%)	FFF (%)	NBNBNB (%)	MMF (%)	FFM (%)	MFNB (%)
Nonbinary plural 1	8.75	18.75	42.50	11.25	11.25	7.50
Nonbinary plural 2	8.75	11.25	43.75	7.50	21.25	7.50

Table 4.1.15 - Frequency (%) of occurrence of each of the six groups distinguished by their gender composition (MMM, FFF, NBNBNB, MMF, FFM, MFNB) in the case of the nonbinary plural condition *lā candidatā* ‘the.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL’.



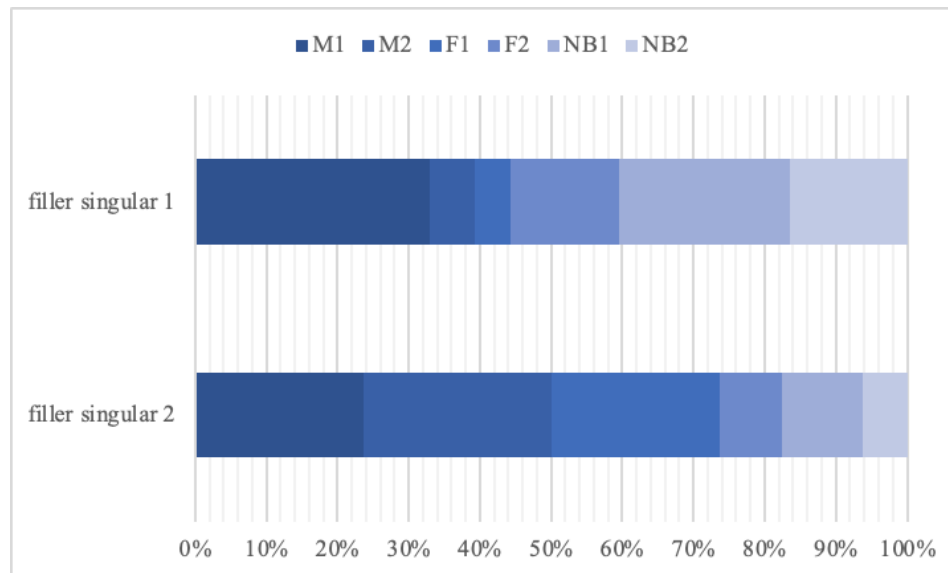
Graph 4.1.15 - Visual distribution of the selected gender-diverse groups for nonbinary plural condition *lā candidatā* ‘the.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL’ (response rates).

In the absence of grammatical gender cues, it becomes difficult to predict which gender – reflected in the appearance of the person depicted in the selected image – is to be picked by participants. Fillers were included in the study precisely to investigate which gender is favored in a condition that is deprived of any gender markers. Unsurprisingly, the results indeed seem to be pointing to two different directions: ‘non-binariness’ for the first filler, and maleness for the second. Despite the highest frequency of occurrence being detected at a male referent in both fillers (i.e., M1 for filler 1, M2 for filler 2) as illustrated in Table 4.1.16a, by looking at the aggregate data reported in Table 4.1.16b it turns out that the highest percentage of participants selected a nonbinary referent for the first filler (40%) and a male referent for the second filler (50%). It is necessary to specify, however, that the frequency of occurrence of the masculine and nonbinary gender in the first filler nearly coincide (i.e., 40% vs 38.75%). As a matter of fact, it was not possible to decode one participant’s response; hence, perhaps, we could have ended up

with the same exact percentage for both the masculine and nonbinary gender. It is thus safe to assume that in the absence of any marker of grammatical gender, participants resorted to the default value, being the masculine gender. Nonbinary and female referents nevertheless found a rather fair representation within fillers, since none is associated with significantly low percentages. Graphs 4.1.16a and 4.1.16b allow for the visualization of this distribution, by using both aggregate and disaggregate data.

Condition	M1 (%)	M2 (%)	F1 (%)	F2 (%)	NB1 (%)	NB2 (%)
<i>Filler singular 1</i>	32.50	6.25	5.00	15.00	23.75	16.25
<i>Filler singular 2</i>	23.75	26.25	23.75	8.75	11.25	6.25

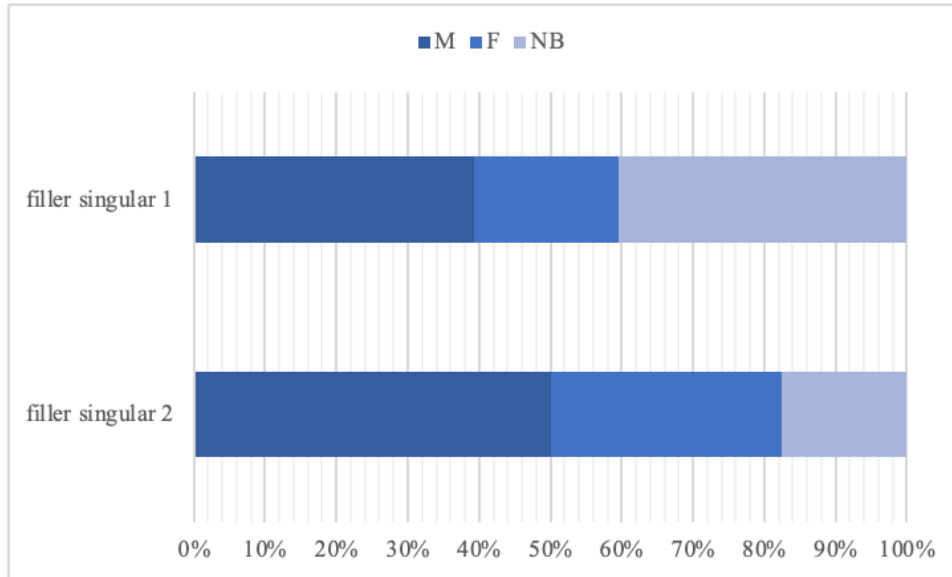
Table 4.1.16a - Frequency (%) of occurrence of each of the three genders (masculine, feminine, nonbinary) in the singular filler *l'aspirante tutor* 'the aspiring mentor'. Two separate percentages are reported for each gender, referring to the first and second images appearing in the six-image array. It should be noted that one participant's response could not be retrieved for the first filler.



Graph 4.1.16a - Visual distribution of the selected genders for singular filler *l'aspirante tutor* 'the aspiring mentor' (response rates; disaggregate data).

Condition	M (%)	F (%)	NB (%)
<i>Filler singular 1</i>	38.75	20.00	40.00
<i>Filler singular 2</i>	50.00	32.50	17.50

Table 4.1.16b - Percentages of participants selecting each of the three genders (masculine, feminine, nonbinary) in the case of the singular filler *l'aspirante tutor* 'the aspiring mentor'.

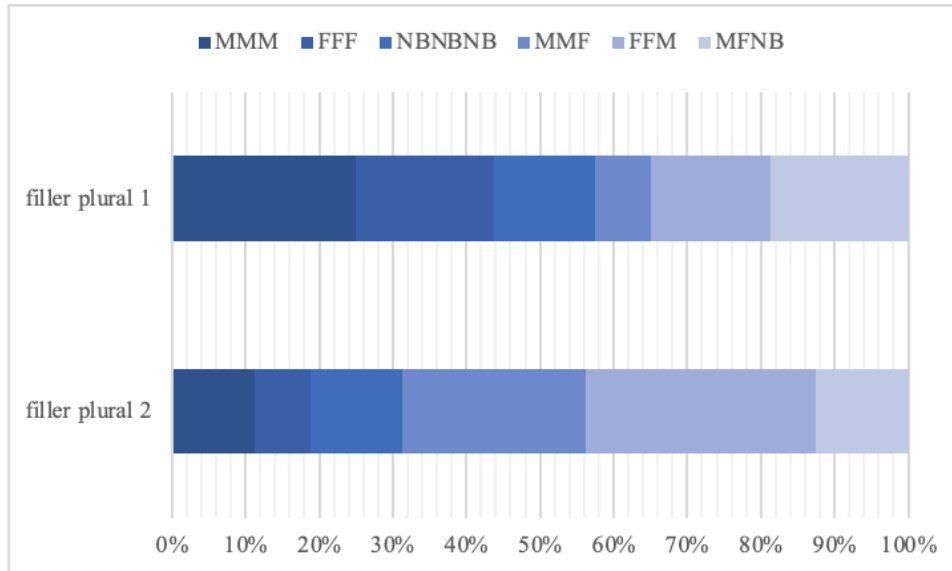


Graph 4.1.16b - Response rates of the selected genders for singular filler *l'aspirante tutor* 'the aspiring mentor', aggregate data.

The process of gender assignment through selection of the depicted referent seems to follow two different trajectories with plural fillers as well. Pure maleness prevails in the first filler, selected by 25% of the participants, whereas a mixed-gender group with a majority of female members (i.e., the FFM group) was picked by 31.25% of the participants in the second filler (see Table 4.1.17 and Graph 4.1.17 for further details). The responses obtained in the first filler thus seem to confirm the tendency to interpret as male referents candidates described without mentioning any gender information. Such an interpretation mirrors the one triggered by singular fillers.

Condition	MMM (%)	FFF (%)	NBNBNB (%)	MMF (%)	FFM (%)	MFNB (%)
<i>Filler plural 1</i>	25.00	18.75	13.75	7.50	16.25	18.75
<i>Filler plural 2</i>	11.25	7.50	12.50	25.00	31.25	12.50

Table 4.1.17 - Frequency (%) of occurrence of each of the six groups distinguished by their gender composition (MMM, FFF, NBNBNB, MMF, FFM, MFNB) in the case of the plural filler *i membri del gruppo di ricerca* 'members of the research team'.



Graph 4.1.17 - Visual distribution of the selected gender-diverse groups for plural filler *i membri del gruppo di ricerca* ‘members of the research team’ (response rates).

4.1.3.1 Qualitative Analysis of the Distractors

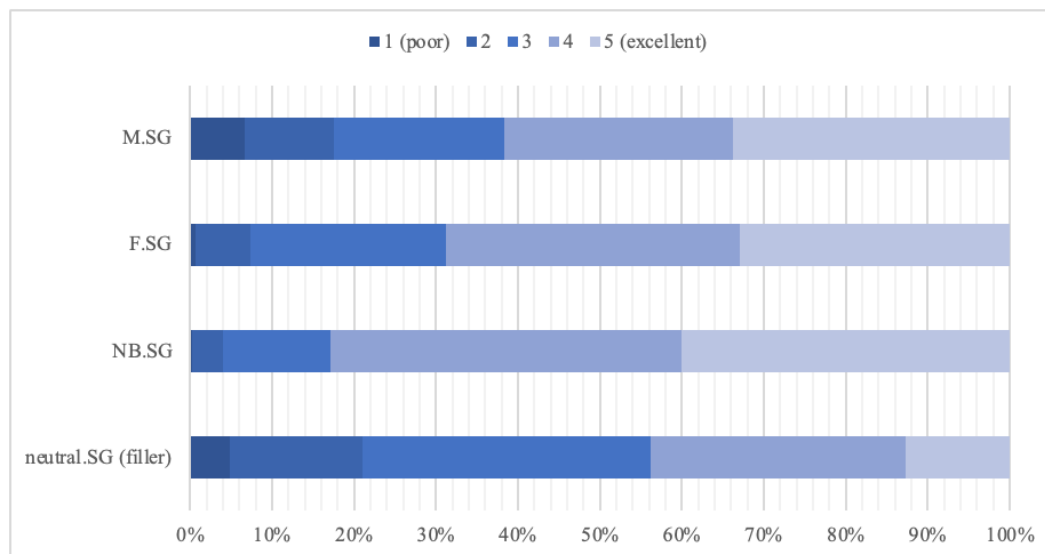
As mentioned in Section 3.3.5, participants were asked to rate candidates’ academic profiles on a 5-point Likert scale according to three different parameters. With respect to the singular-condition task, they were to rate (a) the candidate’s academic preparation, (b) their prior experience and (c) their suitability for the role. For the plural-condition task, participants rated (d) the relevance of the project proposal, (e) its originality and social impact and (f) the scientific profile of the research team. This brief evaluation procedure was exclusively designed to act as a distractor. Despite not being the primary focus of our research, we nonetheless decided to include these ratings in our analysis given that they can yield interesting insights as to whether different judgments were expressed with reference to a male, female or nonbinary referent, in order to shed light on any possible gender stereotypes, since the effect of gender stereotypes in linguistic tasks has already been observed (Irmén & Roßberg, 2004; Oakhill et al., 2005; Misersky et al., 2014; Gyga et al., 2021).

We calculated the relative number (%) of participants based on the ratings they assigned to each candidate, depending on the gender condition, i.e., feminine, masculine, nonbinary or neutral. The calculation thus refers to the three questions examined altogether, not individually. Since each condition consists of two items, the ratings assigned to the individual items were also

assessed jointly. Table 4.1.18 shows the percentages for the singular-condition task. The corresponding visual representation is found in Graph 4.1.18.

Conditions	1 - poor (%)	2 - below average (%)	3 - average (%)	4 - above average (%)	5 - excellent (%)
<i>M.SG</i>	6.67	10.83	20.83	27.92	33.75
<i>F.SG</i>	0.62	6.67	23.96	35.83	32.92
<i>NB.SG</i>	0.21	3.75	13.12	42.92	40.00
<i>neutral.SG (filler)</i>	4.80	16.25	35.21	31.04	12.71

Table 4.1.18 - Percentages of participants based on the assigned ratings across conditions in the singular-condition task.



Graph 4.1.18 - Visual distribution of the assigned ratings across conditions in the singular-condition task.

Overall, in all three gender-marked conditions, most participants rated the various profiles by describing them as at least above average. The majority of participants rated as excellent the profile of the male candidate (33.75%). 35.83% of the participants rated as above average the profile of the female candidate. 42.92% of the participants rated as above average the profile of the nonbinary candidate. Interestingly, the highest percentages of participants rating the academic profile as above average or excellent are observed precisely in the nonbinary condition. Conversely, the neutral condition was rated by the majority of participants only as average (35.21%). Yet, the neutral condition was matched with a male referent by most participants, as we are reminded of by Table 4.1.19. Thus, in line with how the referent is interpreted (i.e., male),

we would therefore expect to find similarly high ratings in the cases of fillers. However, this does not occur.

The fact that the nonbinary condition was matched with a female referent by most participants and that received the highest ratings, on the other hand, indirectly confirms this positive correlation between the female presence and the academic path, attesting, that in the participants' view, the female candidate definitely fits well in the description of the Italian academic scenario.

Conditions	M (%)	F (%)	NB (%)
<i>Masculine singular 1</i>	80.00	6.25	13.75
<i>Masculine singular 2</i>	68.75	12.50	18.75
<i>Nonbinary singular 1</i>	8.75	52.50	38.75
<i>Nonbinary singular 2</i>	23.75	42.50	32.50
<i>Filler singular 1</i>	38.75	20.00	40.00
<i>Filler singular 2</i>	50.00	32.50	17.50

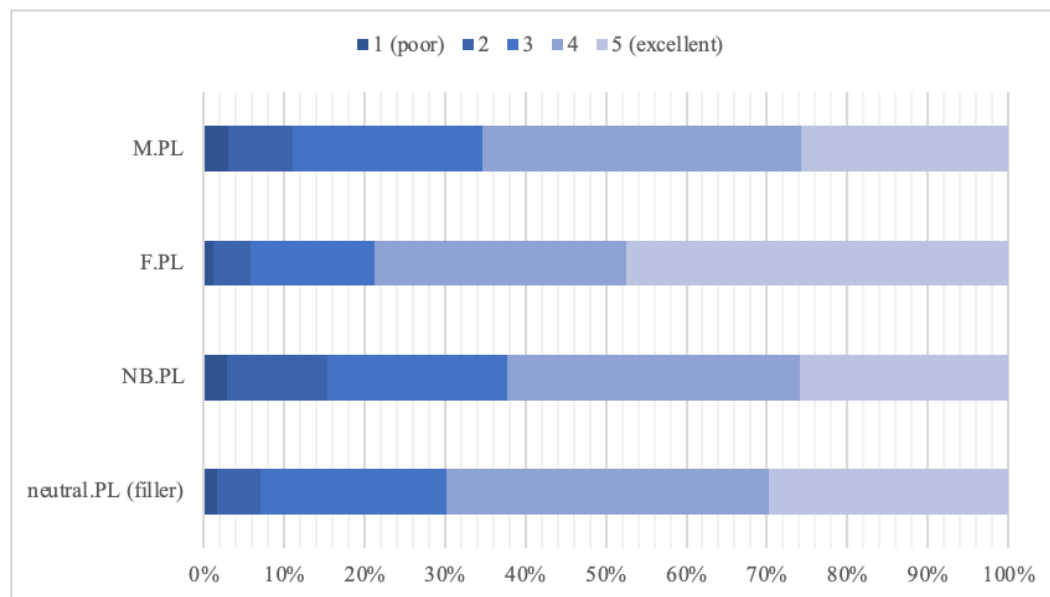
Table 4.1.19 - Percentages of participants selecting each of the three genders (masculine, feminine, nonbinary) across the masculine, nonbinary and neutral conditions.

In the plural-condition task, all conditions received ratings as above average by most participants. The percentages are listed in Table 4.1.20 and visually displayed in Graph 4.1.20.

Particularly, the research team matched with the feminine plural conditions was rated as excellent by the great majority of participants (47.50%), demonstrating once again that the presence of women in Italian universities is appreciated and promoted. The only-male group combined with the masculine plural condition was rated as above average by almost 40% of the participants. In contrast to the singular-condition task, as shown in Table 4.1.21, the majority of participants selected a nonbinary-only group to represent the nonbinary plural condition, which was rated by most participants as above average (36.66%). A male-only group and a mixed group of two female and one male members were matched by the majority of participants with the neutral condition, whose profile was rated by 40% of the participants as above average.

Conditions	1 - poor (%)	2 - below average (%)	3 - average (%)	4 - above average (%)	5 - excellent (%)
<i>M.PL</i>	3.12	8.12	23.75	39.95	26.04
<i>F.PL</i>	1.25	4.58	15.42	31.25	47.50
<i>NB.PL</i>	2.91	12.50	22.50	36.66	26.04
<i>neutral.PL (filler)</i>	1.67	5.42	23.12	40.00	29.79

Table 4.1.20 - Percentages of participants based on the assigned ratings across conditions in the plural-condition task.



Graph 4.1.20 - Visual distribution of the assigned ratings across conditions in the plural-condition task.

For convenience, Table 4.1.21 summarizes the internal distribution of potentially-ambiguous plural conditions according to the selected groups.

Condition	MMM(%)	FFF (%)	NBNBNB(%)	MMF (%)	FFM (%)	MFNB (%)
<i>Masculine plural 1</i>	28.75	5.00	10.00	12.50	26.25	17.50
<i>Masculine plural 2</i>	38.75	6.25	11.25	11.25	18.75	12.50
<i>Nonbinary plural 1</i>	8.75	18.75	42.50	11.25	11.25	7.50
<i>Nonbinary plural 2</i>	8.75	11.25	43.75	7.50	21.25	7.50
<i>Filler plural 1</i>	25.00	18.75	13.75	7.50	16.25	18.75
<i>Filler plural 2</i>	11.25	7.50	12.50	25.00	31.25	12.50

Table 4.1.21 - Frequency (%) of occurrence of each of the six groups distinguished by their gender composition (MMM, FFF, NBNBNB, MMF, FFM, MFNB) in the case of the masculine, nonbinary and neutral condition.

Based on the assigned ratings, conditions therefore do not differ substantially from one another, revealing no particular gender stereotype. The only outstanding, consistent positive trend was found in the association of feminine referents with an above-average profile, emerging also from nonbinary conditions.

