



**Universiteit
Leiden**

How does gender-inclusive language affect language attitudes? A cross-linguistic experimental study on French and German

Applicants

Eligible proposals must have at least two applicants from Humanities, preferably with an interdisciplinary approach.

| Supervisor Name | Discipline |
|--------------------|--|
| Dr Naomi Truan | Assistant Professor in German Sociolinguistics |
| Dr Benjamin Storme | Assistant Professor in French Linguistics |

Project description

Provide a brief description of the project (max. 300 words)

Gender-inclusive language debates are actively ongoing. While research has addressed the effect of gender-inclusive language on mental representations and readability (Burnett & Pozniak 2021, Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser 2016, Gygax & Gesto 2007), the broader impact on language attitudes remains unexplored.

Language attitudes are evaluative reactions towards language practices. This includes the inferences that one draws about the social/political group membership of someone, based on the way they speak or write (Dragojevic 2017). In this project, we ask two interrelated questions:

- (i) Does gender-inclusive language impact how one perceives the political orientation of the speaker/writer (progressive vs conservative)?
- (ii) Gender-inclusive language corresponds to a wide variety of strategies (middot, coordination...). Do all these strategies have the same effect on language attitudes? Previous research has shown that some strategies do not negatively impact readability: e.g., coordination is perceived as more readable than parentheses in French (Gygax & Gesto 2007). One might hypothesize that these strategies will also be perceived as politically more neutral.

To answer these questions, the project will gather experimental data on French and German, two languages with a variety of gender-inclusive linguistic strategies. The effect of specific gender marking strategies on language attitudes will be assessed while controlling for potential confounding factors (e.g., political content of a text). Participants will be presented with texts differing in content and gender marking. Reading times will be measured to assess the readability of various gender marking strategies. The participants' language attitudes will be evaluated through a survey (e.g., "Where on the political spectrum would you situate the writer?").

The project's outcomes will carry both theoretical and social significance. By identifying gender-neutral strategies that reduce negative language attitudes, the project can promote the adoption of more widely accepted gender-inclusive language across the political spectrum.

292 words

Bibliography

- Burnett, Heather & Céline Pozniak. 2021. Political dimensions of gender inclusive writing in Parisian universities. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 25(5). 808–831. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12489>.
- Dragojevic, Marko. Language Attitudes. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. Retrieved 11 Oct. 2023, from <https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-437>.
- Gygax, Pascal & Noelia Gesto. 2007. Féminisation et lourdeur de texte. In: *L'Année psychologique* 107 (2), 239–255.
- Szczesny, Sabine, Magda Formanowicz & Franziska Moser. 2016. Can Gender-Fair Language Reduce Gender Stereotyping and Discrimination? *Frontiers in Psychology* 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00025>.

Research Trainee Profile

Each proposal requests two Research Trainees. Describe the general tasks of the research trainees, how these tasks are academically challenging to the research trainees, whether they need any preliminary knowledge (regarding the topic and/or research methods) and which skills the research trainees should have. Also specify which type of students are eligible to apply (3rd year Ba, Ma, ResMa).

We are looking for Ma or ResMa students with a background in Linguistics with interest in designing linguistic questionnaires. Candidates should be highly proficient in English and at least French or German (C1-C2 level). A passive knowledge of the other language is a plus.

The following criteria are a plus, but no strict prerequisites:

- Demonstrable courses or term papers on relevant topics, especially sociolinguistics, gender, language attitudes, and experimental linguistics.
- Demonstrable familiarity with relevant research methods, such as formulating questions/reading tasks for linguistic questionnaires, collecting data online, conducting statistical analyses in R, and releasing data in open access.

Collaboration

If applicable: Describe how your research improves collaboration and cross-pollination between the disciplines involved (max. 300 words)

The proposed traineeships will contribute to the interdisciplinary collaboration between the applicants on gender-inclusive language in two languages and communities that have rarely been compared until now while strengthening cooperation across departments. As the German and the French departments are increasingly working together as part of the *Sektorplan*, our joint application for the research traineeship programme aims at initiating a first collaboration with students from the two departments.

Naomi Truan's ongoing research focuses on language attitudes and language ideologies around gender-inclusive language, especially through a qualitative lens based on interviews with multilinguals (see Truan in preparation). Benjamin Storme uses experimental and statistical methods to answer theoretical questions about how language is stored, used and processed. He has worked specifically on the way grammatical gender is interpreted in French in a recent project (Storme & Delaloye Saillen, forthcoming).

Our collaboration and the proposed traineeships will also increase synergy between groups within LUCL that are not normally working together: on the one hand, 'Sociolinguistics and Discourse Studies' (Naomi Truan), on the other hand, 'Experimental Linguistics' and 'Theoretical Linguistics' (Benjamin Storme). Given the topic of our project and its combination of methodologies, the results will be relevant for both theoretical and empirical linguists. Given our comparative endeavor, the findings will be of interest for research on cross-linguistic variation.

Bibliography

- Truan, Naomi, in preparation. „In Deutschland wird es weniger diskutiert“. Sprachideologien über geschlechtergerechte Sprache aus der Sicht von L2-Sprechenden des Deutschen [“In Germany there are less debates about it”. Language

ideologies about gender-inclusive language from the perspective of L2 speakers of German”], *Linguistische Berichte*.

Storme, Benjamin & Laura Delaloye Sallen. forthcoming. Effects of grammatical gender on gender inferences: evidence from French hybrid nouns. *Linguistics Vanguard*.

Deliverables

Enumerate intended project results: papers, research proposals or otherwise. (max 200 words)

The project is intended to result in the following:

- A thorough analysis of the linguistic questionnaire, focusing on cross-linguistic variation of how perceived readability, various graphies, and language attitudes possibly interact.
- An academic paper which would be published in the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* or *Glossa Psycholinguistics*. The paper will also be presented at academic conferences such as the *International Conference of Experimental Linguistics* or student conferences such as the *Studierendenkonferenz der niederländischen Germanistiken* (StuK) [Student Conference of Dutch German Studies].

Planning

Provide a breakdown of the project into phases with tentative timing (max 150 words)

| Month | Activities | Hours* |
|-------|---|--------|
| 1-2 | Preparation and literature review on language attitudes towards gender-inclusive language in German and French. | 30 |
| 3-4 | Designing of the online questionnaire, including reading tasks, closed and open questions. Translation of the questionnaire items in French and German. Online dissemination of the questionnaire on mailing lists, social media, etc. Release of the questionnaire and its methodology in open access. | 40 |
| 5-6 | Qualitative and quantitative analysis. Collection of the online data. Qualitative annotation of the data. Quantitative test of the research hypotheses using mixed effects models or Bayesian hierarchical modeling in R. | 60 |
| 7 | Writing. The two applicants and the two research trainees will submit an abstract to a conference and co-author a journal paper reporting on the project's results. | 40 |

*Approximate working hours per trainee, based on 7 months x 0.15fte = 173 hours per trainee.

Student Application

Provide information on how to apply e.g. required documents for application (resume, motivation letter etc.) and an email address where student applications should be sent to.

Please submit your application, consisting of a CV and cover letter of maximum 2 pages in a single PDF file, to n.a.l.truan@hum.leidenuniv.nl and b.p.p.storme@hum.leidenuniv.nl. The application materials should be in English.

If you have written a paper relevant to the project in English, French, or German, please send it together with your application with a short explanation of the context (i.e. in which course you wrote it, as part of which assignment, etc.).