

When Words Catch Up with Society: Gender-Inclusive Language in Polish and Spanish Youth Speech

Inclusivity encompasses both linguistic and sociological phenomena. Historically, when women did not occupy professional roles, there was no necessity to develop or utilize feminine forms of such titles. Over time, women have increasingly gained access to roles previously deemed inaccessible to them. In languages where gender functions as a grammatical category structuring utterances (Hockett, 1958), a linguistic gap arose owing to the absence of specific terms denoting women in such roles. This scenario often engendered ambiguity and grammatical incoherence. Nevertheless, many of these gaps have been progressively addressed, thereby reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of language.

My investigation aims to shed further light on the most recent developments in the language use of young people in Polish and Spanish, both of which have grammatical gender. In these languages, inanimate nouns generally possess invariant grammatical gender, whereas nouns referring to animate entities can be modified to align with the gender of the referent. Nevertheless, for many years, certain masculine nouns have not been feminised even when referring to feminine subjects. Recently, there has been a noticeable and dynamic linguistic shift, with a growing trend towards feminising professional titles. The purpose of my investigation is to assess students' use of inclusive language, particularly concerning professional titles and forms of address, and to explore their attitudes towards such language. To this end, I conducted semi-structured written interviews, where students were asked to complete sixteen phrases related to various professions, with gender explicitly indicated by the individual's name and surname. The second part focused on forms of address and involved five scenarios depicting different communicative contexts, varying in formality. Participants were asked to compose the opening lines of a message appropriate for each situation. The final segment comprised three questions designed to gather students' opinions regarding the appropriate usage of feminine forms.

The investigation indicates that, although some students employ feminine forms, there remains a considerable gap before such forms become widely adopted. In Spanish, these forms are more prevalent, while in Polish, there is still uncertainty regarding the appropriate form to use. In both languages, certain forms endorsed by the advisory and consultative institutions (Rada Języka Polskiego and La Real Academia Española) have yet to become standard in common usage.

keywords: gender-inclusive language, social change, students, Polish, Spanish

References:

Hockett, C. F. (1958). *A course in modern linguistics*. Collier-Macmillan.

word count: 368