

Lengua y equidad de género: aciertos, contradicciones y tareas pendientes en las guías de lenguaje inclusivo promovidas en México

Language and gender equity: rights, contradictions and pending tasks in Mexico's promoted inclusive language guides

Língua e igualdade de gênero: sucessos, contradições e tarefas pendentes nos guias de linguagem inclusiva promovidos no México

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Resumen

Desde hace más de una década, en México el lenguaje inclusivo se ha promovido en las instituciones gubernamentales y organismos públicos sin avances significativos. Desde luego, a la resistencia del cambio lingüístico debe agregarse la oposición al cambio social. Sin embargo, entre las dificultades que enfrentan las y los hablantes también se encuentran las contradicciones de carácter formal que quienes buscan llevar la equidad a la lengua deben resolver. En este trabajo se analizan tres documentos fundamentales sobre el lenguaje

inclusivo: el *Manual para el uso no sexista del lenguaje* (Pérez, 2011), el *Manual de comunicación no sexista* (Guichard, 2015) y el *Informe de la Real Academia Española sobre el lenguaje inclusivo y cuestiones conexas* (Real Academia Española [RAE], 2020). Estos documentos cuentan con avales institucionales y son recomendados por entidades públicas bajo la bandera de la equidad de género. La hipótesis plantea que la divulgación y, en consecuencia, el uso del lenguaje inclusivo enfrenta como obstáculo las contradicciones de carácter formalista presentes en los manuales más importantes, debido a la ausencia de lingüistas y gramáticos en su elaboración. Los resultados evidencian la necesidad de un trabajo lingüístico formal en dos de los documentos analizados, así como el carácter ineludible de que instituciones como la Real Academia Española y la Academia Mexicana de la Lengua formulen propuestas conciliatorias desde paradigmas sociolingüísticos, y no exclusivamente formalistas.

Palabras clave: duales aparentes, ergónimos, género no marcado, lenguaje inclusivo, masculino genérico, sexismo lingüístico.

Abstract

For over a decade, in Mexico inclusive language has been promoted within government institutions and public bodies without any sign of significant progress. This is partly due to the constant opposition to both social and linguistic changes. Additionally, speakers face difficulties stemming from formal contradictions that must be resolved by those who seek to bring equity into language. This work analyses three fundamental documents on inclusive language: the *Manual para el uso no sexista del lenguaje* (Manual for the Non-Sexist Use of Language) (Pérez, 2011), the *Manual de comunicación no sexista. Hacia un language de inclusion* (Manual of Non-Sexist Communication. Towards a Language of Inclusion) (Guichard, 2015), and the *Informe de la Real Academia Española sobre el lenguaje inclusivo y cuestiones conexas* (Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues) (RAE, 2020), all of which are institutionally endorsed and recommended by public entities under the banner of gender equity. The central hypothesis of this work is that one of the main obstacles to the dissemination and, consequently, the use of inclusive language lies in the formalist contradictions present in the most important manuals. The results highlight the need for formal linguistic work in two of the analysed documents, as well as the unavoidable necessity for both the Royal Spanish Academy (Real Academia

Española) and the Mexican Academy of Language (Academia Mexicana de la Lengua) to propose conciliatory solutions from sociolinguistic paradigms rather than merely formalist ones.

Keywords: apparent duals, ergonyms, unmarked gender, inclusive language, generic masculine, linguistic sexism.