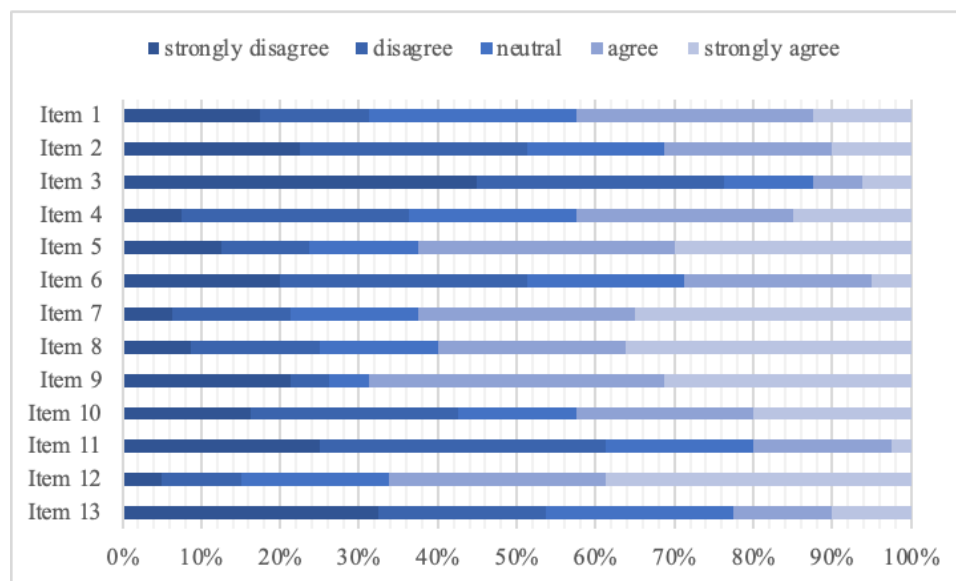
4.2 Results of the SILUI

For every item composing the first section of the SILUI (i.e., *Convinzioni personali sull'uso sessista della lingua italiana* 'Beliefs About the Sexist Use of the Italian Language' in § 3.3.3.1), only the response selected by the great majority of participants will be commented on. All lower percentages are, however, available in Table 4.2.1, which provides a precise division of the sample based on the level of agreement with the item expressed. The distribution of the percentages of participants based on their judgments are then visually presented in Graph 4.2.1.

Item	Corresponding full statement	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
Item 1	Giorgia Meloni goes by "Mr President". That is to be considered a sexist choice.	17.50	13.75	26.25	30.00	12.50
Item 2	We should not change the way the Italian language has traditionally been written and spoken.	22.50	28.75	17.50	21.25	10.00
Item 3	Inclusive language is a trivial matter.	45.00	31.25	11.25	6.25	6.25
Item 4	The masculine plural is not really inclusive, still we should continue to use it to refer to mixed groups of people (e.g., males, females, and nonbinary people) because it is more immediate.	7.50	28.75	21.25	27.50	15.00
Item 5	When a person does not identify with the binary distinction of gender, it is only fair that we refer to that person with <i>ə</i> : e.g., studentə.	12.50	11.25	13.75	32.50	30.00
Item 6	The Italian language will never be changed because it is too deeply ingrained in the culture.	20.00	31.25	20.00	23.75	5.00

Item 7	The elimination of the sexist use of the Italian language is an important goal.	6.25	15.00	16.25	27.50	35.00
Item 8	Most publication guidelines require newspaper writers to avoid using ethnic and racial slurs. So, these guidelines should also require writers to avoid the sexist use of language.	8.75	16.25	15.00	23.75	36.25
Item 9	The sexist use of the Italian language is related to sexist treatment of people in the Italian society.	21.25	5.00	5.00	37.50	31.25
Item 10	If there are males, females, and non-binary people in a group of people, it is appropriate to refer to them with ø: e.g., not the.M.PL students.M.PL but lø.NB.PL studentø.NB.PL.	16.25	26.25	15.00	22.50	20.00
Item 11	Teachers who require students to use Italian nonsexist language are unfairly forcing their political views upon their students.	25.00	36.25	18.75	17.50	2.50
Item 12	Although change is difficult, we still should try to eliminate the sexist use of the Italian language.	5.00	10.00	18.75	27.50	38.75
Item 13	It is only fair that "mother" and "father" remain on children's ID cards blowing up the neutral qualifiers "parent 1" and "parent 2".	32.50	21.25	23.75	12.50	10.00

Table 4.2.1 - Percentages of participants expressing their assent/dissent to each statement, divided by the level of agreement indicated (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree).



Graph 4.2.1 - Proportions of the percentages of participants agreeing or disagreeing with each statement. Five different levels of agreement are distinguished.

30% of the participants agreed with the first statement (cf. Item 1 (3.9) in § 3.3.3.1) that reads as follows: *Il fatto che Giorgia Meloni si faccia chiamare “il signor presidente” è da considerarsi una scelta sessista*. ‘Giorgia Meloni goes by “Mr President”. That is to be considered a sexist choice’. The choice of having the epicene term preceded by a determiner declined in the masculine – responsible for a gender disambiguation – is seen as a sexist behavior.

28.75% of the participants disagreed with the second statement according to which *Non dovremmo cambiare il modo in cui la lingua italiana è stata tradizionalmente scritta e parlata*. ‘We should not change the way the Italian language has traditionally been written and spoken’ (cf. Item 2 (3.1) in § 3.3.3.1), thus advocating for a change at the level of language, irrespective of how rooted these practices might all be.

45% of the participants strongly disagreed with considering inclusive language a trivial matter (see Item 3 (3.2) in § 3.3.3.1). This item (i.e., *Il linguaggio inclusivo è una questione di poco conto*. ‘Inclusive language is a trivial matter’) thus gives us an approximate size of the sample that recognizes full dignity to the topic at hand.

Choosing to look at the aggregate data instead of the disaggregate data can sometimes lead to opposite conclusions. That is the case with the percentages recorded for the following statement (cf. Item 4 (3.10) in § 3.3.3.1): *Il maschile plurale non è davvero inclusivo, ma dovremmo comunque continuare a usarlo per riferirci a gruppi misti di persone (es. maschi, femmine e persone non binary) perché risulta più immediato*. ‘The masculine plural is not really inclusive, still we should continue to use it to refer to mixed groups of people (e.g., males, females, and nonbinary people) because it is more immediate’. In admitting that the percentages listed are quite similar, what the disaggregate data shows is that 28.75% of the participants are against using the masculine plural to refer to mixed groups of people, as opposed to 27.5% of the participants being in favor of such an employment. One comes to a different conclusion, however, by taking into consideration the data in its aggregate form, as to say, by adding up the percentage of participants who claimed to disagree with the percentage of those who strongly disagreed. Same procedure applies to the groups in favor. It turns out that only 36.25% of the participants expressed their dissent to this statement, whereas 42.5% indicated their assent. The totality of participants rejecting this use is therefore less than the totality of participants willing

to accept it, for the sake of an ease and instantaneousness that would guarantee a rather effective communication, hence justifying its use. It should be noted that whenever disaggregate data are taken into account, with aggregate data being ignored, it means that the data in both forms lead to the same conclusion.

32.5% of the participants agreed that it is only fair to refer to a person who does not identify with the binary distinction of gender with *-ə* (e.g., *studentə*), as illustrated in the statement: *Se una persona non si identifica nella distinzione binaria del genere è giusto che ci si riferisca a quella persona con ə: per es. studentə*. ‘When a person does not identify with the binary distinction of gender, it is only fair that we refer to that person with *ə*: e.g., *studentə*’ (see Item 5 (3.11) in § 3.3.3.1). Therefore, the majority of participants seemed to welcome the use of the innovative *-ə* suffix serving as the singular exclusive representation of the nonbinary population.

31.25% of the participants disagreed with the statement that reads *La lingua italiana non verrà mai cambiata perché è troppo radicata nella cultura*. ‘The Italian language will never be changed because it is too deeply ingrained in the culture’ (cf. Item 6 (3.3) in § 3.3.3.1). Once again, the majority promotes change, regardless of cultural conservatism.

Absolutely in line with the content of the third item, the seventh statement stresses the importance of achieving the elimination of the sexist use of the Italian language, as it reads *L’eliminazione dell’uso sessista della lingua italiana è un obiettivo importante*. ‘The elimination of the sexist use of the Italian language is an important goal’ (see Item 7 (3.4) in § 3.3.3.1). 35% of the participants strongly agreed by acknowledging its relevance.

36.25% of the participants strongly agreed with the necessity that the phenomenon of the sexist use of language must be controlled for in drafting specific editorial guidelines, by approving the following: *Dal momento che le norme editoriali impongono agli autori di articoli di giornale di evitare l’uso di insulti di carattere etnico-razziale dovrebbero imporre un divieto anche sull’uso sessista della lingua*. ‘Most publication guidelines require newspaper writers to avoid using ethnic and racial slurs. So, these guidelines should also require writers to avoid the sexist use of language’ (see Item 8 (3.5) in § 3.3.3.1).

37.5% of the participants are aware of a strong interdependence existing between the way people are treated in Italian society and the sexist use of the Italian language, in agreeing with the statement positing that *L’uso sessista della lingua italiana ha a che fare con il trattamento*

sessista delle persone nella società italiana. ‘The sexist use of the Italian language is related to sexist treatment of people in the Italian society’ (see Item 9 (3.6) in § 3.3.3.1).

A symmetric usage, yet with a broader, inclusive meaning, associated with the innovative -ə suffix appears to be rejected by the 26.25% of the participants, who disagreed with the statement according to which *Se in un gruppo di persone ci sono maschi, femmine e persone non binary, è giusto che ci si riferisca a loro con ə: per es. non gli studenti ma lə studentə*. ‘If there are males, females, and non-binary people in a group of people, it is appropriate to refer to them with ə: e.g., not the.M.PL students.M.PL but lə.NB.PL studentə.NB.PL’ (cf. Item 10 (3.12) in § 3.3.3.1). As in the case outlined earlier, however, if we look at the aggregate data a different outcome is determined. In adding up the percentages of participants who expressed their dissent and comparing it with the sum of the percentages of participants expressing their assent, we reach the same exact percentage, amounting to 42.5%. Therefore, this time it is not possible to determine a disparity. Based on these results, the inclusive plural ending -ə was neither rejected nor approved by our sample of participants.

36.25% of the participants disagreed with the idea that *Tutti quei professori che pretendono che i loro studenti evitino un uso sessista della lingua italiana non fanno altro che imporre le loro idee politiche sulla classe*. ‘Teachers who require students to use Italian nonsexist language are unfairly forcing their political views upon their students’ (cf. Item 11 (3.7) in § 3.3.3.1). Hence, the majority of participants believe that in the educational context banning sexism in language is not the same as imposing a political view.

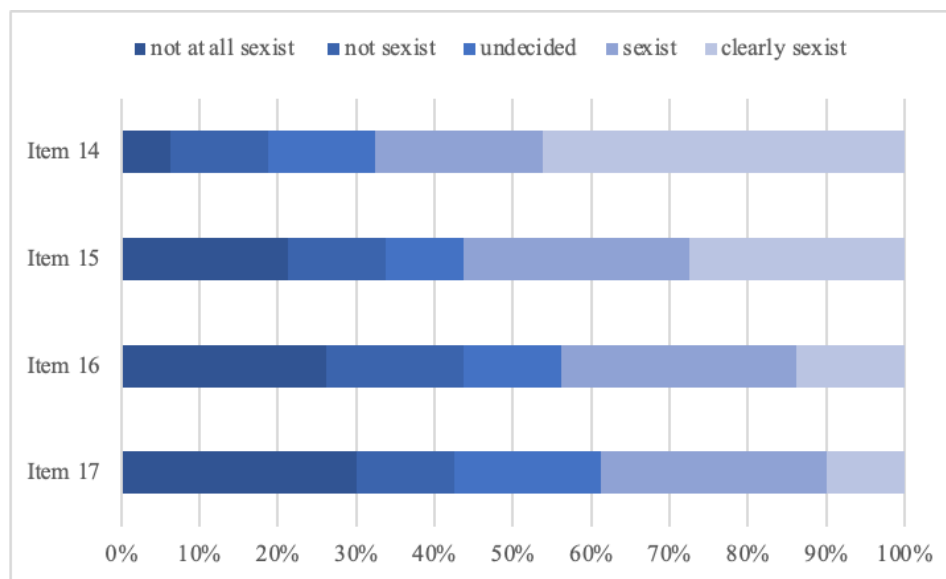
38.75% of the participants confirmed, once again, by strongly agreeing with the need to eliminate the sexist use of the Italian language, no matter the difficulties, the urgency of action to implement change, by accepting that *Anche se il cambiamento è difficile, dovremmo comunque cercare di eliminare l’uso sessista della lingua italiana*. ‘Although change is difficult, we still should try to eliminate the sexist use of the Italian language’ (see Item 12 (3.8) in § 3.3.3.1).

To conclude, 32.5% of the participants strongly disagreed with the following statement: *E’ giusto che sulla carta d’identità dei minori restino le diciture “madre” e “padre” e saltino le qualifiche neutre “genitore 1” e “genitore 2”*. ‘It is only fair that "mother" and "father" remain on children's ID cards blowing up the neutral qualifiers "parent 1" and "parent 2"’ (cf. Item 13 (3.13) in § 3.3.3.1). The high percentages of those in favor of replacing the traditional, long-established roles with these novel, neutral qualifiers are quite impressive.

The second section (i.e., *Riconoscere la lingua sessista* ‘Recognition of Sexist Language’) draws from four “designation errors” (APA, 1983) that are brought to the attention of participants who are instructed to pass their judgments by expressing the degree of sexism found in each error. As for the previous section, only the judgment made by the majority of participants will be taken into account. For each of the four items that make up this section, however, all percentages are listed in Table 4.2.2, with their distribution being represented in Graph 4.2.2.

Item	Corresponding full statement	Not at all sexist (%)	Not sexist (%)	Undecided (%)	Sexist (%)	Clearly sexist (%)
Item 14	Marta is a trans woman <u>born.M.SG</u> in 1986.	6.25	12.50	13.75	21.25	46.25
Item 15	Lucia does not identify with the binary distinction of gender. Lucia was <u>raised.F.SG</u> in Modena.	21.25	12.50	10.00	28.75	27.50
Item 16	Serena passed the bar exam. Serena is now <u>an.M.SG</u> attorney.M.SG.	26.25	17.50	12.50	30.00	13.75
Item 17	Elementary school <u>teachers.F.PL</u> tend to give so much space to recreational activities.	30.00	12.50	18.75	28.75	10.00

Table 4.2.2 - Percentages of participants assessing sexism in each statement, divided by the level of sexism found (not at all sexist, not sexist, undecided, sexist, clearly sexist).



Graph 4.2.2 - Proportions of the percentages of participants assessing the level of sexism in each statement. Five different levels of sexism are distinguished.

46.25% of the participants were able to identify the incorrect gender selection in *Marta è una donna transgender. E' nato nel 1986*. 'Marta is a trans woman born.M.SG in 1986' by declaring that this instance is clearly sexist (cf. Item 14 (3.14) in § 3.3.3.1).

28.75% of the participants also found it sexist to assign a binary gender marker – presumably justified by the presence of the feminine given name (i.e., *Lucia*) – to a person who has said explicitly that does not identify with the binary distinction of gender, as it is displayed in *Lucia non si identifica nella distinzione binaria del genere. Lucia è cresciuta a Modena*. 'Lucia does not identify with the binary distinction of gender. Lucia was raised.F.SG in Modena' (see Item 15 (3.15) in § 3.3.3.1).

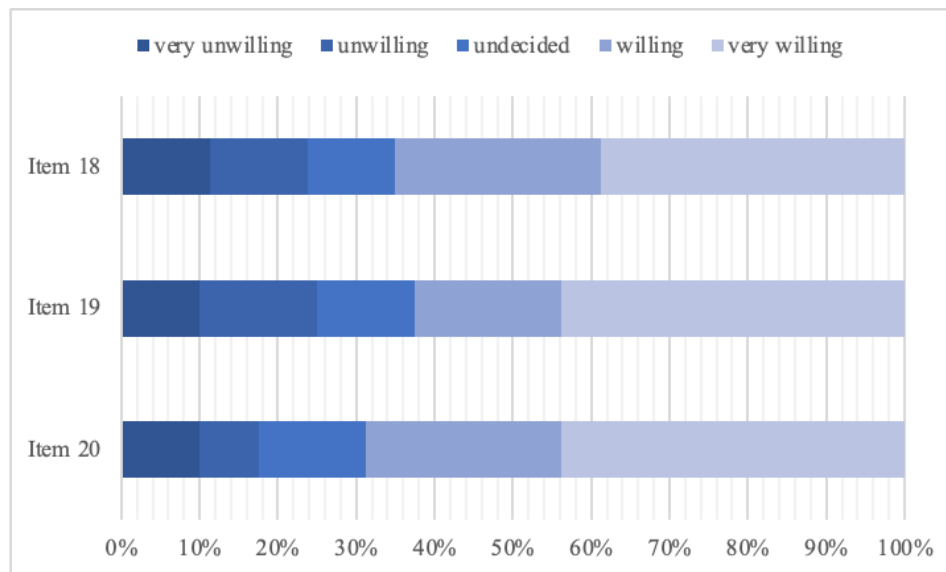
From a first glance at the table above, it may seem that the majority of participants (30%) deemed sexist the following statement: *Serena ha superato con successo l'abilitazione all'avvocatura. Adesso Serena è un avvocato*. 'Serena passed the bar exam. Serena is now an attorney.M.SG' (cf. Item 16 (3.16) in § 3.3.3.1). There is indeed inconsistency in a masculine term designating an occupation being assigned to a feminine referent. Looking at the aggregate data, however, it turns out that the totality of participants who considered this item sexist equals the totality of those who claimed that it is not sexist (43.75%). Therefore, this is an instance where a real disparity cannot be determined. No clear preference emerges from the sample's responses.

30% of the participants argued that the statement according to which *Le maestre delle scuole elementari tendono a dare tanto spazio alle attività ludiche*. 'Elementary school teachers.F.PL tend to give so much space to recreational activities' is not at all sexist (cf. Item 17 (3.17) in § 3.3.3.1). It is safe to assume that, because female primary school teachers outnumber male teachers in Italy, this is understood by participants as a harmless generalization that does not suggest the overshadowing of a male minority. Our exposure to "the feminine generic" (Pires, 2020: 119) is rather rare, so much so that we do not even notice it.

The third section (i.e., *Apertura all'uso del linguaggio inclusivo* 'Willingness to Use Inclusive Language') measures participants' intention to accommodate three different uses of the innovative *-ə* suffix. A clear-cut disparity can be traced in all three items, as can be grasped by the high percentages reported in Table 4.2.3, as well as vividly shown in Graph 4.2.3.

Item	Corresponding full statement	Very unwilling (%)	Unwilling (%)	Undecided (%)	Willing (%)	Very willing (%)
Item 18	How willing are you to start an email with <i>cari studenti</i> 'dear.M.PL students.M.PL', <i>care studentesse</i> 'dear.F.PL students.F.PL' and <i>carə studentə</i> 'dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL' knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender?	11.25	12.50	11.25	26.25	38.75
Item 19	How willing are you to start an email with <i>carə studentə</i> 'dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL' knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender?	10.00	15.00	12.50	18.75	43.75
Item 20	How willing are you to use the term <i>candidatə</i> 'candidate.NB.SG' instead of <i>candidato</i> 'candidate.M.SG' when the referent does not identify with the binary distinction of gender?	10.00	7.50	13.75	25.00	43.75

Table 4.2.3 - Percentages of participants expressing their willingness/unwillingness to welcome the behavior described in each statement, divided by the level of willingness indicated (very unwilling, unwilling, undecided, willing, very willing).



Graph 4.2.3 - Proportions of the percentages of participants expressing their willingness/unwillingness to welcome the behavior described in each statement. Five different levels of willingness are distinguished.

38.75% of the participants claimed to be very willing to adopt the *-ə* suffix to represent an exclusive-nonbinary plurality in a sequence that makes sure to overtly mention all three gender categories, as in the case of the opening of an email with *cari studenti, care studentesse e carə studentə* ‘dear.M.PL students.M.PL, dear.F.PL students.F.PL and dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL’ (see Item 18 (3.18) in § 3.3.3.1).

Once having established that the plural exclusive nonbinary ending seems to have been approved, the predisposition to eventually introduce a single, short form to represent a male, female and nonbinary composition was subsequently tested. 43.75% of the participants stated that they are very willing to start an email with *carə studentə* ‘dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL’ knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender (cf. Item 19 (3.19) in § 3.3.3.1). This proves that a plural inclusive usage of the *-ə* suffix is expected to be equally welcomed.

Along the same lines, 43.75% of the participants expressed their utmost willingness to use the singular exclusive nonbinary ending to refer to a person who does not identity with the binary distinction of gender by replacing the term *candidato* ‘candidate.M.SG’ with *candidatə* ‘candidate.NB.SG’ (see Item 20 (3.20) in § 3.3.3.1).

The table below summarizes the mean scores obtained that allow us to determine the type of attitude of our sample of participants with respect to inclusive language, by implementing the scoring system borrowed from Parks and Robertson (2000) described in § 3.3.3.1. The list of the reverse-scored items is reported here again for convenience: 2 (3.1), 3 (3.2), 4 (3.10), 6 (3.3), 11 (3.7) and 13 (3.13). The latter are indicated in blue in Table 4.2.4.

Item	Corresponding full statement	Average level of willingness indicated	Scores on the 5-point Likert scale
Item 1	Giorgia Meloni goes by “Mr President”. That is to be considered a sexist choice.	Agreement	4
Item 2	We should not change the way the Italian language has traditionally been written and spoken.	Disagreement	2
Item 3	Inclusive language is a trivial matter.	Disagreement	2
Item 4	The masculine plural is not really inclusive, still we should continue to use it to refer to mixed groups of people (e.g., males, females, and nonbinary people) because it is more immediate.	Disagreement/Agreement	2/4
Item 5	When a person does not identify with the binary distinction of gender, it is only fair that we refer to that person with ø: e.g., studentø.	Agreement	4
Item 6	The Italian language will never be changed because it is too deeply ingrained in the culture.	Disagreement	2
Item 7	The elimination of the sexist use of the Italian language is an important goal.	Strong agreement	5
Item 8	Most publication guidelines require newspaper writers to avoid using ethnic and racial slurs. So, these guidelines should also require writers to avoid the sexist use of language.	Strong agreement	5
Item 9	The sexist use of the Italian language is related to sexist treatment of people in the Italian society.	Agreement	4
Item 10	If there are males, females, and non-binary people in a group of people, it is appropriate to refer to them with ø: e.g., not the.M.PL students.M.PL but lø.NB.PL studentø.NB.PL.	Disagreement	2
Item 11	Teachers who require students to use Italian nonsexist language are unfairly forcing their political views upon their students.	Disagreement	2
Item 12	Although change is difficult, we still should try to eliminate the sexist use of the Italian language.	Strong agreement	5
Item 13	It is only fair that "mother" and "father" remain on children's ID cards blowing up the neutral qualifiers "parent 1" and "parent 2".	Strong disagreement	1

Item 14	Marta is a trans woman <u>born.M.SG</u> in 1986.	Clear sexism	5
Item 15	Lucia does not identify with the binary distinction of gender. Lucia was <u>raised.F.SG</u> in Modena.	Sexism	4
Item 16	Serena passed the bar exam. Serena is now <u>an.M.SG attorney.M.SG</u> .	Sexism / No sexism	4/2
Item 17	Elementary school <u>teachers.F.PL</u> tend to give so much space to recreational activities.	No sexism at all	1
Item 18	How willing are you to start an email with <i>cari studenti</i> ‘dear.M.PL students.M.PL’, <i>care studentesse</i> ‘dear.F.PL students.F.PL’ and <i>carə studentə</i> ‘dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL’ knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender?	Utmost willingness	5
Item 19	How willing are you to start an email with <i>carə studentə</i> ‘dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL’ knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender?	Utmost willingness	5
Item 20	How willing are you to use the term <i>candidatə</i> ‘candidate.NB.SG’ instead of <i>candidato</i> ‘candidate.M.SG’ when the referent does not identify with the binary distinction of gender?	Utmost willingness	5

Table 4.2.4 - The average score is reported for each of the items that makes up the SILUI questionnaire, together with the level of willingness that derives.

Overall, the predominance of high scores (4–5), together with the six items that are reverse-scored for which very low scores are indeed reported, makes us conclude that we are dealing with a sample of participants whose attitude is positive toward inclusive language. It should be noted that the responses obtained for the fourth item (i.e., *Il maschile plurale non è davvero inclusivo, ma dovremmo comunque continuare a usarlo per riferirci a gruppi misti di persone (es. maschi, femmine e persone non binary) perché risulta più immediato*. ‘The masculine plural is not really inclusive, still we should continue to use it to refer to mixed groups of people (e.g., males, females, and nonbinary people) because it is more immediate’) lead to a different conclusion depending on whether one looks at the aggregate or disaggregate data; whereas, in the case of the sixteenth item (i.e., *Serena ha superato con successo l’abilitazione all’avvocatura. Adesso Serena è un avvocato*. ‘Serena passed the bar exam. ‘Serena is now an.M.SG attorney.M.SG’), a tie is established, which makes it impossible to determine which of

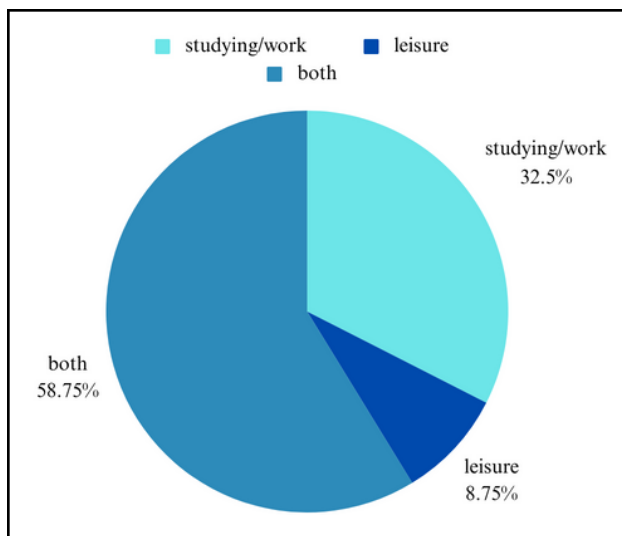
the two positions prevails. The only two responses that actually countertrend the positive attitude outlined happen to be the ones recorded at Item 10 and Item 17 (i.e., *Se in un gruppo di persone ci sono maschi, femmine e persone non binary, è giusto che ci si riferisca a loro con a: per es. non gli studenti ma la studenta*. ‘If there are males, females, and non-binary people in a group of people, it is appropriate to refer to them with a: e.g., not the.M.PL students.M.PL but la.NB.PL studenta.NB.PL’; *Le maestre delle scuole elementari tendono a dare tanto spazio alle attività ludiche*. ‘Elementary school teachers.F.PL tend to give so much space to recreational activities’). The latter could be explained by a low-level exposure to the phenomenon of the generic feminine, as previously posited. The former, however, proves difficult to explain as the same strategy is instead welcomed in Item 19 (i.e., *Quanto saresti disponibile a iniziare una mail con: cara studenta se sai che tra i destinatari sono presenti maschi, femmine e persone che non si identificano nella distinzione binaria del genere?* ‘How willing are you to start an email with *cara studenta* ‘dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL’ knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender?’), thus showing the opposite response.

4.3 Results of the Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits

The first part of the questionnaire – as anticipated in § 3.3.4 – explores reading habits by opening precisely with the question regarding the reasons for reading (see Item 1 (3.21)). It was found that 32.5% of the participants only read for studying and working purposes. 8.75% of the participants declared to read for leisure, in their free time. Both options were selected by 58.75% of the participants (see Graph 4.3.1).

<i>Studying/work</i>	32.50%
<i>Leisure</i>	8.75%
<i>Both</i>	58.75%

Table 4.3.1 - Percentages of participants based on their reasons for reading.

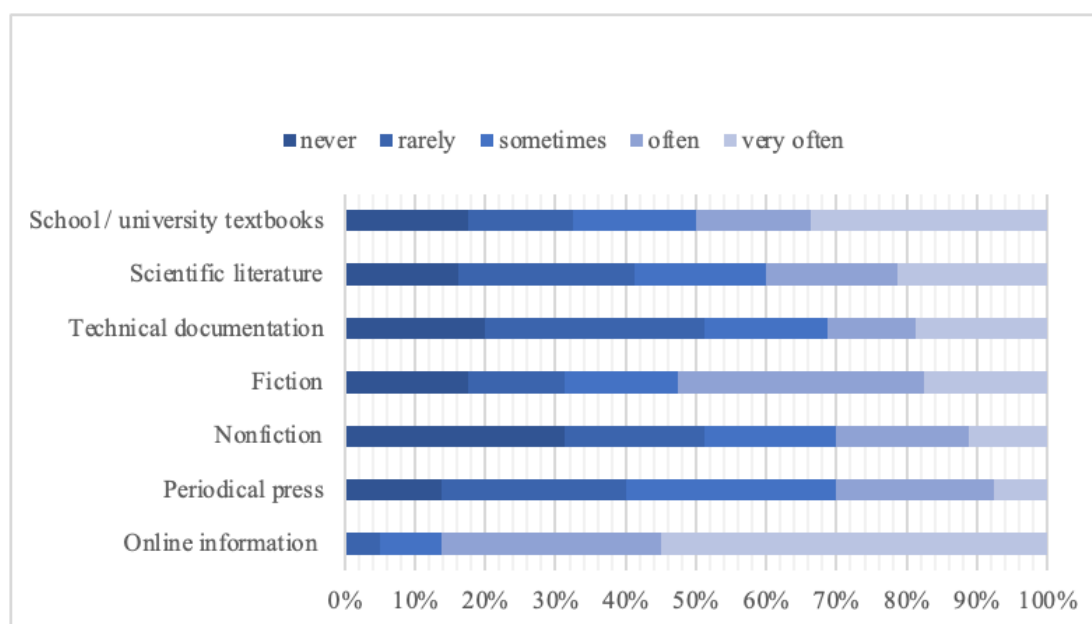


Graph 4.3.1 - *Why do you read?* Distribution of participants according to their reasons for reading (response rates).

Readers' familiarity with different text types was measured by means of reading frequency (cf. Item 2 (3.22) in § 3.3.4). What emerges from the second question is that 55% of the participants very often read online information. School and university textbooks are also read very often by 33.75% of the participants. Fiction is read often by 35% of the participants, as opposed to nonfiction, which is never read by the majority of participants (31.25%). Periodical press is sometimes read by the majority of participants (30%) whereas technical documentation is only rarely read by the majority of participants (31.25%). The same applies to scientific literature (25%). Therefore, it can be ruled out that familiarity with the format identified for the sentence-picture matching task (i.e., technical documentation) facilitated the processing of the text by partly obscuring the morphological innovation introduced. It is also specified that among the additional textual types reported by a few participants are collections of poems – with the specification of “often” as an indication of its reading frequency –, comics (very often), travel guides and books for work. All percentages are listed in the table below. Graph 4.3.2 provides a visual representation of the data.

Text type	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Very often (%)
<i>School/university textbooks</i>	17.50	15.00	17.50	16.25	33.75
<i>Scientific literature</i>	16.25	25.00	18.75	18.75	21.25
<i>Technical documentation</i>	20.00	31.25	17.50	12.50	18.75
<i>Fiction</i>	17.50	13.75	16.25	35.00	17.50
<i>Nonfiction</i>	31.25	20.00	18.75	18.75	11.25
<i>Periodical press</i>	13.75	26.25	30.00	22.50	7.50
<i>Online information</i>	0.00	5.00	8.75	31.25	55.00

Table 4.3.2 - Percentages of participants stating their reading frequency of different text types, divided into five levels (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often).



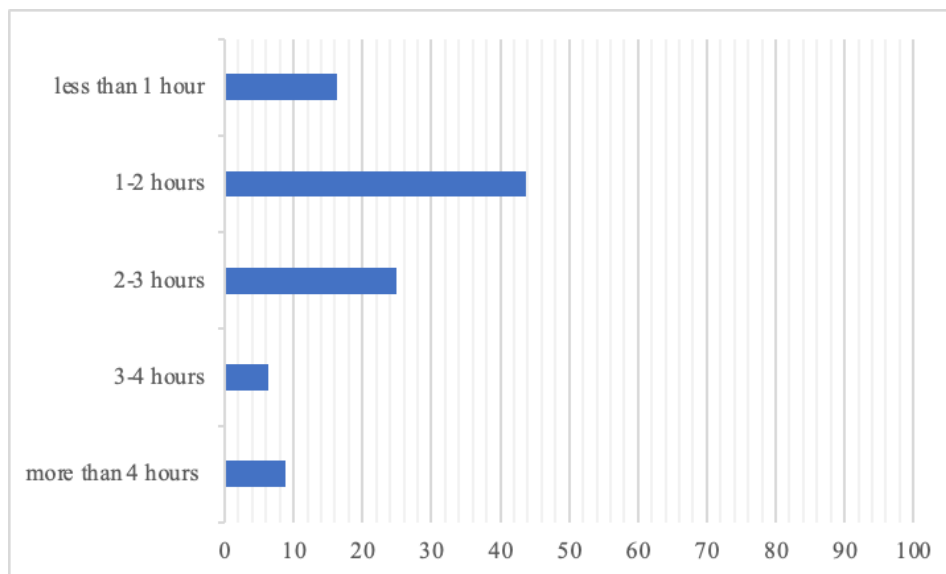
Graph 4.3.2 - How often do you read the following types of text? Distribution of participants according to the level of reading frequency attributed to each text type (response rates).

The approximate number of hours spent reading on average each day (including reading for study, work and pleasure) is the information obtained with the third question (see Item 3 (3.23) in § 3.3.4). Most participants read 1-2 hours per day (43.75%); 25% of the participants read from 2-3 hours while only 6.25% of the participants read 3-4 hours per day. Looking now at the two

poles, 16.25% of the participants stated they read less than one hour per day whereas about 9% of the participants reported reading more than 4 hours (8.75%), as the Table 4.3.3 lists and the Graph 4.3.3 below shows. As the level of expertise – determined by a range of factors including the time spent reading – might modulate, to some extent, the processing of linguistic innovations by enabling participants to put in place diversified strategies to handle the new form, the data collected here do not suggest a surprisingly high amount of hours spent reading.

<i>Less than 1 hour</i>	16.25%
<i>1-2 hours</i>	43.75%
<i>2-3 hours</i>	25.00%
<i>3-4 hours</i>	6.25%
<i>More than 4 hours</i>	8.75%

Table 4.3.3 - Percentages of participants based on their time spent reading.



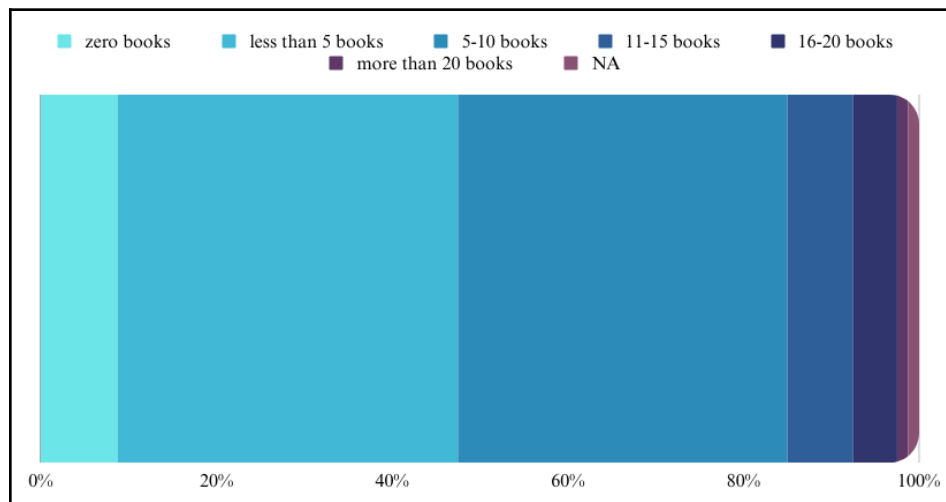
Graph 4.3.3 - How much time do you spend reading each day? Proportions of the percentages of participants based on the approximate number of hours devoted to reading each day (response rates).

The size of participants' reading pile is also an indication of their level of expertise (see Item 4 (3.24) in § 3.3.4). Only 8.75% of the participants reported that they did not read any books for leisure in their spare time. Most participants (38.75%) read less than five books; 37.5% read up to ten books. As the number of books goes up, percentages go down: 7.5% of the participants read 11 to 15 books, with only 5% indicating 20 as the maximum number. In only one case the participant claimed to have read around 60 books (see Table 4.3.4 and Graph 4.3.4). Shown as

NA are responses for which it was not possible to infer, even approximately, the number of books read.

<i>Zero books</i>	8.75%
<i>Less than 5 books</i>	38.75%
<i>5-10 books</i>	37.50%
<i>11-15 books</i>	7.50%
<i>16-20 books</i>	5.00%
<i>More than 20 books</i>	1.25%
NA	1.25%

Table 4.3.4 - Percentages of participants based on their reading pile.



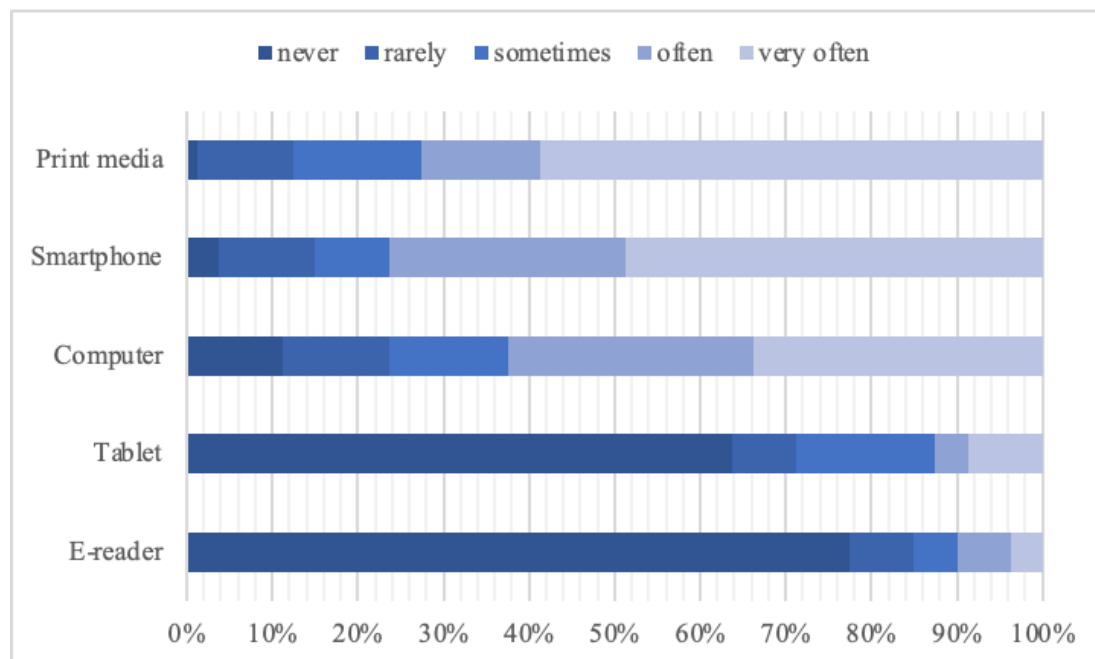
Graph 4.3.4 - *How many books have you read this year?* Distribution of participants according to the number of books read in the current year (response rates).

The fifth and sixth questions are closely interrelated, in that they both explore the print vs digital opposition by looking at the frequency of use of different media (see Item 5 (3.25) in § 3.3.4) as well as participants' preferred media (see Item 6 (3.26) in § 3.3.4). Print media turned out to be the most widely used by 58.75% of the participants, who indicated that they indeed very often read from print media. Also the smartphone was rated rather highly: 48.75% of the participants reported reading from their smartphone very often. 33.75% of the participants affirmed to use their computer very often to read. Conversely, the great majority of participants never opts for using a tablet or an e-reader to read from. In fact, 63.75% of the participants declared never to

read from a tablet; just like 77.5% of the participants admitting never to read from an e-reader, as can be seen in Table 4.3.5 as well as the Graph 4.3.5.

Media	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Very often (%)
Print media	1.25	11.25	15.00	13.75	58.75
Smartphone	3.75	11.25	8.75	27.50	48.75
Computer	11.25	12.5	13.75	28.75	33.75
Tablet	63.75	7.50	16.25	3.75	8.75
E-reader	77.50	7.50	5.00	6.25	3.75

Table 4.3.5 - Percentages of participants stating their frequency of use of different media, divided into five levels (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often).