Resumo

Por mais de uma década, a linguagem inclusiva foi promovida no México em instituições governamentais e órgãos públicos sem progresso significativo. É claro que a resistência à mudança linguística deve ser adicionada a oposição à mudança social. Entretanto, entre as dificuldades enfrentadas pelos falantes estão também as contradições formais que aqueles que buscam trazer equidade à língua devem resolver. Este artigo analisa três documentos fundamentais sobre linguagem inclusiva: o Manual para o uso não sexista da linguagem (Pérez, 2011), o Manual de comunicação não sexista (Guichard, 2015) e o Relatório da Real Academia Espanhola sobre linguagem inclusiva e questões relacionadas (Real Academia Espanhola [RAE], 2020). Esses documentos têm endossos institucionais e são recomendados por entidades públicas sob a bandeira da igualdade de gênero. A hipótese é que a disseminação e, conseqüentemente, o uso da linguagem inclusiva esbarra nas contradições formalistas presentes nos manuais mais importantes, pela ausência de linguistas e gramáticos em sua elaboração. Os resultados mostram a necessidade de um trabalho linguístico formal em dois dos documentos analisados, bem como a inevitabilidade de instituições como a Real Academia Espanhola e a Academia Mexicana da Língua formularem propostas conciliatórias a partir de paradigmas sociolinguísticos, e não exclusivamente formalistas.

Palavras-chave: duais aparentes, ergônimos, gênero não marcado, linguagem inclusiva, masculino genérico, sexismo linguístico.

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Inclusive language: why, how, and what for

Every time we speak, write or think, more than just linguistic signs coexist in our minds. Words and language are integrated with the traditions of the social groups to which we belong and, of course, those of the linguistic community in which we operate. In our case, the Spanish linguistic community is the main repository of the so-called standard language. In addition to being part of the linguistic community, our words are part of the speech community or communication community, according to the terms of Dell Hymes (1972), which has a higher hierarchy and a higher level of standardization. Thus, those who belong to a speech community share cultural products made up of traditions, customs and diverse world views, whether hegemonic or marginal, which can be reproduced and perpetuated through language.

Extralinguistic factors and phenomena such as androcentrism influence language. When speaking, not only is the learned code of communication used, but social values, ideological commitments, beliefs and worldviews assimilated during the process of language acquisition and education are also reflected. Thus, the presence or absence of certain linguistic structures can be linked to inclusion in androcentric contexts.

Therefore, linguistics with a feminist perspective promotes the use of inclusive language under the accord that its understanding and assimilation among speakers contribute to the breaking down of sexist roles. From the perspective of this work, *inclusive language* is understood as that which avoids the use of discriminatory language based on sex, whether in formal or informal contexts, orally or in writing, with the aim of preventing the perpetuation of gender stereotypes (Bengoechea, 2015; Grijelmo, 2019). The United Nations defines inclusive language as “the way of expressing oneself orally and in writing without discriminating against a particular sex, social gender or gender identity, without perpetuating gender stereotypes” (United Nations, 2024).

Proposals on the use of inclusive language have generated extensive discussion among the linguistic community, language institutions and speakers (RAE, 2012). Each position, whether in favour or against, is based on the possibilities of application and acceptance of various linguistic alternatives. Underlying them are elements such as the rejection or defence of an ideology, a lack of consensus between the proposals, resistance to the feminisation of certain terms, and the controversy over the use of morphemes such as “x” and “e”, among others.

Therefore, this paper analyses three of the most important guides on the non-sexist use of the Spanish language with the aim of assessing the viability and applicability of their proposals. The relevance of this research lies in the necessity for a solution to the problems of the application feasibility and assimilation proposed in the guides and/or manuals that have been published against linguistic sexism, as well as their subsequent dissemination (or lack thereof) by school authorities or public institutions.

The analysis focuses on the guidelines for non-sexist use of the Spanish language officially adopted by the Autonomous University of Zacatecas "Francisco García Salinas", the National Commission for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women (CONAVIM given its initials in Spanish), the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES given its initials in Spanish), the Human Rights Commission of Zacatecas (CDHEZ given its initials in Spanish) and the Observatory of Political Participation of Women in Zacatecas.

Thus, the analysed corpus is made up of the *Manual de comunicación no sexista. Hacia un lenguaje inclusivo* (Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards an Inclusive Language (Guichard, 2011), the *Manual para el uso no sexista del lenguaje* (Manual for the Non-Sexist Use of Language) (Pérez, 2015) and the *Informe de la Real Academia Española sobre el lenguaje inclusivo y cuestiones conexas* (Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues) (RAE, 2020), the dissemination of these documents has been promoted by institutions such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph which hold a certain level of prestige in the linguistic community. The comparison between the three texts made it possible to find concordances, levels of congruence, between the content and the objectives, their deficiencies, their virtues and, above all, the viability of application and adaptation of each one.