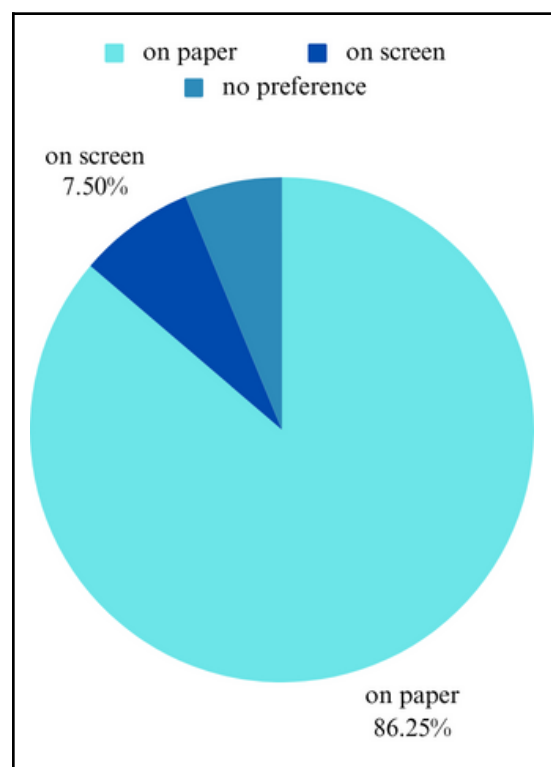
Graph 4.3.5 - How often do you read from the following media? Distribution of participants according to the frequency of use of each media (response rates).

Faced with the choice between reading on paper or on screen, the great majority of participants (86.25%) expressed their preference for reading on paper. Only 7.5% of the participants would rather read on screen, while 6.25% of the participants reported no preference whatsoever. For the purposes of this study, this data might indirectly suggest that only 7.5% of the participants were

truly comfortable with onscreen reading, hence affecting their performance in the sentence-picture matching task positively.

<i>On paper</i>	86.25%
<i>On screen</i>	7.50%
<i>No preference</i>	6.25%

Table 4.3.6 - Percentages of participants based on their preference for the media to read from.



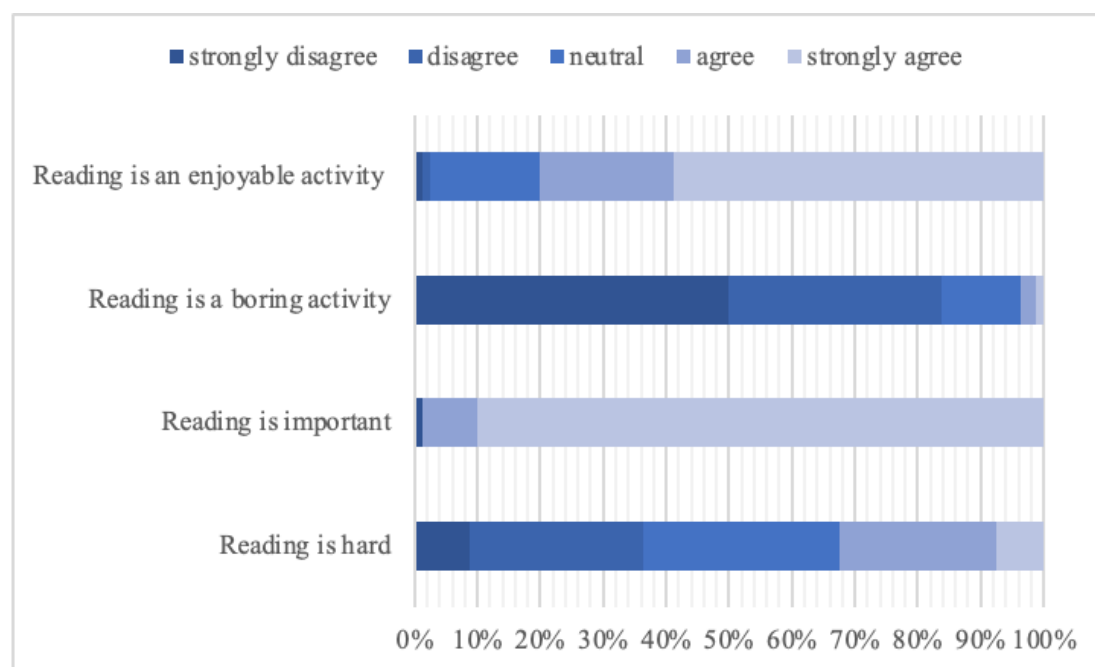
Graph 4.3.6 - *Would you rather read on paper or on screen?* Distribution of participants according to their preference for the media to read from (response rates).

The beneficial power of reading seems to be fully recognized by the experimental sample in its entirety. The four statements that make up the seventh question (cf. Item 7 (3.27) in § 3.3.4) indeed allowed us to reconstruct how reading is viewed in terms of enjoyability, purpose and effort. As a matter of fact, 90% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement on the importance of reading. Only one participant did not recognize its importance. Reading is considered an enjoyable activity by 58.75% of the participants, with only two participants stating the opposite, and 17.5% of the participants not taking a position. In line with these results, 50% of the participants strongly disagreed with reading being a boring activity. As to the effort to be put in reading, opinions here are more diversified. 31.25% of the participants declared being

neutral on this matter. 27.5% of the participants disagreed with the statement according to which reading is hard; whereas 25% of the participants recognized that the activity of reading is hard. Looking at the rest of the percentages shown in Table 4.3.7 (visually represented in Graph 4.3.7) one soon notices a sharp split: 36.25% of the participants overall found themselves in disagreement with this statement, as opposed to 32.5% of the participants being in agreement.

Statements	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
<i>Reading is an enjoyable activity</i>	1.25	1.25	17.5	21.25	58.75
<i>Reading is a boring activity</i>	50.00	33.75	12.50	2.50	1.25
<i>Reading is important</i>	1.25	0.00	0.00	8.75	90.00
<i>Reading is hard</i>	8.75	27.50	31.25	25.00	7.50

Table 4.3.7 - Percentages of participants expressing their assent/dissent to each statement, divided by the level of agreement indicated (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly agree).



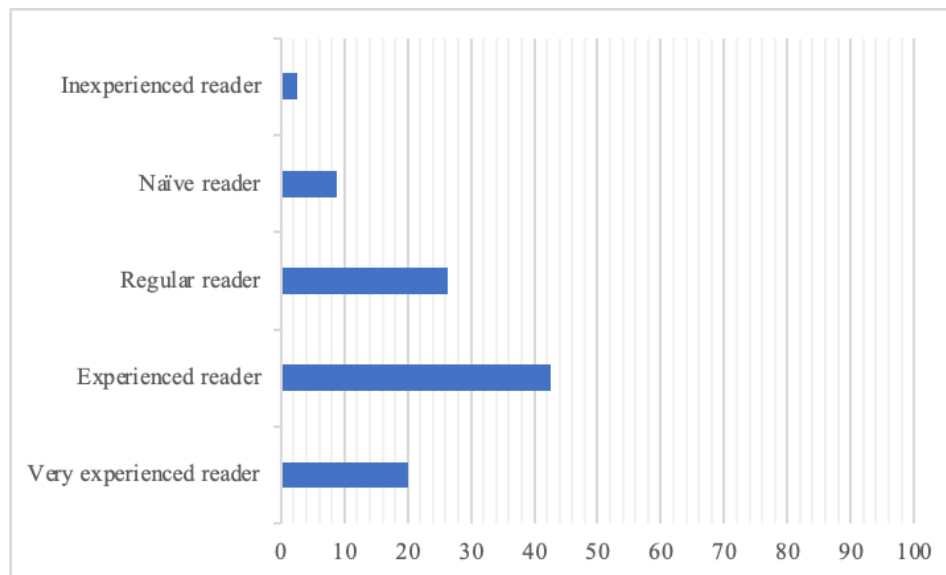
Graph 4.3.7 - *How much do you agree with the following statements?* Proportions of the percentages of participants agreeing or disagreeing with each statement (response rates). Five different levels of agreement are distinguished.

Through the brief self-assessment procedure obtained with the eighth question (see Item 8 (3.28) in § 3.3.4), participants were profiled according to their competence. The sample is thus divided

as follows: 42.5% of the participants claimed to be experienced readers and only 2.5% of the participants consider themselves inexperienced readers. Turning now to the intermediate levels, about 9% of the participants believe they are naïve readers; 26.25% of the participants are regular readers; and 20% of the participants are confident they are very experienced readers.

<i>Inexperienced reader</i>	2.50%
<i>Naïve reader</i>	8.75%
<i>Regular reader</i>	26.25%
<i>Experienced reader</i>	42.50%
<i>Very experienced reader</i>	20.00%

Table 4.3.8 - Percentages of participants based on their self-assessment as experienced/inexperienced readers.

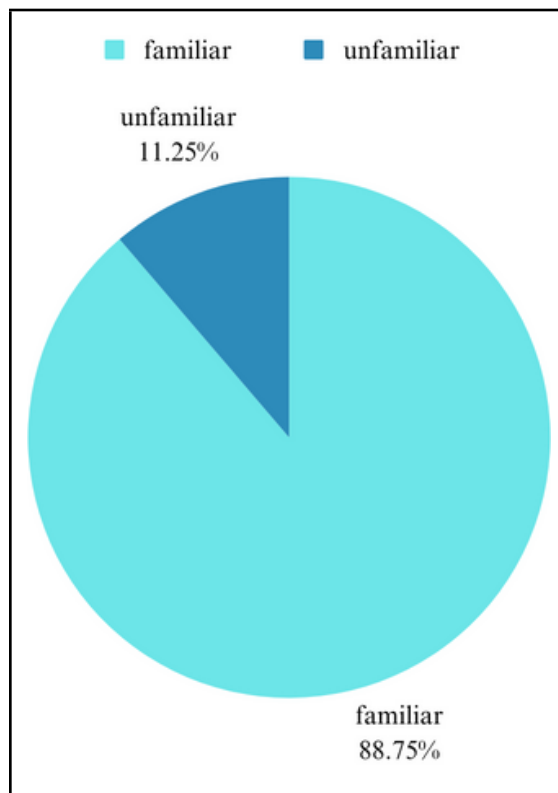


Graph 4.3.8 - What kind of reader do you consider yourself to be? Proportions of the percentages of participants based on their self-assessment as experienced/inexperienced readers (response rates).

The ninth question (cf. Item 9 (3.29) in § 3.3.4) opens the second section of the present questionnaire, specifically devoted to measuring participants' exposure to the inclusive use of the Italian language. A major distinction was first drawn between participants who had previously heard of inclusive language prior to the experiment – who turned out to be the vast majority of participants (88.75%) – and those who had never heard of inclusive language before (11.25%). A large disproportion among participants thus emerged (see Graph 4.3.9). It follows that only 11.25% of the participants came across the phenomenon of inclusive language for the first time through this experiment.

<i>Familiar</i>	88.75%
<i>Unfamiliar</i>	11.25%

Table 4.3.9 - Percentages of participants based on their familiarity with inclusive language.



Graph 4.3.9 - Have you ever heard of inclusive language before taking part in this experiment? Distribution of participants according to their familiarity with inclusive language (response rates).

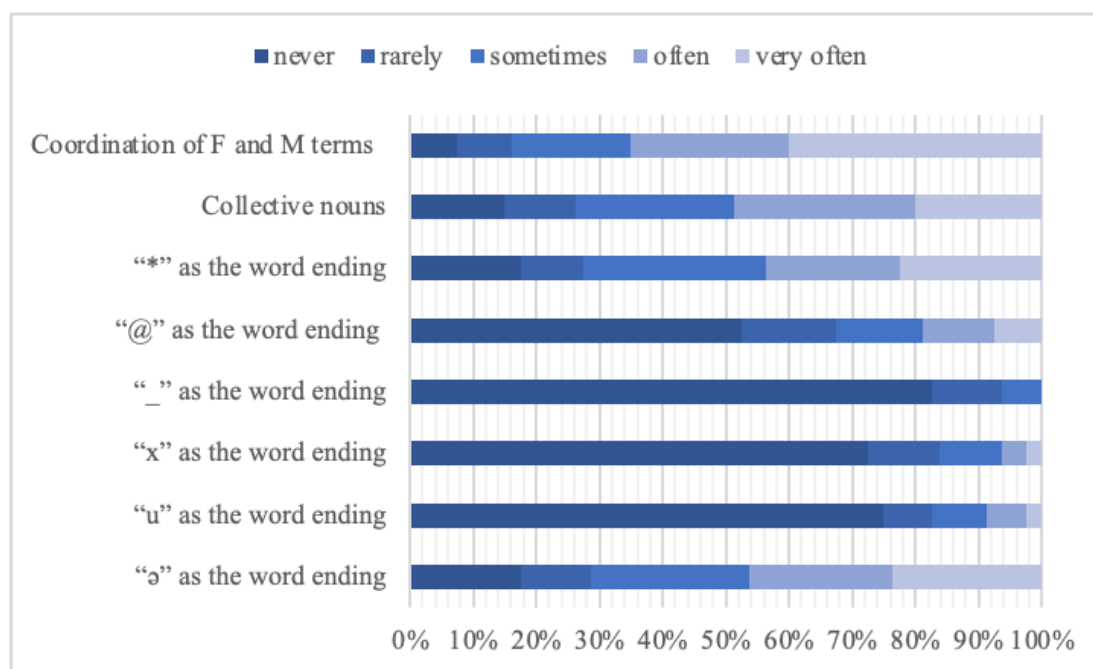
Once established that almost 90% of the participants were already familiar with the concept of inclusive language, an attempt was made to dig deeper into the degree of familiarity by looking at the exposure to the most common strategies at play by means of the tenth question (see Item 10 (3.30) in § 3.3.4). Starting with the long-standing, less invasive ones that do not involve the inclusion of external – and in some ways even anomalous – linguistic materials, the strategy of coordinating feminine and masculine terms is by far the most frequently used according to 40% of the participants, who claimed to have come across this technique very often in their previous readings. Only 7.5% of the participants reported that they had never encountered coordination of feminine and masculine terms. Collective nouns are also quite popular according to participants' responses. The highest percentages are indeed found among participants who said they had seen

this strategy in use at least “sometimes”. 15% of the participants did not detect any collective nouns in their previous readings.

As to the more recent strategies entailing the “adoption or resemanticization of individual characters” (Pires, 2020: 115) – a practice investing both punctuation marks and orthographic markers – the employment of *-ə* as the word ending (e.g., *Salve a tuttə* ‘hello everyone’) turned out to be the most frequently recognized by participants, in line with predictions, hence confirming the reasons behind the choice to focus our research on this particular strategy. 23.75% of the participants – the second highest percentage in the column labeled as “very often” – indicated that they very often encountered the innovative *-ə* suffix; 22.5% of the participants deviated slightly by specifying that they just often came across this orthographic marker; 25% of the participants only sometimes happened to notice *-ə* as the word ending. Similar percentages were found for the asterisk (*) occupying the position of the suffix. 28.75% of the participants claimed to have seen it sometimes, 21.25% of the participants often and 22.5% of the participants very often, thus indirectly decreeing it the most used punctuation mark to convey an inclusive linguistic representation. The opposite trend was observed for the at sign (@) and the underscore (_): the highest percentages were indeed registered with participants who said they had never seen them in use (i.e., 52.5% of the participants with reference to the at sign, 82.5% of the participants with respect to the underscore). Nonetheless, the two strategies differ in that there are at least some participants who had often come across the at sign (11.25%) – some even very often (7.5%) – but no participant when it comes to the underscore claimed to have seen it often. These remarks apply equally to the remaining orthographic markers included in the list (i.e., *x* and *u*). The *x* was never seen before in performing such a function by 72.5% of the participants, as opposed to only 2.5% of the participants who stated that they had encountered it prior to the experiment. Similarly, 75% of the participants had never found the *u* as a word ending, in opposition with 2.5% of the participants who affirmed that they had instead spotted it very often. All percentages are reported in Table 4.3.10, with their distribution being displayed in Graph 4.3.10.

Strategies of inclusive language	Never (%)	Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often (%)	Very often (%)
<i>Coordination of feminine and masculine terms</i>	7.50	8.75	18.75	25.00	40.00
<i>Collective nouns</i>	15.00	11.25	25.00	28.75	20.00
<i>“*” as the word ending</i>	17.50	10.00	28.75	21.25	22.50
<i>“@” as the word ending</i>	52.50	15.00	13.75	11.25	7.50
<i>“_” as the word ending</i>	82.50	11.25	6.25	0.00	0.00
<i>“x” as the word ending</i>	72.50	11.25	10.00	3.75	2.50
<i>“u” as the word ending</i>	75.00	7.50	8.75	6.25	2.50
<i>“ə” as the word ending</i>	17.50	11.25	25.00	22.50	23.75

Table 4.3.10 - Percentages of participants stating the frequency with which they had previously encountered the strategies of inclusive language listed, divided into five levels (never, rarely, sometimes, often, very often).



Graph 4.3.10 - Have you ever come across the following strategies of inclusive language in your previous readings? Distribution of participants according to the frequency with which they had previously encountered each reported strategy of inclusive language (response rates).

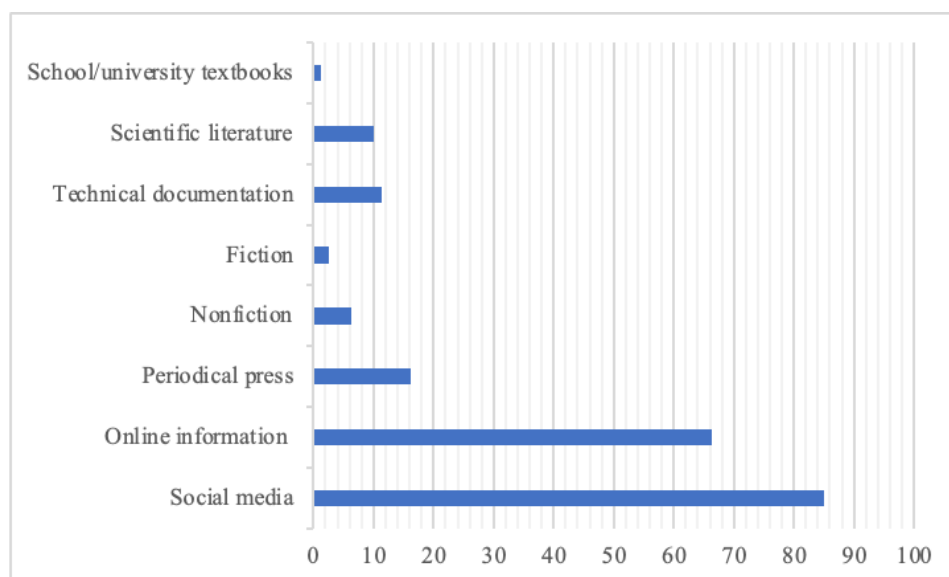
The responses collected with the eleventh question (cf. Item 11 (3.31) in § 3.3.4) were necessary to supplement the list provided in the previous question. Participants were indeed instructed to provide any other strategies attributable to inclusive language. Their responses concerned

different languages. In sticking with Italian first, the orthographic marker “æ” used as a suffix was pointed out, as well as the number 3 (e.g., *ciao a tutt3* ‘hello everybody3’). The slash separating the masculine and feminine determiners to provide both alternatives was also reported (e.g., *il/la...* ‘the.M.SG/the.F.SG’), along with suggesting the omission of whichever word containing gender markers. According to one participant, borrowings from English deprived of gender markers as well as opting for the use of the feminine as the default value are two common strategies used within the Lgbtqia+ community. It is generally considered to be a good practice to always ask the person you are addressing what are the correct pronouns to use. Other suggestions come from German: the so-called *BinnenI* as in *StudentInnen* consisting in capitalizing the i of the *-innen* suffix indicating the feminine of nouns precisely to signal that both genders are included; the use of gerunds (e.g., *Studierenden*) to express category. In French the employment of the midpoint is reported as in *épuisé.e*.

In shifting the focus again solely on the innovative *-ə* suffix, the purpose of the twelfth question (cf. Item 12 (3.32) in § 3.3.4) was to identify the text type that most frequently hosts this symbol. More than one option could be selected. 85% of the participants located the use of *-ə* as a word ending in social media – namely in the form of captions or *ad-hoc* created content – being the highest percentage to stand out from Table 4.3.11. In line with this result, 66.25% of the participants selected online information covering various topics such as current affairs, cooking, sports, culture, travel, fashion and so on, not necessarily retrieved via social media. Periodical press presents the third highest percentage (16.25%). These percentages lead to think that the news industry is the undisputed field in which these linguistic transformations are catching on. Ignoring the intermediate percentages, strikingly, only one participant reported that they had encountered the *-ə* suffix in textbooks (1.25%). Technical documentation – being the textual type deployed in the experimental procedure – was instead selected by a higher percentage of participants (11.25%), yet corresponding to nine participants only.

<i>School/university textbooks</i>	1.25%
<i>Scientific literature</i>	10.00%
<i>Technical documentation</i>	11.25%
<i>Fiction</i>	2.50%
<i>Nonfiction</i>	6.25%
<i>Periodical press</i>	16.25%
<i>Online information</i>	66.25%
<i>Social media</i>	85.00%

Table 4.3.11 - Percentages of participants based on the types of text in which they had previously encountered the "ə" symbol.