The hypothesis of this research work states that part of the obstacles faced in the dissemination and, consequently, use of inclusive language lie in the formalist contradictions present in the most important manuals, due to the fact that linguists and grammarians did not participate in their production; in the same way, the most important document that the orthodoxy of the language produced on the subject, the *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020), the intervention of linguists openly committed to gender equity was needed, making it capable of transcending formalist studies and adopting paradigms such as those of sociolinguistics, which puts the importance of linguistic acts in social construction first.

The main objective of this research is to contribute to the development of linguistic and communicative competence, through specific objectives such as promoting the use of non-sexist and non-androcentric expressions and contributing to the debate on language-society relations, reflecting on the extent to which manuals for the non-sexist use of language or inclusive language have been constructed from an eclectic perspective, where apparently opposing theoretical paradigms fit in, whose dialogue with each other is essential for the speaker to safely develop linguistic skills in accordance with his or her ideological vision on the relationship between genders.

The methodology used consists of analysing each of the three inclusive language guides: *Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language* (Pérez, 2011), *Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards Inclusive Language* (Guichard, 2015), *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020) according to the following steps:

1. Discerning the perspective from which the three guides or manuals were created to understand their implicit objectives.

2. Conceptual and practical analysis of *apparent duals* or *asymmetric pairs*, those words that, when feminized, enter a process of semantic deterioration (Bengoechea, 2015) maintaining sexist and androcentric stereotypes. In this step, it is observed whether the apparent duals recorded in each language guide are built under linguistics supported postulates, if they coincide with each other, if they are viable, and if they share discursive examples.

3. Conceptual and practical analysis of *ergonyms* or *agentives*, defined as occupational or professional terms that reflect an asymmetry in the work field between men and women (Bengoechea, 2015). It analyses whether the three guides share the theoretical postulates of this lexical category, its frequency, whether it is justified from a gender perspective or not, and the possibility of application in case its use is recommended.

4. Conceptual and practical analysis of the *generic masculine*, the inflection of nouns that, from a formalist perspective (Muñoz et al., 2023), has no relation to sex. However, in feminist linguistics, such a morpheme is considered a specific masculine (Bengoechea, 2015). In this methodological step, the analysis focuses on whether each guide recommends its use or not, whether its position adheres to the norm, whether its justification is based on formal linguistic arguments or obeys ideological reasons explained within cognitive linguistics.

As outlined in paragraphs above, the textual corpus is composed of the *Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language* (Pérez, 2011), the *Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards an Inclusive Language* (Guichard, 2015) and the *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020). Pérez's manual (2011) was created at the request of the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women (CONAVIM) in Mexico, as well as by the civil society for Legal Defence and Education for Women “Vereda Themis”.

The *Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language* (Pérez, 2011) is made up of nine chapters that seek to explain the role of language as a gender socialising agent. It also addresses the relationship between gender and grammar, lexical asymmetry, sexist and androcentric linguistic uses, sexist and androcentric structures and their avoidance alternatives, neutral use and generic use, the naming of professional and occupational positions, and resistance to feminisation. The last few chapters are aimed towards the application of the proposals in official documents and work environments to avoid the sexist and androcentric use of language.

As for the *Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards Inclusive Language* (Guichard, 2015) it comprises nine chapters which present arguments and theories that explain sexism in the language; however, its importance lies in its proposals for alternative uses. Regarding the *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020) created at the request of the vice president of the Government of Spain, Carmen Calvo, an introductory note stands out in which the reason for its creation is clarified, as well as the need for its employment in Spain's Magna Carta. It also notes a compilation of diachronic changes in the Dictionary of the Spanish Language (DLE given its initials in Spanish), and answers to questions on the subject provided by representatives of the RAE on the social network X, formerly Twitter.

Inclusive language and feminist linguistics

When the other is degraded through discourse for reasons of gender, the lexicon and semantics reveal *linguistic sexism* (Calero Fernández, M., 2013). Hence, inclusive language consists of the use of a lexicon and linguistic structures that avoid *sexism* and *androcentrism* in language (Grijelmo, A., 2019).

Before continuing, it is imperative to clarify that gender and sex are not synonyms: the former is a social construct, while the latter refers to the physical characteristics with which one is born, such as the female and male reproductive systems.

“In an abstraction of women's living conditions, I have defined a condition of women constituted by the generic characteristics that theoretically they all share [...] It is opposed to the set of qualities and characteristics attributed sexually to women - ranging from behaviours, attitudes, intellectual and physical capacities, to their place in regard to economic and social relations, as well as the oppression to which they are subjected” (Lagarde, 2021, p. 58)

Symbolic violence, defined by Pierre Bourdieu as ‘*that which is exercised essentially through purely symbolic paths of communication and knowledge*’ (2018, p. 12), is a central concept in feminist linguistics studies, since the relationship between language and gender is manifested through androcentrism. Patriarchal ideology has imprinted this on various language structures, given that “*the androcentric perspective consists of considering man as the prototype of human representation*” (Bengoechea, 2015, p. 19), as is done at the morpho-syntactic level through the *unmarked grammatical gender* that is attributed to the masculine inflection, while the ‘marked’ one corresponds to the feminine inflection, according to the norms of Spanish and other languages.

Thus, the representation of women and men in language is characterized by asymmetry. It is true that the emergence of linguistic structures which sexualize and degrade women is not a direct result of the language system, but of sociohistorical and cultural constructs. However, the ecology of our conceptions of language must consider the existence of asymmetrical categories at the lexical-semantic level (Bengoechea, 2015; Calero, 1999; Extebarría, 2007; García, 1994):

1. Feminine terms that face semantic degradation compared to masculine ones (Bengoechea, 2015), such as adjectives like *aventurera* and *aventurero*, where the negative connotation of the first word can be seen when referring to a woman who does not adhere to patriarchal norms in her sexual life. On the contrary, a positive meaning is given to the masculine word related to *adventure, traveling* and discovering new horizons, that is, it does not imply any condemnation of sexual behaviour.

2. Different forms of address for women and men which refer to their private lives, such as “*señorita*” and “*señora*”, that possess semes related to age and sexuality, as well as marital status; this is not the case for “*señor*” while the use of “*señorito*” is almost non-

existent. Hence, women are defined by their relationship with men; forms of address frequently indicate whether they are single, married, divorced, adults, or if they have started their sexual life.

3. Metaphors that represent women as natural elements – not people – in structures such as ‘you are the light of my life’ or ‘you are the most beautiful flower’ emphasize gender differences based on physical characteristics. In these types of linguistic constructions, women are described as objects which can be obtained, are delicate, need protection, etc.

4. The stereotypical vocabulary in well-known expressions such as “the weaker sex” and “the stronger sex” symbolizes social characteristics based on physical features, thus legitimizing gender differences.

5. Abundance of vocabulary to describe women and men whose sexuality does not adhere to hegemonic patriarchal patterns of behaviour. Words such as “*machorra*” (butch), “*marimacha*” (dyke), “*marica*” (fag) and “*muñeco*” (sissy) are used in a derogatory sense to indicate sexual preferences or social attitudes that do not conform to gender roles in patriarchal society.

6. *Apparent duals or asymmetric pairs* are nouns and/or adjectives that do not share the same semantic load when feminized as when inflected in the masculine. Different gender word pairs do not agree in their meaning. García (1994) defines the concept as, “*those feminine expressions whose homonyms in the masculine mean something different, implying a strong inherited sexism. They are almost always degrading with compared to the masculine ones (which is why they are called apparent duals) reason why it is advisable to avoid their use.*” (García, 1994, p. 30).