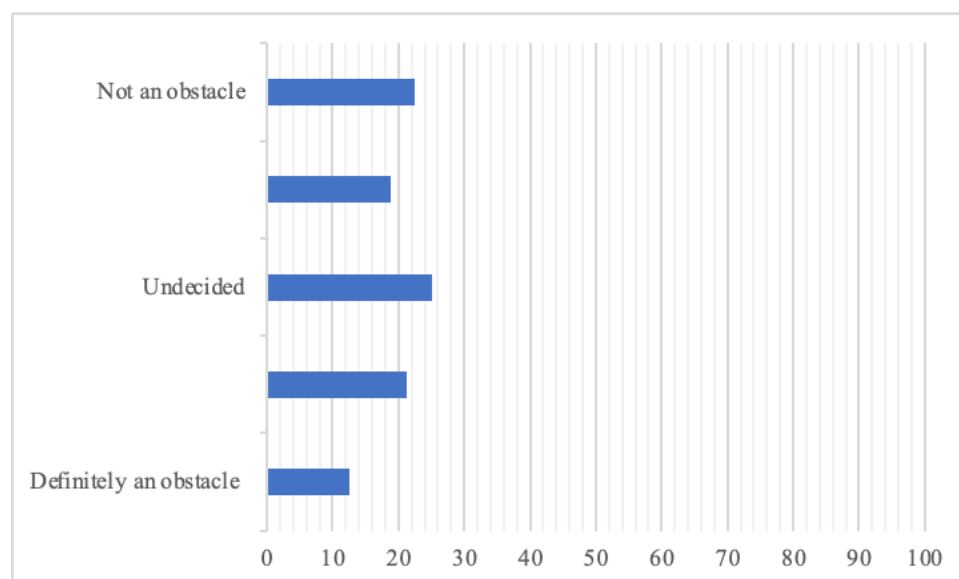
Graph 4.3.11 - Proportions of the percentages of participants based on the type of text in which they had previously encountered the "ə" symbol (response rates).

The last two questions address participants' overall perception of the innovative -ə suffix first, with the thirteenth question (cf. Item 13 (3.33) in § 3.3.4), testing whether the -ə ending is perceived as an obstacle to the reading of the word and, after that, investigating the performativity and meaning related to it through the fourteenth question (cf. Item 14 (3.34) in § 3.3.4). When asked to determine the level of interference of the "ə" symbol in the process of reading, the majority of participants expressed their uncertainty (25%), as shown in Table 4.3.12. The highest percentage of participants who instead chose to take a clear position with respect to the issue, decided that it was not an obstacle (22.5%). Only 12.5% of the participants argued

instead that the -ə ending represented an obstacle in all respects. It should be noted, however, that the response rates are all in all relatively close, meaning that the sample is quite divided on the issue, as shown by the distribution in Graph 4.3.12. What is apparent, in wanting to detect a general trend at all costs, is that most participants lean toward not considering it an actual obstacle to reading.

<i>Not an obstacle</i>	22.50%
	18.75%
<i>Undecided</i>	25.00%
	21.25%
<i>Definitely an obstacle</i>	12.50%

Table 4.3.12 - Percentages of participants based on their perception of the "ə" symbol.



Graph 4.3.12 - Proportions of the percentages of participants according to their perceiving the "ə" symbol to be an obstacle to reading or not. Five different levels are distinguished (response rates).

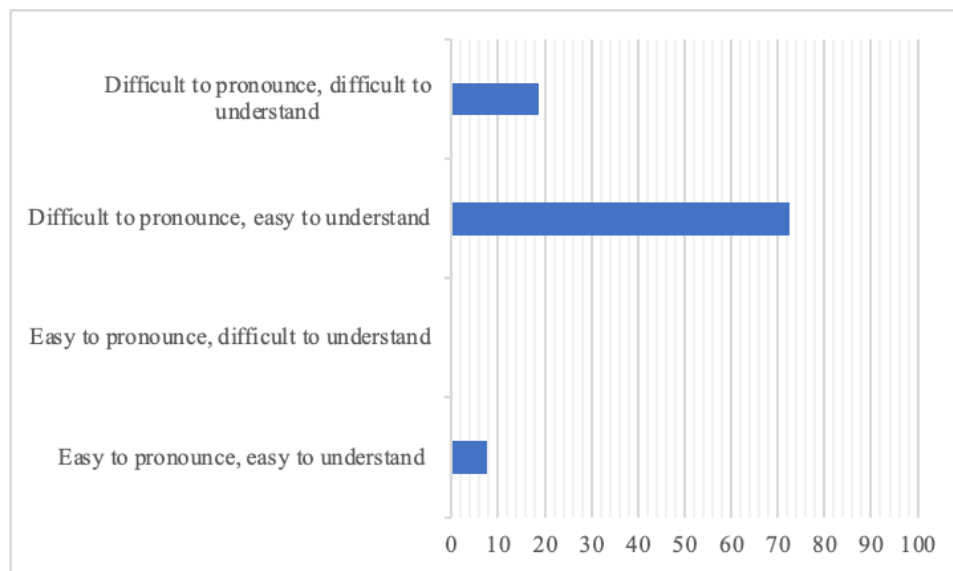
As to its phonetic production and interpretation, the situation changes drastically: a rather larger disproportion emerges (see Table 4.3.13 and Graph 4.3.13). In extrapolating an initial summative data, almost all participants (about 91%) agreed that this new suffix is difficult to pronounce. Conversely, only 7.5% of the participants (i.e., 6/80 participants) deemed that it is easy to pronounce. Despite this difficulty on the production side, a very high percentage of participants (72.5%) established that from an interpretive point of view, it is easy to understand what the -ə

suffix stands for. 18.75% of the participants found it difficult not only to pronounce but also to understand what -ə refers to. Notice that one participant was excluded from the analysis concerning this specific question, as they provided two different opposing judgements.

Although these judgments are the result of a mediated, conscious evaluation, and therefore do not constitute a direct and spontaneous measurement, they are valuable indications suggesting how participants feel about embracing this linguistic innovation, by shedding light on the actual limitations. To date, based on the responses from the sample tested, the greatest difficulty seems to be found at the level of pronunciation. Understanding its meaning, on the other hand, would appear to be easily accessible.

<i>Difficult to pronounce, difficult to understand</i>	18.75%
<i>Difficult to pronounce, easy to understand</i>	72.50%
<i>Easy to pronounce, difficult to understand</i>	0.00%
<i>Easy to pronounce, easy to understand</i>	7.50%

Table 4.3.13 - Percentages of participants based on their evaluation of the "ə" symbol in terms of how accessible it is to pronounce and interpret it.



Graph 4.3.13 - Proportions of the percentages of participants according to their evaluation of the "ə" symbol (response rates).

4.4 Discussion

The data we collected through the SPMT experiment confirmed an overall lower level of accuracy when participants are dealing with the morphological variant *-ə*. *Analysis 1* in § 4.1.2.1 indeed showed that the lowest accuracy is found precisely in the nonbinary singular condition, while the masculine and feminine conditions obtained a rather high, identical score. The main finding revealed by *Analysis 2* in § 4.1.2.2 points to the actual interpretation of the nonbinary plural condition, i.e., one that serves as a representation of a mixed-gender group that may be composed by male and female members only. The sharp drop in score recorded for the nonbinary plural condition as a consequence of leaving out MMF and FFM groups proves that the groups including at least one nonbinary member selected by participants were few. Hence, there appears to be a tendency for the innovative suffix *-ə* to be interpreted just as frequently as referring to a mixed group of males and females, without a nonbinary person. It follows that the inclusive use of this morphological variant does not necessarily entail nonbinary participation, thus partly redefining the concept of inclusiveness conveyed, which will be further discussed in the final chapter. Activation of a nonbinary referent in the presence of *-ə* is therefore by no means to be taken for granted.

As far as reaction times are concerned, what emerges from *Analysis 3* in § 4.1.2.3 is that higher levels of traditional gender markedness were found to aid in reducing reaction time, as participants were fastest in dealing with the feminine and masculine conditions. The one exception is the masculine appearing in the plural condition, which recorded a rather slow mean reaction time, in all likelihood owing to the opposition in meaning (i.e., specific *vs* generic) that generates, posing some sort of conflict to be handled by participants. The fact that the masculine can have a generic meaning might have caused longer reaction times precisely because it took longer for participants to decide which referent to choose, as opposed to what happened with the feminine, for which the choice was much easier: the feminine gender marker could only be assigned an exclusive meaning. The same reasoning can be applied to the neutral condition: being completely deprived of any gender cue, the wide margin of choice prevents participants from an immediate disambiguation, since the selection of potentially any referent is grammatically correct. It is therefore not surprising that the neutral condition is the one with the slowest mean reaction time in the plural-condition task, and the second-slowest in the singular condition-task. The nonbinary condition was identified as the most irregular condition, as it was

attributed the slowest mean reaction time in the singular-condition task, as opposed to the fastest mean reaction time in the plural-condition task. This opposite trend might suggest total hesitation in having to identify the corresponding single referent indicated by the variant *-ə*, on the one hand, and the maximum freedom to which its plural counterpart alludes to, on the other. Diametrically opposite mean reaction times here thus seem to indicate differential responding, reflected by the diverse strategies implemented when dealing with the singular and plural variant *-ə*.

The examination of the internal distribution of the assigned genders per condition carried out in § 4.1.3, has shed light on the possible conflicts that surface from the matching procedure. For the masculine singular condition, a distinct preference for pictures previously rated as “masculine” was markedly detected, confirming the activation of the specific meaning of the masculine form. The opposition arising with the plural (i.e., specific *vs* generic meaning) seems to be resolved in favor of a specific interpretation of the masculine plural form, as the majority of participants selected a male-only group, rather than a mixed-gender one. This is evidence supporting the existence of a bias embedded in the masculine form according to which, when confronting this form, an interpretation of an exclusivity of male referents is naturally triggered. It is worth pointing out that the group obtaining the second-highest score was the FFM group, that is, one that sees a majority of female members. This choice could be explained in terms of the rather high proportion of women within university research groups, perceived to be a characteristic feature of Italian academia, at least in the collective imagination.

Far from being a unanimous selection, the total percentage of participants matching the verbal stimulus containing the description of a nonbinary candidate with a picture portraying a female referent outnumbered the percentage of participants who actually properly selected a nonbinary referent. Moreover, an expected restrained selection of male referents is confirmed. In an attempt to explain why the feminine gender exhibits the highest rate of selection when it comes to the nonbinary singular condition, we must rely on the visual. Namely, the reason female referents are matched so frequently with the nonbinary singular condition might be traced to the critical similarity that can be found in feminine and nonbinary photos. This hypothesis would also explain the sharper detachment detected with the masculine, whose visual representation takes on far more distant and distinguishable features. In addition, the letter of the alphabet employed as word-ending could also entail a certain level of proximity between the feminine and the

nonbinary (i.e., *e* and *ə*), which hardly leaves room for a male reading. A strong preference was instead measured in the nonbinary plural condition, which was matched by the great majority of participants with the nonbinary-only group (i.e., the NBNBNB group), determining the adoption of the exclusive use of the innovative suffix *-ə* solely to refer to nonbinary groups. Nonetheless, a large portion of participants still selected mixed-gender groups with no nonbinary candidates.

In comparing the singular and plural nonbinary conditions, it emerges that female referents – be it a single individual or a female-only group – tend to be chosen more frequently than male referents in the presence of this innovative suffix. This could be seen as a clear indication that there is a potential link between the feminine and nonbinary conditions, in that they recall each other visually. As to the actual use of this morphological innovation to refer to nonbinary individuals, a major distinction must be drawn between the singular and the plural condition, as this function appears to be fulfilled in the latter, but not in the former.

With singular fillers, all genders displayed a rather fair representation, based on their frequency of occurrence. Although a slight preference for nonbinary referents in filler singular 1 was revealed through the aggregate data (i.e., the overall percentage of participants choosing a specific gender), it is the masculine gender that exhibits the highest frequency of occurrence according to disaggregate data (i.e., separate percentages for each gender distinguished on the basis of image 1 and image 2), as well as aggregate data for filler singular 2. The default value (i.e., masculine) is thus what participants resort to when no gender information is provided. This trend is reflected also in plural fillers, as the male-only group reports the highest frequency of occurrence in the first plural filler. The FFM group was instead selected by the majority of participants in the second filler. Since the frequency of occurrence registered for the FFM group compared to the one of the MMF group was always higher in all the instances previously analyzed, this could indeed be justified by our exposure to a constant presence of women in academia indirectly modulating our choices. Alternatively, perhaps it is the order in which the images are presented that affects participants' choices in conditions where there is no grammatical gender clue. The first group encountered by participants in the first filler was in fact the MMM group. As for the second filler, the FFM group was the second group to be introduced. Further studies measuring the impact exerted by the order of presentation of the images are thus needed to eventually corroborate this hypothesis.

The responses collected through the questionnaire on the *Sexist/Inclusive Language Use in Italian* (SILUI), reported in § 4.2, revealed that, overall, our sample of participants is determined to embrace change, in abandoning the sexist use of the Italian language in favor of an inclusive one. However, when the immediacy of our language is at stake, participants seem to hesitate in adopting morphological innovations. With the generic use of the masculine form introduced in the fourth item, for instance, participants are definitely unsure as to whether they should still drop it or not (i.e., *Il maschile plurale non è davvero inclusivo, ma dovremmo comunque continuare a usarlo per riferirci a gruppi misti di persone (es. maschi, femmine e persone non binary) perché risulta più immediato*. ‘The masculine plural is not really inclusive, still we should continue to use it to refer to mixed groups of people (e.g., males, females, and nonbinary people) because it is more immediate’). Participants might indeed be tempted to maintain it as it is a linguistically-economic strategy that guarantees straightforwardness. Others still struggle with recognising sexist language, especially with the adoption of masculine occupational terms to refer to a feminine individual (i.e., *Serena ha superato con successo l’abilitazione all’avvocatura. Adesso Serena è un avvocato*. ‘Serena passed the bar exam. ‘Serena is now an.M.SG attorney.M.SG’). However, when asked to make use of the *-ə* suffix to refer to an exclusive-nonbinary plurality, or a single nonbinary referent, or a mixed-gender group (in so doing, introducing a single short form to represent all genders), these three different proposals were all strongly welcomed by the majority of participants. The only conflicting information deriving from participants’ responses has to do with the use of *-ə* as a general, common word-ending to indicate a group whose gender composition is not known or of a mixed nature, as the majority first did not agree with such a use put forward in Item 10 (i.e., *Se in un gruppo di persone ci sono maschi, femmine e persone non binary, è giusto che ci si riferisca a loro con ə: per es. non gli studenti ma lə studentə*. ‘If there are males, females, and non-binary people in a group of people, it is appropriate to refer to them with ə: e.g., not the.M.PL students.M.PL but lə.NB.PL studentə.NB.PL’), to then welcome it in Item 19 (i.e., *Quanto saresti disponibile a iniziare una mail con: carə studentə se sai che tra i destinatari sono presenti maschi, femmine e persone che non si identificano nella distinzione binaria del genere?* ‘How willing are you to start an email with *carə studentə* ‘dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL’ knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender?’). As much as the object under investigation (i.e., the use of the single inclusive plural

suffix -ə) is identical in both items, the questions are actually exploring quite different related aspects, in that Item 10 is directly asking, in more absolute terms, to express a judgment as to whether the proposed use is deemed appropriate as well as fair; Item 19, on the other hand, is addressing participants' willingness to eventually adopt such a strategy. Morality aside, it is testing their being ready to put it in use.

As for the Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits (cf. § 4.3), which was included to profile our sample of participants according to their level of expertise in reading and to their level of exposure to the phenomenon of inclusive language (with a focus on the innovative suffix -ə), the majority of participants consider themselves experienced readers. Furthermore, the importance of reading was acknowledged by them all, who also expressed a strong preference for reading on paper. Almost 90% of the participants claimed to be familiar with the phenomenon of inclusive language. As predicted, among the punctuation marks and orthographic markers listed, the innovative suffix -ə was the most frequently recognised by participants, yet mostly confined to the news industry, particularly online. Through the last two questions, we were able to understand to what extent the "ə" symbol actually impacts on the process of reading as well as the criticalities arising from producing it phonetically and interpreting it. The general trend that emerges is that most participants do not see it as an obstacle to reading, they find it quite difficult to pronounce, yet easy to interpret.

Conclusions

The work presented in this thesis represents the first attempt at systematically investigating the use of the innovative suffix *-ə* to designate people of unknown, unspecified or nonbinary gender in Italian. Notwithstanding the countless strategies put forward to pursue a gender-fair language, the study was narrowed down to the most widespread, extensively debated one, which, unlike others (e.g., *-**, *-@*), also benefits from a predetermined correspondence to a sound, however problematic and unfamiliar to most speakers of Italian. Much has been said about the potential of the suffix *-ə*, bringing out conflicting views on the topic, but too little has been demonstrated experimentally to back up whichever stance. This study aims at filling this gap, as it is specifically designed to reveal how such morphological innovation is really interpreted when called upon to indicate a single referent or a plurality. The first research question turns indeed to the level of meaning, introducing a key opposition (i.e., specific *vs* generic meaning), which is addressed as follows: does the variant *-ə* manage to immediately refer to an individual who does not identify with the binary distinction of gender (i.e., specific meaning)? Does it activate a reference with a nonbinary group (i.e., specific meaning) or a mixed-gender group (i.e., generic meaning)? The second research question assesses the processing costs that are associated with the suffix *-ə*, by framing the issue in these terms: does the nonbinary form *-ə* require longer reaction times as opposed to the traditional, long-established suffixes used to refer to feminine and masculine referents? The underlying idea was thus to track potential heavy processing requirements by means of participants' reaction times, that is, an indirect measure. The third research question is directed to the bulky presence that has been taking up too much space and obscuring others, namely the masculine form. In an attempt to unveil its supposedly intrinsic inclusiveness, the central question remains: does the alleged generic masculine display a bias in favor of an interpretation that sees only men as the exclusive referents? The opposition specific *vs* generic meaning once again returns.

Starting with a description of the properties of the language system that would accommodate these “inclusive communication practices” (Iannaccaro & Giusti, 2020: 10) was deemed absolutely necessary. To this purpose, Chapter 1 draws the linguistic boundaries within which the phenomenon under investigation lies. First, it provides a typological overview of the different gender-marking strategies displayed by natural languages, which leads to the observation that

gender marking is particularly pervasive in Grammatical gender languages like Italian (Section 1.1). The latter possesses a bipartite noun-class system (F/M) whose gender is visible far beyond nouns (Section 1.2). As thoroughly illustrated, every Italian noun is indeed embedded with an inherent gender manifested through the ending-vowel “and gender agreement must be marked on almost all modifiers” (Bates et al., 1995: 848), as well as coreferential pronouns, clitics and past participles, with all due exceptions. This is particularly relevant for our purpose, as it follows that the introduction of a novel suffix not only affects the class of nouns, but also encompasses many other elements of classes belonging to both functional and lexical categories, thus accounting for the risky invasiveness of such an operation. In examining derivational paradigms forging either symmetrical or asymmetrical feminine/masculine pairs, the centrality of the masculine form immediately emerged, by presenting itself as the dominant form, responsible, in most cases, for the molding of the feminine counterpart. The primacy of the masculine form was thus hinted at, and with it the dual interpretation (universal *vs* specific) it activates (Section 1.3). With the purpose of providing the necessary background information to reason on the third research question, we lingered on the semantic ambiguity arising from the masculine form which has been certified across different languages (e.g., French, English, Italian). All in all, whether the generic masculine is really capable of evoking a mixed-gender representation has long been the subject of cross-linguistic debate. After establishing a tight link with the phenomenon of gender stereotypicality of role nouns by reviewing some of the literature, we were able to determine the prevalence of a male-biased mental representation in correspondence of gender-marked stereotypical nouns, a trend that possibly extends far beyond this class of nouns. Our experimental work therefore contributes to either disproving or confirming the hypothesis according to which it is the male-specific interpretation of the masculine form to prevail over the generic one.