“The systematic degradation of women and the feminine also affects Spanish. In addition to the violence and contempt towards women that many of the proverbs and insults hide, the masculine and feminine word pairs, theoretically symmetrical, but in which the feminine has acquired negative or pejorative values (gobernante/gobernanta) that frequently highlight a supposed promiscuity or mercenary sexuality, are well known: zorro/zorra, aventuro/aventura, entretenido/entretendida, etc.” (Bengoechea, 2015, p. 40).

As can be seen from asymmetric pairs, it could be inferred that women have historically incited corruption and perversion; the apparent duals along with other lexical elements reflect a culture’s androcentric worldview. Language dictionaries play an important role since they provide a wide semantic network in which a sexist, dichotomous and

stereotypical vision of the feminine and masculine is established (Bengoechea, 2015). In 1992, the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (DRAE) still defined “*sexo débil*” (weak sex) as a synonym for “women” and “*sexo fuerte*” (strong sex) as a synonym for “men” (Forgas, 2011).

The disparity in the linguistic representation of women and men is also reflected in the naming of professions, trades, and occupations. According to García (1994) “*One of the issues that arouses the most controversy today is how to name women who access positions, trades, and professions that until now were reserved for men*” (p. 50). Thirty years have passed since the publication of this text, and there is still controversy over naming people who carry out historically masculine activities, a situation that is reflected in the lexical category of agentive or ergonym, defined a few paragraphs above.

“In Spanish, the close association that the speaking community has established between grammatical gender and sex explains the centuries old tendency to differentiate positions, professional titles and occupations by ending according to sex. Consequently, based on the fact that the association between the sex of the referent and certain differentiated formal markers contributes to preventing the processes of concealment or hiding of women, the fundamental question that feminisms have asked is why the regular gender inflection has not occurred precisely in such agentives.” (Bengoechea, 2015, p.48).

According to Bengoechea (2015), the trend has been not to feminize prestigious professions that have traditionally been performed by men. On the other hand, trades, occupational positions and professions that are not qualified have no problem being feminized, such as *panadero/panadera* (baker), the opposite happens with *médico/médica* (medic), *gobernante/gobernanta* (ruler) which struggle to be inflected in the feminine form. This phenomenon occurs for two reasons, the first is that women have historically been relegated from qualified positions, and the second is that they are nominations for positions that hold influence and authority within society.

Agentives or ergonyms have also resisted masculinization, but in positions that have generally been held by women and do not hold social prestige, such as *amo de casa* (househusband). *In these cases*, new names are created to refer to men in these areas, for example: instead of the regular gender inflection *azafato* (stewart), *auxiliar de vuelo* (flight attendant) is used (Bengoechea, 2015). Not feminizing the word clearly shows a need to

acquire prestige for the masculine noun, since a new name is created, perhaps with the aim of demonstrating superiority.

Likewise, there are questionable expressions such as *mujer árbitro* (female referee) or *mujer policía* (female police officer) that are supported by the classic justification of 'women had never practiced that profession' with the purpose of not feminizing ergonyms. (Bengoechea, 2015; Calero, 2013). Following that logic, a linguistic phenomenon should occur, one which has not yet happened, there would be feminine terms masculinized with *varón* (male), expressions such as *varón partero* (male midwife), *varón ama de casa* (male housewife), *varón modista* (male dressmaker), *varón azafata* (male flight attendant) would be used, therefore, the use of *mujer policía* (female police officer), *mujer árbitro* (female referee) is not a matter of who has monopolized the profession, occupation or position, but, possibly, of patriarchal symbolic power. (Bourdieu, 2018).

In *La dominación masculina* (2018), Bourdieu explains the *paradox of doxa*, an expression referring to the naturalized patriarchal order, agreed upon in tradition, despite its discriminations; respected in a broad sense, since it is easily perpetuated by hiding the history of female disadvantage, which is defined as acceptable if not natural (Bourdieu, 2018).

Bourdieu's contributions reveal the symbolic violence in language and communication. The masculine order forgoes any justification, the androcentric perspective is imposed as neutral and does not need to be formulated in discourses capable of legitimizing it. Bourdieu (2018) explains that social order functions as a symbolic machine that corroborates the masculine domination on which it is based, the sexual division of labour, the distribution of activities, spaces and instruments to each of the sexes, in other words, women and men have an assigned role that they must fulfil and occupy, consigned without reason for being and iniquitous, which ratifies the social world through the construction of the body as a sexual reality, a depository of dividing principles and sexuating perspectives.

By constructing and defining the anatomical differences between men and women from an androcentric perspective, they become the indisputable guarantor of meanings and values that agree with patriarchal principles (Bourdieu, 2018).

An example of linguistic structures with negative perceptions would be the resistance to feminize ergonyms or agentives by women themselves, having as their main motive the prestige of the masculine; *juez* (judge) or *médico* (medic) are often chosen instead of *jueza* (female judge) or *médica* (female doctor) to feel in a level playing field with men.

Thus, the *unmarked grammatical gender* in Spanish is the generic use of the masculine. We must ask ourselves to what extent the representation and visibility of women in the language is biased by such a definition. Although in Spanish almost all nouns are classified as feminine and masculine, the *unmarked grammatical gender* affects only a specific part of the lexicon. Bengoechea, in his book *Lengua y género* (2015), explains that this lexical fraction does not concern nouns without sexual differentiation, such as: *barrio* (neighborhood), *pueblo* (town) or *víctima* (victim). Non-animate nouns that establish size relationships, such as *jarro/jarra* (jug/pitcher) or between trees and their fruit such as *almendro/almendra* (almond tree/almonds) do not fall into this category either.

Therefore, the part of the lexicon that concerns this work is that of certain animate nouns that present opposition of gender and sex. However, it does not always apply to heteronyms such as *toro* (bull) and *vaca* (cow) because the unmarked gender of *ovejas* (sheep) and *carneros* (rams) is feminine. Thus, it is possible to interpret that the use of unmarked gender in the feminine referring to such important domestic animals as *ovejas* (sheep), *chivas* (goats) and *borregas* (lambs) is due to the importance of having reproductive females in livestock. In Mexico, it is commonly understood that raising ‘*borregas*’ and ‘*chivas*’ refers to both female and male animals.

“This restricted behavior is already significant in that it seems to refer to the possibility that the linguistic and cognitive classification of reality may originate in terms of human experience and not just be a formal matter.”
(Bengoechea, 2015, p. 21).

Socio-historical context is essential in assuming that *unmarked grammatical gender* excludes women. Sentences such as ‘*Todos los **mexicanos** deben presentar su servicio military después de cumplir los 18 años*’ (All Mexicans must present their military service after turning 18) and ‘*Los **mexicanos** son aquellos que nacen en el territorio mexicano*’ (Mexicans are those who are born in Mexican territory) show a discrepancy in meaning between both nouns.

On the one hand, in the first sentence, ‘*Todos los **mexicanos** deben presentar su servicio military después de cumplir los 18 años*’ the *masculine generic*¹ does not work, because the speaker knows that in their social and historical context, women are not included in that *all Mexicans* because military service was an activity exclusive to men. Even after the

¹ In feminist perspective linguistics, the ‘unmarked grammatical gender’ is also called ‘masculine generic’ because the generic use in Spanish is masculine.

official integration of women into the military in recent years, those of us who speak Spanish in Mexico know that military service is not an obligation for women, it is not -therefore- a task pertaining to that gender² in a conservative society such as Mexico's.

On the other hand, the second linguistic construction '*Los mexicanos son aquellos que nacen en el territorio mexicano*' does fulfil the function of *unmarked grammatical gender* because it includes women and men born in Mexico. Why, then, should women have to decipher whether they are included in the discourse based on social, cultural and historical context?

Androcentrism can be evidenced through language, as shown by the *generic masculine* or *unmarked grammatical gender*:

"Reading about the Greeks, the Vikings or the Amerindians in a history book evokes the mental image of a series of men, which instils suspicions about the capacity of the supposed generic masculine to be something more than a mere masculine form" (Moure, 2021, p. 219).