In Chapter 2, we provided an overview of the degendering strategies so far formulated for Italian and other languages, with the aim of offering a glimpse of the current, albeit constantly changing, situation with respect to the possibility of achieving an inclusive use of language. A major distinction was drawn between strategies found in neo-standard Italian – first documented by Alma Sabatini in 1987 on commission, then taken up, expanded and further elaborated by the various vademecums compiled by national institutes and agencies – and those belonging to sub-standard Italian (Section 2.1). Among the strategies officially recommended to avoid the

unmarked masculine are the symmetrical use of gender resulting in binomials (e.g., *Tutti i consiglieri e tutte le consigliere* ‘all councilors and councilwomen’), the abbreviated double form (e.g., *Il/La sottoscritto/a* ‘the.M/F.SG undersigned.M/F.SG’), expressions without gender reference (e.g., *persona* ‘person’), collective nouns (e.g., *personale dipendente* ‘teaching personnel’), relative and indefinite pronouns (e.g., *Chiunque arrivi in ritardo...* ‘whoever gets here late’), the passive form (e.g., *La domanda deve essere presentata* ‘the application must be submitted’), and the impersonal form (e.g., *Si entra uno alla volta* ‘entrance is allowed one at a time’). “Resemanticization of individual characters” (Pires, 2020: 115) – ranging from punctuation marks to orthographic markers – was identified as the main technique employed within sub-standard Italian. A list of the most widely used morphological innovations based on Comandini’s (2021) work is here reported, appearing from the most frequent to the least frequent: asterisk (*), suffix *-ə*, suffix *-u*, suffix *-x*, “at” sign (@), underscore (_), *-+*, *-y*, *-æ* (all serving as suffixes), and the omission of the final vowel. A detailed account of the advantages and disadvantages carried by suffix *-ə* was inevitably provided, in an attempt to give the necessary elements for assessing its actual feasibility and suitability with the language. A crucial point we have emphasized has to do with the transition underwent by the suffix *-ə* pointed out by Thornton (2022), which can be summarized in these terms: this innovative suffix was initially adopted specifically to give visibility to nonbinary gender identities but now it is mostly used to neutralize all gender distinctions, by functioning as a single form representative of women, men, and nonbinary people. In other words, we are witnessing an ongoing transition from the specific to the generic meaning assigned to the suffix *-ə*. As we shall see, the latter is however refuted by our study.

Next, we observed the different traits characterizing the strategies proposed for other languages (Section 2.2). For instance, the abbreviated double form presents much more variation in the separating signs used in French, whereas it is visually represented through capitalization by German (Pires, 2020). Special characters deployed as suffixes are also common in French and Spanish (Pires, 2020). Specifically, Spanish resorts to *[-e]* as the suffix standing for the generic (Stetie & Zunino, 2022). Subsequently, an example of success was presented with reference to the Swedish third-gender neutral pronoun *hen*, now firmly established. The chapter ends with a focus on English singular *they* and on previous studies (e.g., Bradley et al., 2019a) which

demonstrated that it is properly interpreted as gender-neutral, while also referring to nonbinary individuals, thus identifying it as the pronoun most likely to gain a foothold.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the experiment we designed to test the process of gender assignment, especially when confronted with the suffix *-ə*, via a sentence-picture matching task (SPMT) (Section 3.1) adapted from Bradley and colleagues (2019a). In the adaptation process, considerations of a cultural and social nature have contributed to forming the experimental material (e.g., adjusting to the Italian academic context). 81 native Italian speaking participants (44 F, 36 M, age range 18-30 years, mean age 24;8 years) were asked to (i) read the verbal stimuli describing the academic profiles of potential candidates, (ii) rate the academic profiles of the described candidates, and (iii) match each verbal stimulus with the picture portraying the gender of the described candidate. In addition, two online questionnaires, i.e., the *Sexist/Inclusive Language Use in Italian* (SILUI) adapted from Parks and Robertson (2000) and the *Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits* adapted from Cerutti (2023), were administered, so as to elaborate a profile of the participants w.r.t. their reading habits and their familiarity with inclusive language. To form the photo arrays for the experiment, a norming online survey, i.e., *Femininity-Masculinity Image Evaluation Survey*, was first conducted (Section 3.2). In sticking to Bradley and colleagues' procedure, a separate sample of participants ($N=90$) was gathered to rate a total of 24 stock photos – kindly provided by Bradley's research team – using an independent 10-point scale by assigning each depicted person a perceived value of femininity-masculinity. The ratings of the Italian sample of participants turned out to be matching those collected by Bradley and colleagues (2019a); therefore, no cultural difference of any kind could be identified among the samples.

As to our experimental design (Section 3.3.2), it consists of two separate tasks (i.e., *Task 1*, *Task 2*), testing the singular and plural condition, respectively, each composed of eight items. In both tasks, grammatical gender is the independent variable which has three levels (i.e., feminine, masculine, nonbinary). The set of items thus includes two descriptions for each level of the independent variable, for a total of six target descriptions, and two fillers lacking any gender marking (i.e., the neutral or zero condition). The textual and visual materials deployed were thoroughly described by delving into the linguistic considerations underlying word formation with the suffix *-ə*, hence the choice of the starting root, as well as the replacement of the unmarked masculine with collective nouns and epicenes, to name a few (Section 3.3.2). Such

linguistic choices that have marked the language used in the verbal stimuli embodies the strive to actually implement the strategies outlined in Chapter 2, indicated as the most recommended. Each of the questionnaires' items were subsequently presented, by tracing their origin and reasons for being included (Section 3.3.3; Section 3.3.4). After having designed through the three sections of the SILUI the way to access (i) participants' view on the sexist use of language, (ii) their ability to recognize instances of such use and (iii) their openness to the phenomenon of inclusive language, we deemed it useful to dig into their reading preferences and habits by means of the second questionnaire so to get a rough measure of their level of familiarity with inclusive language.

Finally, in Chapter 4, the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the SPMT data are delineated, along with the discussion of the main findings (Section 4.4). To the purpose of answering the first research question, i.e., the one concerning the referential activation of the suffix *-ə*, accuracy was measured through two analyses (Section 4.1.2.1 and Section 4.1.2.2); these data were later integrated by exploring the internal distribution of the assigned genders found in the nonbinary condition (Section 4.1.3), so as to reveal which gender prevailed. A lower level of accuracy was found in the nonbinary singular condition, meaning that participants performed significantly worse when having to match the description of a nonbinary candidate with a picture portraying a nonbinary referent compared to when dealing with the description of a feminine or masculine candidate. Therefore, we detected a significant difference in response accuracy (scores) that depends on the gender of the item. More specifically, lower performance is attributable to the nonbinary gender appearing in the singular condition. The nonbinary plural condition turned out to be more closely matched with mixed groups of male and female members, lacking a nonbinary person, as evidenced by the drop in score shown by the second analysis we ran. This finding is particularly relevant as it unlocks a new correspondence with the morphological variant *-ə*, namely a mixed-reference devoid of the nonbinary presence. The concept of inclusiveness conveyed by the suffix *-ə* can thus be restricted to gender binarism to be understood as a totality. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that a large portion of participants after reading the description of a research team referred to with the suffix *-ə* indeed selected mixed-gender groups deprived of any nonbinary candidate. Despite the high percentage, the great majority of participants opted for the nonbinary-only group (i.e., the NBNBNB group) to be assigned to the nonbinary plural condition, hence decreeing the specific meaning to be

avored over the generic one, countertrending previous results, while also disproving the transition identified by Thornton (2022). We then looked back at the nonbinary singular condition. We found that the specific interpretation of the nonbinary form -ə was far from being activated given that the total percentage of participants matching the description of a nonbinary candidate with a picture of a female referent outnumbered the percentage of participants properly selecting a nonbinary referent. We were therefore led to draw two different conclusions when confronting the findings obtained in *Task 1* (i.e., the singular-condition task) with those of *Task 2* (i.e., the plural-condition task), namely, that the variant -ə does not manage to immediately refer to an individual who does not identify with the binary distinction of gender, as a female reference is triggered instead; however, it does manage to activate an immediate reference with a nonbinary-only group (i.e., specific meaning), and, to a lesser extent, with a mixed-gender group (i.e., generic meaning). As to why the feminine gender displays the highest rate of selection when it comes to the nonbinary singular condition, we suspect that those unfamiliar with the suffix -ə read it as a typo for -e being the two similarly-shaped, and this could also be seen as a limitation of the adopted text-based paradigm. Another reason could be due to the physical similarity shared by the depicted people appearing in the images rated as feminine and those appearing in the images rated as nonbinary.

In tackling the second research question, i.e., the one regarding the processing costs of the suffix -ə, reaction times were provided by *Analysis 3* (Section 4.1.2.3). We found that the nonbinary singular condition recorded the slowest mean reaction time of all, whereas its plural counterpart was associated with the fastest mean reaction time. By looking at the results for *Task 1* (i.e., the singular-condition task), we would therefore be inclined to conclude that the processing of -ə when used to signal a single referent is indeed cumbersome, as it is reflected in the significantly slower reaction times compared to those recorded with the traditional, long-established suffixes. However, the fact that participants were fastest at matching the description of the group of candidates referred to with the suffix -ə with – at least for the majority – a picture representing a nonbinary-only group rules out a cognitive load associated with -ə in *Task 2* (i.e., the plural-condition task). Our assumption is that participants were struck by total hesitation not knowing which single identity should be matched with the suffix -ə, while being invested by an utmost discretion in freely choosing the group represented by the suffix -ə in the plural condition. This may be due to the fact that a plurality by its very nature admits of multiple possibilities,

hence indirectly instilling much more confidence in participants. Another reason could be that diverse strategies were implemented when dealing with the singular and plural variant -ə, which were also computed differently as mirrored in the diametrically opposite mean reaction times detected.

In order to determine the possible existence of an actual male-specific bias in the use of the masculine form as a generic, i.e., the issue raised by the third research question, we once again resorted to the examination of the masculine condition's gender internal distribution. A distinct preference for pictures of male-only groups was demonstrated, thus confirming the activation of the exclusive interpretation, one that only sees male referents. We conclude that the ambiguity embedded within the masculine plural form (i.e., specific *vs* generic meaning) is resolved in favor of the specific interpretation, hence supporting the existence of a male-specific bias. This data provides us with solid evidence in support of removing the use of the unmarked or inclusive masculine as it naturally triggers a masculine-only reference, and therefore cannot act as a generic. Proof of the existing semantic ambiguity also comes from reaction times, as the masculine plural condition recorded exceptionally slow mean reaction time, compared to its singular counterpart. Regardless of the final decision that most often fell on an exclusively male representation the doubt as to which group should be selected must have aroused, as time attests. It is no coincidence that the same trend is observed for the neutral condition, which presents the slowest mean reaction time in *Task 2* (i.e., the plural-condition task), and the second-slowest in *Task 1* (i.e., the singular condition-task). What we are observing here is that in the absence of any gender cue, the process of gender assignment through referent selection becomes even more time-consuming, as the range of choices is broader. Particularly interesting is the landing point: when no gender information can be retrieved, participants tend to resort to the masculine form, also known as the default value. This finding is rather significant considering that one of the suggested strategies against the generic masculine is precisely the use of neutral forms, which however turned out to be assigned a masculine referent. Although participants were explicitly instructed to match the description with the picture of the referent, hence ascribing a gender to the described candidate, there are reasons to believe that there is no such thing as a neutral condition, since we cannot avoid computing the gender information.

The questionnaires, although secondary, are a valuable supplementary tool in that they force participants to express their own judgments on the state of art of inclusive language as well as

their relationship with the activity of reading. What emerged from the responses collected from the SILUI (Section 4.2) is that our sample of participants, as young as it is (age range 18-30 years), has a positive attitude toward inclusive language and is prepared to put it into practice. In drawing upon previous research (Visser and Krosnick, 1998; Eaton et al., 2009), we believe that age is a predictor of attitudes towards innovative uses and their implementation, as the young population is more prone to challenge traditional roles and embrace change, compared to the older population. Finally, the responses obtained from the *Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits* allowed us to profile our sample of participants in terms of the level of exposure to the phenomenon under investigation. 90% of the participants claimed familiarity with the concept of inclusive language. Crucially, the suffix *-ə* was identified as the most popular strategy in pursuing a gender-fair language, despite the fact that its context of use has been mainly limited to the news industry, more generally the web. The last two questions present a metacognitive nature and offer a glimpse into how the suffix *-ə* is actually perceived and experienced by participants. Urged to read aloud a sentence containing the suffix *-ə* (i.e., *Lə candidatə è unə studentə dottorale del secondo anno in Scienze del linguaggio* ‘The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG is a.NB.SG second-year PhD student.NB.SG in Language Sciences’) in an attempt to assess the difficulty in producing the corresponding sound and accessing its meaning, most participants did not define it as an obstacle to reading; they found it quite difficult to pronounce, yet easy to interpret. In order to explore the actual feasibility of the suffix *-ə* in spoken language, however, an expansion of the reading aloud section is required, possibly accompanied by the simulation of a dialogue that makes use of such strategy.

In summary, the plural suffix *-ə* seems to have a better chance of reaching a wider pool of users, as participants performed better when compared to their scores with the singular suffix *-ə*. Having established that the masculine form cannot be unbiased, but remains intrinsically masculine-dominant, its substitution with neutral forms still poses problems, as they most likely tend to direct participants’ interpretation towards a masculine representation, precisely because in the absence of gender cues, one turns to the default value, i.e., the masculine. It seems thus that to be on the safe side, it is better to use the generic feminine or a dual option.

We should point out that some graphical aspects of our experimental design can be further improved, such as randomizing the order in which the images are presented, especially in *Task 2* counting 18 images per screen, so as to control for the potential effect exerted by the order of

presentation on participants' selection procedure. The spatial arrangement of the elements within an item should also be altered, in order to prevent participants from feeling bombarded by too many visuals and written text. In fact, the choice to merge all the information and instructions into one single screen was entirely dictated by the platform's features (i.e., *Gorilla*). Even reaction times should be measured only in relation to the image-selection operation, and not relative to all three steps (i.e., reading, rating, image-selection). This is also due to platform limitations.

As to the future extensions of this work, in addition to the expansion of the oral section already mentioned, increasing the number of items can help eliminate the risk of the suffix *-ə* not being effectively recognized or distinguished from *-e*. Finally, it is worth investigating how participants respond to other innovative characters, such as the asterisk or the “at” sign, by employing the same experimental procedure, which could also be adapted to other languages to test other novel proposals. The introduction of eye-tracker measurements would however be the real turning point in this type of research, as it would allow us to observe (i) where participants actually look while reading, (ii) how much longer the eye eventually lingers on these morphological innovations (i.e., fixations) and (iii) how often the eye goes back to them (i.e., backward saccades). This is left to future research.

Appendix

Appendix A

For each photo of the feminine, nonbinary and masculine categories the mean score, most frequent score and the assigned label are reported.

PHOTO 1 	Mean score: 2.29 Most frequent score: 2 33.7% of participants Photo rated as feminine	PHOTO 2 	Mean score: 2.18 Most frequent score: 1 39.3% of participants Photo rated as feminine
PHOTO 3 	Mean score: 1.63 Most frequent score: 1 60.7% of participants Photo rated as feminine	PHOTO 4 	Mean score: 2.31 Most frequent score: 2 31.5% of participants Photo rated as feminine

PHOTO 5 	Mean score: 2.72 Most frequent score: 3 25.8% of participants Photo rated as feminine	PHOTO 6 	Mean score: 1.44 Most frequent score: 1 69.7% of participants Photo rated as feminine
PHOTO 7 	Mean score: 2.16 Most frequent score: 1 37.1% of participants Photo rated as feminine	PHOTO 8 	Mean score: 1.94 Most frequent score: 1 44.9% of participants Photo rated as feminine

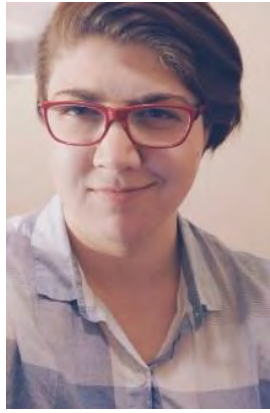
PHOTO 9 	Mean score: 4.04 Most frequent score: 3 27% of participants Photo rated as non-binary	PHOTO 10 	Mean score: 3.48 Most frequent score: 3 25.8% of participants Photo rated as non-binary
PHOTO 11 	Mean score: 4.09 Most frequent score: 4 27% of participants Photo rated as non-binary	PHOTO 12 	Mean score: 5.24 Most frequent score: 5 36% of participants Photo rated as non-binary
PHOTO 13 	Mean score: 5.46 Most frequent score: 5 30.3% of participants Photo rated as non-binary	PHOTO 14 	Mean score: 4.42 Most frequent score: 4 30.3% of participants Photo rated as non-binary

PHOTO 15 	Mean score: 5.38 Most frequent score: 5 32.6% of participants Photo rated as non-binary	PHOTO 16 	Mean score: 4.89 Most frequent score: 5 29.2% of participants Photo rated as non-binary
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PHOTO 17 	Mean score: 8.42 Most frequent score: 10 30.3% of participants Photo rated as masculine	PHOTO 18 	Mean score: 9.06 Most frequent score: 10 49.4% of participants Photo rated as masculine
PHOTO 19 	Mean score: 8.92 Most frequent score: 10 40.4% of participants Photo rated as masculine	PHOTO 20 	Mean score: 8.33 Most frequent score: 8 29.2% of participants Photo rated as masculine
PHOTO 21 	Mean score: 8.37 Most frequent score: 10 28.1% of participants Photo rated as masculine	PHOTO 22 	Mean score: 8.40 Most frequent score: 10 37.1% of participants Photo rated as masculine

PHOTO 23 	Mean score: 8.28 Most frequent score: 8 25.8% of participants Photo rated as masculine	PHOTO 24 	Mean score: 8.99 Most frequent score: 10 52.8% of participants Photo rated as masculine
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Appendix B

The backbone-scheme of each marked condition displayed in Box 6 in Section 3.3.2 adapted from Bradley and colleagues (2019a) was filled with the elements appearing in the Table.

1 stands for the first item of the masculine singular condition, 2 stands for the second item of the masculine singular condition. The same goes for the numbers that follow, as shown in the list below:

1=MSG1

2=MSG2

3=FSG1

4=FSG2

5=NBSG1

6=NBSG2

7=filler1

8=filler2

(Italian version)

Caratteristiche dei candidati:

Anno di iscrizione (2 o 3 sillabe)	1. Primo 2. Primo 3. Primo 4. Primo 5. Primo 6. Secondo 7. Primo 8. Secondo
Programma di dottorato (18 o 19 sillabe)	1. Filologia classica, italianistica e linguistica (19 sillabe) 2. Marketing per la tutela dei beni culturali in Italia (19 sillabe) 3. Scienze linguistiche - Curriculum Linguistica educativa (19 sillabe) 4. Lingue e letterature straniere - Curriculum europeo (19 sillabe) 5. Linguistica applicata all'ambito clinico infantile (19 sillabe) 6. Scienze del linguaggio - Percorso in Linguaggio e cognizione (18 sillabe) 7. Scienze del linguaggio - Curriculum Letterario editoriale (19 sillabe) 8. Lingue, culture, comunicazione e studi culturali (18 sillabe)
Voto di laurea magistrale	1. 110L 2. 101 3. 104

	4. 109 5. 108 6. 110 7. 98 8. 107
Media ponderata in magistrale	1. 29.2 2. 25.2 3. 26.3 4. 28.9 5. 28.7 6. 27.3 7. 23.9 8. 27.5
Disciplina di riferimento (15 sillabe)	1. Lingua, Letteratura, Filologia Latina 2. Antropologia culturale e artistica 3. Psicologia cognitiva e dello sviluppo 4. Lingua, Letteratura, Filologia Inglese 5. Linguistica per l'acquisizione patologica 6. Semantica e linguistica computazionale 7. Elementi di editoria informatica 8. Lingua e cultura dei paesi anglosassoni
Argomento di tesi dottorale (24 sillabe)	1. La traduzione di Omero in Virgilio: sondaggi dal primo libro dell'Eneide 2. Digitalizzazione delle visite museali: il caso degli Uffizi 3. Lo sviluppo della teoria della mente in contesti di deprivazione 4. La poetica femminista nel teatro americano del XXI secolo 5. L'insegnamento esplicito delle frasi relative in bambini con DPL 6. I frame semantici dei verbi di moto. Prime annotazioni su FrameNet 7. Dalla carta al digitale: gli effetti sulle piccole case editrici 8. Il processo di naturalizzazione degli Stati Uniti d'America
Numero di pubblicazioni	1. 3 2. 0 3. 1 4. 2 5. 3 6. 1 7. 0 8. 1
Numero corsi tenuti come tutor	1. 2 2. 3 3. 1 4. 2 5. 2

	6. 1 7. 1 8. 1
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(English version)

Candidates' characteristics:

Enrolment year	1. First 2. First 3. First 4. First 5. First 6. Second 7. First 8. Second
Doctoral programme	1. Classical Philology, Italian Studies and Linguistics 2. Cultural Heritage Marketing 3. Language Sciences - Educational Linguistics Curriculum 4. Foreign Languages and Literature - European Curriculum 5. Clinical Linguistics Applied to Language in Childhood 6. Language Sciences - Language and Cognition Curriculum 7. Language sciences - Literary Publishing Curriculum 8. Languages, Cultures, Communication and Cultural Studies
Passing grade	1. 110L 2. 101 3. 104 4. 109 5. 108 6. 110 7. 98 8. 107
Weighted average mark	1. 29.2 2. 25.2 3. 26.3 4. 28.9 5. 28.7 6. 27.3 7. 23.9 8. 27.5
Leading discipline (15 sillabe)	1. Latin Language, Literature and Philology 2. Anthropology of Art 3. Cognitive and Developmental Psychology

	4. English Language, Literature and Philology 5. Linguistics for Atypical Language Acquisition 6. Computational Linguistics and Semantics 7. Elements of Digital Publishing 8. Language and Culture of Anglo-Saxon Countries
Dissertation proposal (24 sillabe)	1. The translation of Homer in Virgil: surveys from the first book of the Aeneid 2. Digitization and virtual experience of museums: a case study of the Uffizi 3. The Development of the Theory of Mind in Cases of Environmental Deprivation 4. Feminist Poetics in the 21st Century American Theatre 5. The explicit teaching of relative clauses in children with DLD 6. Semantic frames of motion verbs. First annotations on FrameNet. 7. From paper to digital: the effects on small publishing houses 8. The Naturalization Procedures in the United States
Number of publications	1. 3 2. 0 3. 1 4. 2 5. 3 6. 1 7. 0 8. 1
Number of courses as a mentor	1. 2 2. 3 3. 1 4. 2 5. 2 6. 1 7. 1 8. 1

Appendix C

The items of the sentence-picture matching task (SPMT) and the questionnaires are presented here both in the Italian and the English version. Only the former, however, was used during the experiment.