So, as Teresa Moure, author of *Lingüística se escribe con a. La perspectiva de género en las ideas del lenguaje*, explains by promoting inclusive language, a discrimination free order is, partly, restored after centuries of symbolic violence. It is often argued that grammar has no gender (Company, 2019); however, when we consider that the concept of *gender* is related to biological characteristics, such argument loses validity. While it is true that grammatical gender does not have to correspond to biology, the extralinguistic relationships that influence language cannot be ignored either.

Van Dijk (2004) defines *discursive power* as a means to control future actions through words, in this case, those of women. *Unmarked gender* provides references of meaning with greater prestige than those made in the feminine. Therefore, *"preventing the masculine from being considered the standard form is not a mere stylistic rule, but a tactic to ensure that the masculine worldview does not prevail at the expense of other views"* (Moure, 2021, p. 205).

The argument that language is neutral and, therefore, *unmarked grammatical gender* is neutral comes from formal linguistics, in which the extralinguistic interaction has no place, but as Bourdieu says:

"The strength of masculine order is revealed in the fact that it forgoes any justification: the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and does not feel the

² We must not confuse 'gender' as a social construct with 'grammatical gender'.

need to express itself in discourses capable of legitimizing it. The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine that tends to ratify the masculine domination on which it is based: it is the sexual division of labour, a very strict distribution of the activities assigned to each of the two sexes, of their space, their time, their instruments; it is the structure of space, with the opposition between the meeting place, or the market, reserved for men, and the house reserved for women, or within it, between the masculine part, such as the home, and the feminine part, such as the stable, the water and the vegetables; it is the structure of time, day, year, agrarian, life cycle, with the masculine moments of rupture and the long periods of gestation, feminine.” (Bourdieu, 2018, p. 22).

Analysis and presentation of results

The analysis of the three inclusive language manuals, *Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language* (Pérez, 2011), *Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards Inclusive Language* (Guichard, 2015) and *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020), yielded the following results:

The first text, the *Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language* (Pérez, 2011) written by María Julia Pérez Cervera was created by order of the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women (CONAVIM) together with the Legal Defense and Education for Women SC (Vereda Themis) in Mexico. It includes an introduction by Laura Carrera Lugo, head of the aforementioned commission, in which she states that language serves to express the perception that individual have of the world and, therefore, it is imperative that sexist uses of language be denounced. Likewise, Carrera believes that language as an instrument has the capacity to transform and vindicate:

“That is why the National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women (Conavim), in its capacity as Gender Unit of the Ministry of the Interior, presents the Manual for the non-sexist use of language, in order to promote, among those who work in this Ministry, a better understanding of the elements that are a part of everyday language and the components that promote discrimination, inequality between genders or that promote traditional roles and stereotypes attributed to women and men.” (Pérez, 2011, p. 5)

The *Manual for the Non-Sexist Use of Language* (Pérez, 2011) is presented as a tool for the staff of the federal public administration of Mexico to become familiar with non-

sexist use of language along with strategies for its use, as well as to raise awareness about the changes required in society regarding discrimination.

The introduction briefly explains the reasons for its creation. The most notable being gender inequality:

“One of the most subtle ways of transmitting this discrimination is through language, since it is nothing more than a reflection of the values, thinking, and the society that creates and uses it. Nothing we say at any given moment in our lives is neutral: all words have a gender interpretation. Thus, language not only reflects but also transmits and reinforces the stereotypes and roles considered appropriate for women and men within society. Let us think about what everyday phrases such as “vieja, el último” (the last one is a girl), “lo que valga una mujer, en sus hijos se ha de ver” (children are a reflection of a woman’s worth), “si no me pega, no me quiere” (if he doesn’t hit me it means he doesn’t love me), or “mujer que sabe latín, ni tiene marido ni tiene buen fin” (woman who knows Latin, has neither a husband nor a good end try to convey.” (Pérez, 2011, p. 7)

For this reason, it was considered imperative to develop the *Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language* (Pérez, 2011), particularly for its application within the administrative areas of the Mexican government. The guide was borne out of the need and urgency to promote inclusive language in public institutions, as it aims to avoid sexism in official documents, all the while teaching administrative staff the uses and strategies of inclusive language.