For the purposes of this analysis, the English translation provided for each condition contains interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses signaling gender marking. The implemented tag system adheres to the Leipzig Glossing Rules. Translations were made to be as comparable as possible to the original items, though not entirely overlapping.

The Sentence-Picture Matching Task (SPMT)

SINGULAR ITEMS (Italian version)

Istruzioni:

Bando per l'affidamento di attività tutoriali

SELEZIONE PER L'AFFIDAMENTO DI ATTIVITÀ TUTORIALI, DIDATTICO-INTEGRATIVE, ATTIVITÀ PROPEDEUTICHE E DI RECUPERO

Il Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Culturali indice una selezione per titoli per l'affidamento a studenti capaci e meritevoli, iscritti ai corsi di dottorato, di attività tutoriali, didattico-integrative, propedeutiche e di recupero da svolgere nel primo semestre dell'a.a. 2022/2023. I tutor dovranno assicurare la propria disponibilità in tutto il periodo in cui si svolgerà il servizio. In particolare è possibile presentare domanda per le seguenti attività: linguistica generale, lingua inglese I, e linguistica applicata.

La selezione verrà svolta da una Commissione appositamente nominata dalla Direttrice del Dipartimento con successivo provvedimento. Per agevolare l'intervento della Commissione, la segreteria ha preparato dei riassunti dei materiali di candidatura degli studenti che hanno partecipato al concorso.

A partire da questi materiali, il tuo compito sarà quello di esprimere, per ciascun candidato, un giudizio in termini di:

1. Preparazione accademica (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente)
2. Esperienza pregressa (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente)
3. Idoneità al ruolo (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente)

Una volta conclusa questa prima fase di valutazione, ti verrà chiesto di selezionare l'immagine raffigurante il candidato descritto.

SINGULAR ITEMS (English version)

Instructions:

Mentoring Programme Call for Applications

Recruitment procedure for educational and remedial courses

The Department of Linguistics and Cultural Studies announces a merit based selection process for the assignment of mentoring educational and remedial activities. This is awarded to capable and deserving students enrolled in Ph.D. programs, to be carried out in the first semester of the academic year 2022/2023. Mentors must ensure their availability for the entire period during which the service will be carried out. In particular, applications may be submitted for the following activities: General Linguistics, English Language 1, and Applied Linguistics.

A special committee appointed by the dean at a later time is in charge of the selection procedure. To facilitate the committee's work, summaries of the application materials for each student were provided by the administrative office.

Your job is to read the summary and rate each student on various qualities, and to decide whether to recommend them for the position.

- 1) Academic Preparation (Poor Average Good Outstanding)
- 2) Previous Experience (Poor Average Good Outstanding)
- 3) Suitability for the Role (Strongly Discourage Discourage Recommend Strongly Recommend)

Once this initial assessment phase has been completed, you are asked to select the photo that matches the description of the candidate.

Condizione maschile singolare 1

Il candidato è uno studente dottorale del *primo* anno in *Filologia classica, italianistica e linguistica*. In magistrale, si è laureato con un voto di *110L*. La media ponderata del candidato, in magistrale, era di *29.2*. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento del candidato è *Lingua, Letteratura, Filologia Latina*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *La traduzione di Omero in Virgilio: sondaggi dal primo libro dell'Eneide*. Il candidato vanta 3 pubblicazioni nella disciplina di interesse ed esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico; nello specifico, è stato tutor di 2 corsi. Il candidato risulta regolarmente iscritto per l'anno accademico in corso.

Male singular condition 1

The.M.SG candidate.M.SG is a.M.SG first-year PhD student.M.SG in Classical Philology, Italian Studies and Linguistics. [He]²² graduated.M.SG from the MA programme with 110 cum laude. The weighted average mark of the.M.SG candidate.M.SG during the master was 29.2. The leading discipline of the.M.SG candidate.M.SG in the academic arena is Latin Language, Literature and Philology. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *The translation of Homer in Virgil: surveys from the first book of the Aeneid*. The.M.SG candidate.M.SG has 3 publications in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, [he] mentored.M.SG in two courses. The.M.SG candidate.M.SG is duly enrolled.M.SG in the current academic year.

Translation without interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses:

The candidate is a first-year PhD student in Classical Philology, Italian Studies and Linguistics. He graduated from the MA programme with 110 cum laude. The weighted average mark of the candidate during the master was 29.2. The leading discipline of the candidate in the academic arena is Latin Language, Literature and Philology. The topic of his doctoral dissertation is *The translation of Homer in Virgil: surveys from the first book of the Aeneid*. The candidate has 3 publications in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, he mentored in two courses. The candidate is duly enrolled in the current academic year.

Condizione maschile singolare 2

Il candidato è uno studente dottorale del *primo* anno in *Marketing per la tutela dei beni culturali in Italia*. In magistrale, si è laureato con un voto di *101*. La media ponderata del candidato, in magistrale, era di 25.2. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento del candidato è *Antropologia culturale e artistica*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà: *Digitalizzazione delle visite museali: il caso degli Uffizi*. Il candidato *non* vanta pubblicazioni nella disciplina di interesse ma esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico; nello specifico, è stato tutor di 3 corsi. Il candidato risulta regolarmente iscritto per l'anno accademico in corso.

Male singular condition 2

The.M.SG candidate.M.SG is a.M.SG first-year PhD student in Cultural Heritage Marketing. [He] graduated.M.SG from the MA programme with 101. The weighted average mark of the.M.SG candidate.M.SG during the master was 25.2. The leading discipline of the.M.SG candidate.M.SG in the academic arena is Anthropology of Art. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *Digitization and virtual experience of museums: a case study of the Uffizi*. The.M.SG candidate.M.SG has no publications in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, [he] mentored.M.SG in three courses. The.M.SG candidate.M.SG is duly enrolled.M.SG in the current academic year.

²² Subjects placed within square brackets are *pro* given that Italian is a pro-drop language.

Condizione femminile singolare 1

La candidata è una studentessa dottorale del *primo* anno in *Scienze linguistiche - Curriculum Linguistica educativa*. In magistrale, si è laureata con un voto di *104*. La media ponderata della candidata, in magistrale, era di *26.3*. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento della candidata è *Psicologia cognitiva e dello sviluppo*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *Lo sviluppo della teoria della mente in contesti di privazione*. La candidata vanta *1* pubblicazione nella disciplina di interesse ed esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico; nello specifico, è stata tutor di *1* corso. La candidata risulta regolarmente iscritta per l'anno accademico in corso.

Female singular condition 1

The.F.SG candidate.F.SG is a.F.SG first-year PhD student.F.SG in Language Sciences - Educational Linguistics Curriculum. [She] graduated.F.SG from the MA programme with *104*. The weighted average mark of the.F.SG candidate.F.SG during the master was *26.3*. The leading discipline of the.F.SG candidate.F.SG in the academic arena is Cognitive and Developmental Psychology. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *The Development of the Theory of Mind in Cases of Environmental Deprivation*. The.F.SG candidate.F.SG has *1* publication in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, [she] mentored.F.SG in one course. The.F.SG candidate.F.SG is duly enrolled.F.SG in the current academic year.

Condizione femminile singolare 2

La candidata è una studentessa dottorale del *primo* anno in *Lingue e letterature straniere - Curriculum europeo*. In magistrale, si è laureata con un voto di *109*. La media ponderata della candidata, in magistrale, era di *28.9*. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento della candidata è *Lingua, Letteratura, Filologia Inglese*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *La poetica femminista nel teatro americano del XXI secolo*. La candidata vanta *2* pubblicazioni nella disciplina di interesse ed esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico; nello specifico, è stata tutor di *2* corsi. La candidata risulta regolarmente iscritta per l'anno accademico in corso.

Female singular condition 2

The.F.SG candidate.F.SG is a.F.SG first-year PhD student.F.SG in Foreign Languages and Literature - European Curriculum. [She] graduated.F.SG from the MA programme with *109*. The weighted average mark of the.F.SG candidate.F.SG during the master was *28.9*. The leading discipline of the.F.SG candidate.F.SG in the academic arena is English Language, Literature and Philology. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *Feminist Poetics in the 21st Century American Theatre*. The.F.SG candidate.F.SG has *2* publications in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, [she] mentored.F.SG in two courses. The.F.SG candidate.F.SG is duly enrolled.F.SG in the current academic year.

Condizione non binary singolare 1

La candidate è una studenta dottorale del *primo* anno in *Linguistica applicata all'ambito clinico infantile*. In magistrale, si è laureata con un voto di *108*. La media ponderata della candidate, in magistrale, era di *28.7*. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento della candidate è *Linguistica per l'acquisizione patologica*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *L'insegnamento esplicito delle frasi relative in bambini con DPL*. La candidate vanta *3* pubblicazioni nella disciplina di interesse ed esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico; nello specifico, è stata tutor di *2* corsi. La candidate risulta regolarmente iscritta per l'anno accademico in corso.

Nonbinary singular condition 1

The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG is a.NB.SG first-year PhD student.NB.SG in Clinical Linguistics Applied to Language in Childhood. [They] graduated.NB.SG from the MA programme with *108*. The weighted average mark of the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG during the master was *28.7*. The leading discipline of the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG in the academic arena is Linguistics for Atypical Language Acquisition. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *The explicit teaching of relative clauses in children with DLD*. The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG has *3* publications in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, [they] mentored.NB.SG in two courses. The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG is duly enrolled.NB.SG in the current academic year.

Condizione non binary singolare 2

La candidate è una studenta dottorale del *secondo* anno in *Scienze del linguaggio - Percorso in Linguaggio e cognizione*. In magistrale, si è laureata con un voto di *110*. La media ponderata della candidate, in magistrale, era di *27.3*. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento della candidate è *Semantica e linguistica computazionale*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *I frame semantici dei verbi di moto. Prime annotazioni su FrameNet*. La candidate vanta *1* pubblicazione nella disciplina di interesse ed esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico; nello specifico, è stata tutor di *1* corso. La candidate risulta regolarmente iscritta per l'anno accademico in corso.

Nonbinary singular condition 2

The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG is a.NB.SG second-year PhD student.NB.SG in Language Sciences - Language and Cognition Curriculum. [They] graduated.NB.SG from the MA programme with *110*. The weighted average mark of the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG during the master was *27.3*. The leading discipline of the.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG in the academic arena is Computational Linguistics and Semantics. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *Semantic frames of motion verbs. First annotations on FrameNet*. The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG has *1* publication in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor, specifically, [they] mentored.NB.SG in one course. The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG is duly enrolled.NB.SG in the current academic year.

Filler 1

L'aspirante tutor frequenta il *primo* anno di dottorato in *Scienze del linguaggio - Curriculum Letterario editoriale*. Ha conseguito la laurea magistrale con un voto di 98. La media ponderata dell'aspirante tutor era di 23.9. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento dell'aspirante tutor è *Elementi di editoria informatica*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *Dalla carta al digitale: gli effetti sulle piccole case editrici*. L'aspirante tutor *non* vanta pubblicazioni nella disciplina di interesse ma esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico di *I* corso.

L'iscrizione all'anno accademico in corso risulta regolarmente registrata.

Filler 1 (EN)

The applicant for the position of mentor is carrying out the first year of doctoral research in Language sciences - Literary Publishing Curriculum. Having graduated from the MA programme with 98, the weighted average mark of the applicant during the master was 23.9, whose leading discipline in the academic arena is Elements of Digital Publishing. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *From paper to digital: the effects on small publishing houses*. The applicant has no publications in the discipline of interest but past experience as a specialized mentor for 1 course. Enrollment in the current academic year appears to be duly registered.

Filler 2

L'aspirante tutor frequenta il *secondo* anno di dottorato in *Lingue, culture, comunicazione e studi culturali*. Ha conseguito la laurea magistrale con un voto di 107. La media ponderata dell'aspirante tutor era di 27.5. In ambito accademico, la disciplina di riferimento dell'aspirante tutor è *Lingua e cultura dei paesi anglosassoni*. Il suo argomento di tesi dottorale sarà *Il processo di naturalizzazione degli Stati Uniti d'America*. L'aspirante tutor vanta *1* pubblicazione nella disciplina di interesse ed esperienza pregressa come tutor specialistico di *I* corso.

L'iscrizione all'anno accademico in corso risulta regolarmente registrata.

Filler 2 (EN)

The applicant for the position of mentor is carrying out the second year of doctoral research in Languages, Cultures, Communication and Cultural Studies. Having graduated from the MA programme with 107, the weighted average mark of the applicant during the master was 27.5, whose leading discipline in the academic arena is Language and Culture of Anglo-Saxon Countries. The topic of the doctoral dissertation is *The Naturalization Procedures in the United States*. The applicant has 1 publication in the discipline of interest and past experience as a specialized mentor for 1 course. Enrollment in the current academic year appears to be duly registered.

PLURAL ITEMS (Italian version)

Istruzioni:

Bando per il finanziamento di progetti di ricerca nel campo di Scienze della Vita

*Con il presente bando si intende promuovere il potenziamento della ricerca e dell'innovazione nel settore di Scienze della Vita attraverso il sostegno a progetti di ricerca che **contribuiscono alla creazione di condizioni di benessere duraturo e sostenibile in termini di salute e crescita per gli esseri umani e l'ambiente**. A tale scopo, il programma si prefigge di finanziare progetti che per complessità e natura richiedono la collaborazione di più unità di ricerca. La costituzione del gruppo di ricerca è dunque flessibile, purché veda la partecipazione di più unità provenienti dallo stesso ateneo: LS - Scienze della vita.*

La selezione verrà svolta da una Commissione appositamente nominata che si pronuncerà a partire dai seguenti materiali di candidatura preparati dalla segreteria. Il tuo compito sarà quello di visionarli ed esprimere, per ciascun progetto, una valutazione sulla base dei tre parametri proposti:

1. pertinenza della proposta progettuale rispetto all'obiettivo in grassetto (cioè quanto questa proposta risponde all'obiettivo) (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente)
2. originalità e impatto sociale del progetto di ricerca (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente);
3. qualità del profilo scientifico del gruppo di ricerca (basandoti su bandi vinti, esperienza, pubblicazioni) (scarsa, media, buona, eccellente)

Una volta terminata questa prima fase, ti si chiede di selezionare l'immagine che pensi possa raffigurare il gruppo di ricerca descritto.

PLURAL ITEMS (English version)

Instructions:

Call for proposals:

Grant funding opportunities for research projects in the field of Life Sciences

*The purpose of this call is to promote research and foster innovation in the field of Life Sciences by supporting research projects that **contribute to creating conditions of lasting and sustainable well-being in terms of health and growth for both human beings and the environment**. To this end, the programme aims at funding projects that by their complexity and nature require the collaboration of multiple research units. Group composition is therefore flexible, as long as it sees the participation of more than one unit from the same university: LS - Life Sciences.*

A specially appointed committee is in charge of the selection procedure, whose work is based on the following application materials that were provided by the administrative office. Your job is to go through them, one by one, and rate each project on the basis of the three proposed parameters:

1. Relevance of the project proposal to the objective in bold (i.e. how well this proposal meets the objective) (Poor Average Good Outstanding);
2. Originality and social impact of the research project (Poor Average Good Outstanding);
3. Quality of the research team's scientific profile (based on previous grants, experience, publications) (Poor Average Good Outstanding);

Once this initial assessment phase has been completed, you are asked to select the photo that matches the described research team.

Condizione maschile plurale 1

I candidati sono *ricercatori a tempo determinato di tipo A*. Negli anni precedenti, sono già risultati vincitori di 1 bando. I candidati propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Analisi genetica di persone con Corea di Huntington*; la cui finalità è di *proporre nuove strategie farmacologiche e cellulari per rallentarne il decorso o bloccarne l'insorgenza*. I candidati saranno impegnati nell'attività di ricerca per un periodo di 24 mesi, e il progetto prevede la collaborazione con l'ateneo di *Santa Barbara, California*. Tutti i candidati si sono dedicati a questo settore di ricerca per 5 anni. Sono autori di 5 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Male plural condition 1

The.M.PL candidates.M.PL are fixed-term type A researchers.M.PL. In previous years, [they] were announced.M.PL winners.M.PL of a funding programme. The.M.PL candidates.M.PL are proposing the following research project: *Genetic testing for Huntington's chorea*; the aim of which is to come up with new pharmacological and cellular strategies to slow down its course or block its onset. The.M.PL candidates.M.PL will be engaged.M.PL in the research activity for a period of 24 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of Santa Barbara, California.

All.M.PL (the.M.PL) candidates.M.PL have been committed.M.PL to this field of research for 5 years. [They] have authored.M.PL 5 scientific publications on the subject.

Translation without interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glosses:

The candidates are fixed-term type A researchers. In previous years, [they] were announced winners of a funding programme. The candidates are proposing the following research project: *Genetic testing for Huntington's chorea*; the aim of which is to come up with new pharmacological and cellular strategies to slow down its course or block its onset. The candidates will be engaged in the research activity for a period of 24 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of Santa Barbara, California. All (the) candidates have been committed to this field of research for 5 years. [They] have authored 5 scientific publications on the subject.

Condizione maschile plurale 2

I candidati sono *assegnisti di ricerca*. Negli anni precedenti, *non* sono risultati vincitori di bandi. I candidati propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Ricerca in ambito tropicale di modelli innovativi per gli allevamenti*, la cui finalità è di *progettare modelli sostenibili di produzione, gestione zootecnica e igienico-sanitaria degli animali*. I candidati saranno impegnati nell'attività di ricerca per un periodo di 12 mesi, e il progetto prevede la collaborazione con l'ateneo di *Kuala Lumpur, Malesia*.

Tutti i candidati si sono dedicati a questo settore di ricerca per 3 anni. Sono autori di 2 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Male plural condition 2

The.M.PL candidates.M.PL are research fellows.M.PL. In previous years, [they] were never announced.M.PL winners.M.PL of a funding programme. The.M.PL candidates.M.PL are proposing the following research project: *Research on innovative tropical livestock production*; the aim of which is to design sustainable livestock production systems, by guaranteeing their management and animal hygiene. The.M.PL candidates.M.PL will be engaged.M.PL in the research activity for a period of 12 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia..

All.M.PL (the.M.PL) candidates.M.PL have been committed.M.PL to this field of research for 3 years. [They] have authored.M.PL 2 scientific publications on the subject.

Condizione femminile plurale 1

Le candidate sono *professoressse ordinarie*. Negli anni precedenti, sono già risultate vincitrici di 2 bandi. Le candidate propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Studio delle interazioni tra specie e uomo-ambiente*, la cui finalità è di *studiare le risposte delle comunità biologiche ai cambiamenti globali a tutela della loro sopravvivenza e del mantenimento della biodiversità*. Le candidate saranno impegnate nell'attività di ricerca per un periodo di 24 mesi, e il progetto prevede la collaborazione con l'ateneo di *Lima, Perù*.

Tutte le candidate si sono dedicate a questo settore di ricerca per 7 anni. Sono autrici di 6 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Female plural condition 1

The.F.PL candidates.F.PL are full.F.PL professors.F.PL. In previous years, [they] were announced.F.PL winners.F.PL of two funding programmes. The.F.PL candidates.F.PL are proposing the following research project: *The study of organism-environment and human-environment interactions*; the aim of which is to study the responses of biological communities to global changes for the safeguard of biodiversity conservation. The.F.PL candidates.F.PL will be engaged.F.PL in the research activity for a period of 24 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of Lima, Peru.

All.F.PL (the.F.PL) candidates.F.PL have been committed.F.PL to this field of research for 7 years. [They] have authored.F.PL 6 scientific publications on the subject.

Condizione femminile plurale 2

Le candidate sono *professoressse associate*. Negli anni precedenti, sono già risultate vincitrici di 1 bando. Le candidate propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Ricerca sui tumori dell'apparato digerente*, la cui finalità è di *sviluppare strategie innovative in ambito diagnostico e terapeutico per migliorare la preparazione e conduzione di interventi chirurgici per cancro*. Le candidate saranno impegnate nell'attività di ricerca per un periodo di 24 mesi, e il progetto prevede la collaborazione con l'ateneo di Oslo, Norvegia.

Tutte le candidate si sono dedicate a questo settore di ricerca per 7 anni. Sono autrici di 7 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Female plural condition 2

The.F.PL candidates.F.PL are associate professors.F.PL. In previous years, [they] were announced.F.PL winners.F.PL of one funding programme. The.F.PL candidates.F.PL are proposing the following research project: *Digestive cancer research*; the aim of which is to develop novel strategies for cancer treatment for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes. The.F.PL candidates.F.PL will be engaged.F.PL in the research activity for a period of 24 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of Oslo, Norway.

All.F.PL (the.F.PL) candidates.F.PL have been committed.F.PL to this field of research for 7 years. [They] have authored.F.PL 7 scientific publications on the subject.

Condizione non binary plurale 1

Lə candidatə sono *ricercatorə post doc*. Negli anni precedenti, *non* sono risultatə vincitorə di bandi. Lə candidatə propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Analisi economica del consumatore sul piano comportamentale*, la cui finalità è di *potenziare l'etichettatura dei prodotti alimentari, nonché i consumi sostenibili e salutistici, contro l'obesità*. Lə candidatə saranno impegnatə nell'attività di ricerca per un periodo di 12 mesi, e il progetto prevede la collaborazione con l'ateneo di Londra, Regno Unito.

Tuttə lə candidatə si sono dedicatə a questo settore di ricerca per 3 anni. Sono autorə di 2 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Nonbinary plural condition 1

The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL are postdoctoral researchers.NB.PL. In previous years, [they] were never announced.NB.PL winners.NB.PL of a funding programme. The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL are proposing the following research project: *Consumer Behavior Analysis*; the aim of which is to enhance food labeling, as well as sustainable and healthy consumption, in order to fight obesity. The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL will be engaged.NB.PL in the research activity for a period of 12 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of London, Great Britain.

All.NB.PL (the.NB.PL) candidates.NB.PL have been committed.NB.PL to this field of research for 3 years. [They] have authored.NB.PL 2 scientific publications on the subject.

Condizione non binary plurale 2

Le candidate sono *professoræ ordinariæ*. Negli anni precedenti, sono già risultate vincitrici di 2 bandi. Le candidate propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Studio di psicologia clinica per il sostegno psicologico di pazienti con diagnosi di malattie rare*, la cui finalità è di *combattere le difficoltà psico-emotive di adattamento a carico di famiglie e pazienti*. Le candidate saranno impegnate nell'attività di ricerca per un periodo di 18 mesi, e il progetto prevede la collaborazione con l'ateneo di *Lisbona, Portogallo*.

Tutte le candidate si sono dedicate a questo settore di ricerca per 7 anni. Sono autrici di 6 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Nonbinary plural condition 2

The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL are full.NB.PL professors.NB.PL. In previous years, [they] were announced.NB.PL winners.NB.PL of two funding programmes. The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL are proposing the following research project: *Exploring Psychological Support at Diagnosis of a Rare Disease*; the aim of which is to manage how to cope with psycho-emotional adjustment difficulties faced by families and patients. The.NB.PL candidates.NB.PL will be engaged.NB.PL in the research activity for a period of 18 months, and the project involves collaboration with the University of Lisbon, Portugal. All.NB.PL (the.NB.PL) candidates.NB.PL have been committed.NB.PL to this field of research for 7 years. [They] have authored.NB.PL 6 scientific publications on the subject.

Filler 1

I membri del gruppo di ricerca *beneficiano di un assegno di ricerca*. Negli anni precedenti, *non* hanno vinto alcun bando. Tali membri propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Studio di nuovi alimenti ed ingredienti alimentari*, la cui finalità è di *promuovere la salute attraverso il miglioramento dell'alimentazione e dello stile di vita*. L'attività di raccolta dati di ricerca richiederà un impegno complessivo pari a un periodo di 12 mesi, e per il loro progetto è prevista la collaborazione con l'ateneo di *Amsterdam, Paesi Bassi*. Tutti i membri si sono dedicati a questo settore di ricerca per 3 anni e vantano un numero di 4 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Filler 1 (EN)

Members of the research team are currently conducting research by means of a research grant. They have never won a funding programme before. Members are proposing the following research project: *Study of new foods and new ingredients*, the aim of which is to promote health through improved nutrition and lifestyle. The research activity of data collection will require a total commitment of 12 months. The project involves collaboration with the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. All members have been working in this field of research for 3 years and count 4 scientific publications on the topic.

Filler 2

I membri del gruppo di ricerca *beneficiano di un assegno di ricerca*. Negli anni precedenti, hanno vinto 3 bandi. Tali membri propongono il seguente progetto di ricerca: *Studio degli impatti dei cambiamenti*

climatici, la cui finalità è di *descrivere la geodiversità e monitorare l'adattamento ai cambiamenti del clima*. L'attività di raccolta dati di ricerca richiederà un impegno complessivo pari a un periodo di 18 mesi, e per il loro progetto è prevista la collaborazione con l'ateneo di *Bordeaux, Francia*.

Tutti i membri si sono dedicati a questo settore di ricerca per 5 anni e vantano un numero di 5 pubblicazioni scientifiche sull'argomento.

Filler 2 (EN)

Members of the research team are currently conducting research by means of a research grant. In previous years, [they] won three funding programmes. Members are proposing the following research project: *Study of climate-change impacts*, the aim of which is to describe geodiversity and monitor adaptation to climate change. The research activity of data collection will require a total commitment of 18 months. The project involves collaboration with the University of Bordeaux, France. All members have been working in this field of research for 5 years and count 5 scientific publications on the topic.

Sexist/Inclusive Language Use in Italian (SILUI)

(Italian version)

Questionario sull'uso sessista/inclusivo della lingua italiana

Questionario adattato da Parks & Robertson (2000)

Sezione I: Convinzioni personali sull'uso sessista della lingua italiana

Sezione II: Riconoscere la lingua sessista

Sezione III: Apertura all'uso del linguaggio inclusivo

Definizione guida: *L'uso sessista della lingua concerne parole, frasi ed espressioni che tracciano distinzioni superflue tra maschi e femmine o che escludono, ridicolizzano o sminuiscono uno dei generi e ignorano completamente la possibilità che ci siano persone che non si identificano nella distinzione binaria del genere (non binary).*

Sezione I: Convinzioni personali sull'uso sessista della lingua italiana

Leggi la definizione nel riquadro e indica quanto ti trovi d'accordo (1 per nulla d'accordo - 5 completamente d'accordo) con le seguenti frasi:

1. Il fatto che Giorgia Meloni si faccia chiamare “il signor presidente” è da considerarsi una scelta sessista.
2. Non dovremmo cambiare il modo in cui la lingua italiana è stata tradizionalmente scritta e parlata.
3. Il linguaggio inclusivo è una questione di poco conto.
4. Il maschile plurale non è davvero inclusivo, ma dovremmo comunque continuare a usarlo per riferirci a gruppi misti di persone (es. maschi, femmine e persone non binary) perché risulta più immediato.
5. Se una persona non si identifica nella distinzione binaria del genere è giusto che ci si riferisca a quella persona con *ə*: per es. *studentə*.
6. La lingua italiana non verrà mai cambiata perché è troppo radicata nella cultura.
7. L'eliminazione dell'uso sessista della lingua italiana è un obiettivo importante.
8. Dal momento che le norme editoriali impongono agli autori di articoli di giornale di evitare l'uso di insulti di carattere etnico-razziale dovrebbero imporre un divieto anche sull'uso sessista della lingua.
9. L'uso sessista della lingua italiana ha a che fare con il trattamento sessista delle persone nella società italiana.
10. Se in un gruppo di persone ci sono maschi, femmine e persone non binary, è giusto che ci si riferisca a loro con *ə*: per es. non *gli studenti* ma *lə studentə*.
11. Tutti quei professori che pretendono che i loro studenti evitino un uso sessista della lingua italiana non fanno altro che imporre le loro idee politiche sulla classe.

12. Anche se il cambiamento è difficile, dovremmo comunque cercare di eliminare l'uso sessista della lingua italiana.
13. E' giusto che sulla carta d'identità dei minori restino le diciture "madre" e "padre" e saltino le qualifiche neutre "genitore 1" e "genitore 2".

Sezione II: Riconoscere la lingua sessista

Partendo dalla stessa definizione, indica se gli elementi in grassetto sono sessisti (1 per nulla sessista - 5 chiaramente sessista).

14. Marta è una donna transgender. E' nato nel 1986.
15. Lucia non si identifica nella distinzione binaria del genere. Lucia è cresciuta a Modena.
16. Serena ha superato con successo l'abilitazione all'avvocatura. Adesso Serena è un avvocato.
17. Le maestre delle scuole elementari tendono a dare tanto spazio alle attività ludiche.

Sezione III: Apertura all'uso del linguaggio inclusivo

Indica quanto saresti disponibile (1 per nulla disponibile - 5 molto disponibile) ad accogliere le pratiche descritte a seguire:

18. Quanto saresti disponibile a iniziare una mail con: *cari studenti, care studentesse e carə studentə* se sai che tra i destinatari sono presenti maschi, femmine e persone che non si identificano nella distinzione binaria del genere?
19. Quanto saresti disponibile a iniziare una mail con: *carə studentə* se sai che tra i destinatari sono presenti maschi, femmine e persone che non si identificano nella distinzione binaria del genere?
20. Quanto saresti disponibile a utilizzare il termine "candidatə" al posto di "candidato" quando il referente non si identifica nella distinzione binaria del genere?

(English version)

Sexist/Inclusive Language Use in Italian (SILUI)

Survey adapted from Parks & Robertson (2000)

Section I: Beliefs About the Sexist Use of the Italian Language

Section II: Recognition of Sexist Language

Section III: Willingness to Use Inclusive Language

Please use the following definition in completing this questionnaire: Sexist language includes words, phrases, and expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between females and males or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender and completely ignore the possibility that there are people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender (nonbinary).

Section I: Beliefs About the Sexist Use of the Italian Language

Read the definition in the box and indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) how much you agree with the following expressions:

1. Giorgia Meloni goes by “Mr President”. That is to be considered a sexist choice.
2. Non dovremmo cambiare il modo in cui la lingua italiana è stata tradizionalmente scritta e parlata. We should not change the way the Italian language has traditionally been written and spoken.
3. Inclusive language is a trivial matter.
4. The masculine plural is not really inclusive, still we should continue to use it to refer to mixed groups of people (e.g., males, females, and nonbinary people) because it is more immediate.
5. When a person does not identify with the binary distinction of gender, it is only fair that we refer to that person with *ə*: e.g., student $\text{\textcircled{a}}$.
6. The Italian language will never be changed because it is too deeply ingrained in the culture.
7. The elimination of the sexist use of the Italian language is an important goal.
8. Most publication guidelines require newspaper writers to avoid using ethnic and racial slurs. So, these guidelines should also require writers to avoid the sexist use of language.
9. The sexist use of the Italian language is related to sexist treatment of people in the Italian society.
10. If there are males, females, and non-binary people in a group of people, it is appropriate to refer to them with *ə*: e.g., not the.M.PL students.M.PL but l $\text{\textcircled{a}}$.NB.PL student $\text{\textcircled{a}}$.NB.PL.
11. Teachers who require students to use Italian nonsexist language are unfairly forcing their political views upon their students.
12. Although change is difficult, we still should try to eliminate the sexist use of the Italian language.
13. It is only fair that "mother" and "father" remain on children's ID cards blowing up the neutral qualifiers "parent 1" and "parent 2".

Section II: Recognition of Sexist Language

Starting with the same definition, indicate whether the items in bold are sexist (1 not at all sexist - 5 clearly sexist).

14. Marta is a trans woman born.M.SG in 1986.
15. Lucia does not identify with the binary distinction of gender. Lucia was raised.F.SG in Modena.
16. Serena passed the bar exam. Serena is now an.M.SG attorney.M.SG.
17. Elementary school teachers.F.PL tend to give so much space to recreational activities.

Section III: Willingness to Use Inclusive Language

Indicate how willing you are (1 very unwilling - 5 very willing) to accommodate the practices described below:

18. How willing are you to start an email with *cari studenti* 'dear.M.PL students.M.PL', *care studentesse* 'dear.F.PL students.F.PL' and *carə studentə* 'dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL' knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender?
19. How willing are you to start an email with *carə studentə* 'dear.NB.PL students.NB.PL' knowing that among the recipients are males, females, and people who do not identify with the binary distinction of gender?
20. How willing are you to use the term *candidatə* 'candidate.NB.SG' instead of *candidato* 'candidate.M.SG' when the referent does not identify with the binary distinction of gender?

Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits

(Italian version)

Questionario sulle preferenze e le abitudini di lettura

Survey adapted from Cerutti (2023)

1. Per quali motivi leggi? Puoi indicare una o due opzioni.

- ☐ Per studio / Per lavoro
- ☐ Per svago, nel tempo libero

2. Con che frequenza leggi le seguenti tipologie di testo?

1. Libri di testo scolastici / manuali universitari	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
2. Letteratura scientifica (pubblicazioni/ articoli scientifici)	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
3. Documentazione tecnica (circolari, normative, manuali d'uso...)	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
4. Narrativa (romanzi, racconti...)	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
5. Saggistica	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
6. Stampa periodica (quotidiani, riviste...)	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
7. Informazioni online (argomenti vari: attualità, cucina, sport, cultura, viaggi, moda...)	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
8. Altro (specificare):	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)

3. Quanto tempo dedichi alla lettura, in media, in un giorno?

- ☐ Meno di un'ora
- ☐ Da una a due ore
- ☐ Da due a tre ore
- ☐ Da tre a quattro ore
- ☐ Più di quattro ore

4. Quanti libri hai letto, nel tempo libero, nell'ultimo anno?

5. Con che frequenza leggi su queste tipologie di supporto?

Carta stampata	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
Smartphone	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
Computer	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
Tablet	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
E-reader	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)

6. In generale, preferisci leggere:

- ☐ su supporto cartaceo
- ☐ su supporto digitale
- ☐ non ho preferenze

7. Quanto sei d'accordo con queste affermazioni? (scegli un'opzione da 1 = per niente d'accordo a 5= molto d'accordo)

Leggere è un'attività piacevole	per niente d'accordo (1)	molto d'accordo (5)
Leggere è un'attività noiosa	per niente d'accordo (1)	molto d'accordo (5)
Leggere è utile	per niente d'accordo (1)	molto d'accordo (5)
Leggere è faticoso	per niente d'accordo (1)	molto d'accordo (5)

8. “Un lettore esperto ha la capacità di integrare le informazioni di un testo con ciò che già conosce.”
In base a questa affermazione, che tipo di lettore ti consideri?

poco esperto molto esperto

1 2 3 4 5

9. Prima di prendere parte a questo esperimento, avevi già sentito parlare di linguaggio inclusivo?
sì / no

10. Hai già incontrato le seguenti strategie di linguaggio inclusivo nelle tue precedenti letture?

Coordinazione di termini femminili e maschili (<i>splitting</i>)	<i>Salve a tutte e a tutti</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
Nomi collettivi (<i>oscuramento</i>)	<i>Salve a tutte le persone qui presenti</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)
“*” come terminazione finale	<i>Salve a tutt*</i>	mai (1)	molto spesso (5)

14. Prova a leggere questa frase ad alta voce: *Lǽ candidatǽ è unǽ studentǽ dottorale del secondo anno in Scienze del linguaggio - Percorso in Linguaggio e cognizione*. Ti risulta difficile da pronunciare per via dell'inserimento del simbolo "ǽ"? Ti è chiaro a cosa si riferisce?

- ☐ è difficile da pronunciare ed è difficile capire il suo significato quando leggo
- ☐ è difficile da pronunciare, ma è facile capire il suo significato quando leggo
- ☐ è facile da pronunciare, ma è difficile capire il suo significato quando leggo
- ☐ è facile da pronunciare ed è facile capire il suo significato quando leggo

Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits

(English version)

Questionnaire on Reading Preferences and Habits

Survey adapted from Cerutti (2023)

1. Why do you read?

- ☐ For studying purposes / for work
- ☐ For leisure, in my spare time

2. How often do you read the following types of text?

1. School / university textbooks	never (1)	very often (5)
2. Scientific literature (academic papers)	never (1)	very often (5)
3. Technical documentation (regulations and regulatory circulars, how-to guides...)	never (1)	very often (5)
4. Fiction (novels, tales...)	never (1)	very often (5)
5. Nonfiction	never (1)	very often (5)
6. Periodical press (newspaper, magazine...)	never (1)	very often (5)
7. Online information (various topics: current affairs, cooking, sports, culture, travel, fashion...)	never (1)	very often (5)
8. Other (please specify):	never (1)	very often (5)

3. How much time do you spend reading each day?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ 1-2 hours
- ☐ 2-3 hours
- ☐ 3-4 hours
- ☐ More than 4 hours

4. How many books have you read this year in your spare time?

5. How often do you read from the following media?

Print media	never (1)	very often (5)
Smartphone	never (1)	very often (5)
Computer	never (1)	very often (5)
Tablet	never (1)	very often (5)
E-reader	never (1)	very often (5)

6. In general, you would rather read:

- o on paper
- o on screen
- o I don't have a preference

7. Indicate on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) how much you agree with the following statements:

Reading is an enjoyable activity	strongly disagree (1)	strongly agree (5)
Reading is a boring activity	strongly disagree (1)	strongly agree (5)
Reading is important	strongly disagree (1)	strongly agree (5)
Reading is hard	strongly disagree (1)	strongly agree (5)

8. "An expert reader has the ability to integrate information from a text with what they already know." Based on this statement, what kind of reader do you consider yourself to be?

inexperienced very experienced

1 2 3 4 5

9. Have you ever heard of inclusive language before taking part in this experiment?
yes / no

10. Have you ever come across the following strategies of inclusive language in your previous readings?

Coordination of feminine and masculine terms (<i>splitting</i>)	<i>Hello everyone.F.PL and everyone.M.PL</i>	never (1)	very often (5)
Collective nouns (<i>oscuramento</i>)	<i>Hello to all the people here</i>	never (1)	very often (5)
“*” as the word ending	<i>Hello everyon*</i>	never (1)	very often (5)

14. Try reading this sentence aloud: *The.NB.SG candidate.NB.SG is a.NB.SG second-year PhD student.NB.SG in Language Sciences - Language and Cognition Curriculum*. Do you find it difficult to pronounce because of the inclusion of the "ǃ" symbol? Do you know what it refers to?

- ☐ It is difficult to pronounce and it is difficult to understand its meaning as I read
- ☐ It is difficult to pronounce, but it is easy to understand its meaning as I read
- ☐ It is easy to pronounce, but it is difficult to understand its meaning as I read
- ☐ It is easy to pronounce and it is easy to understand its meaning as I read

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