The contents of the nine chapters of the *Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language* (Pérez, 2011) cover various topics: the role of language as a gender socializing agent, gender in grammar, and the sex of people. It also addresses the asymmetrical representation of women and men in the lexicon, sexist and androcentric semantic and grammatical uses, neutral use and generic use, as well as the naming of women in professional settings and resistance to feminization. In addition, it offers proposals and alternatives to avoid and recognize androcentrism and sexism in language, with special emphasis on the administrative field.

The second text, *Manual of Non-Sexist Communication. Towards a Language of Inclusion* (2015), by Claudia Guichard Bello, was produced in Mexico for the *National Institute for Women* (INMUJERES); it was produced with federal funding. Guichard, the author of the manual, is a graduate of the Linguistics and Hispanic Literature program at the *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*, she is an editor, teacher and feminist; her

professional career has focused on issues such as equality, creating workshops on gender perspective, women's human rights, coeducation, gender violence and, of course, inclusive language.

In the introduction to the manual, the *National Institute for Women* (INMUJERES) sets out its positive and open stance towards change in relation to inclusive language. It goes on to recognise the presence of sexism androcentrism in language, as well as the structures and uses that highlight the disparity between women and men. *“Asymmetry, inequality and disparity between the sexes are also evident in language. This is because language forms a set of abstract constructions in which judgements, values and prejudices, which are learned and taught, coincide shaping ways of thinking and perceiving reality.”* (Guichard, 2015, p. 10).

Thus, the purpose of the guide is the same as that of Pérez (2011): to avoid the sexist use of the Spanish language to promote a change in Mexican patriarchal society. In the prologue, written by Rosa Cobo Bedía³, she explains that society is composed of material and symbolic structures, both of equal importance given that no human community can exist in the absence of one or the other. Collective imaginaries and institutional frameworks have an intrinsic relationship, since symbolic structures provide meaning and justify the material structures of society so that the latter are not questioned.

“These two social realities, the symbolic and the material, must be congruent, because if there is no coherence between social structures and collective imaginaries, a crisis of legitimacy will ensue. And with it, social conflicts. In effect, each social reality has correlate ideas which serve to justify its existence.” (Guichard, 2015, p. 13).

Cobo (2015) argues that political theories around the idea of equality, such as feminism, yearn for language to stop being an apparatus of patriarchal social reproduction and become one of emancipation, where concepts, words, proverbs, speeches and expressions do not serve to cover up the oppression of women, she is convinced that language can be a tool of revindication and criticism.

³ PhD in Political Science and Sociology, professor of Gender Sociology and director of the Center for Gender and Feminist Studies at the University of *La Coruña*, Spain (Guichard, 2015).

The *Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards Inclusive Language* (Guichard, 2015) expresses its defence and promotion of inclusive and non-sexist language throughout all its chapters. It exposes the social reasons and linguistic mechanisms that allow patriarchy to maintain its hegemony through institutions, material structures, symbolic structures and language.

The third text, which does not hold a completely open stance about inclusive language, is the *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020). It is a controversial text given that only until its publication in 2020, the RAE manifested its interest and willingness towards the subject, unlike what was conveyed by Juan Ignacio Bosque and other members of the RAE, in 2012, who were characterized by their resistance.

Although the *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020) shows evidence of the changes made to some sexist definitions of the *Dictionary of the Spanish Language* and a study on the use of inclusive language in the Spanish constitution, the subtext of its implementation obeying a government mandate which the institution could not refuse should not be minimized.

The perspectives on inclusive language included in the three manuals addressed in this paper correspond to social, political and linguistic approaches. The manuals created by Pérez (2011) and Guichard (2015) describe the ways in which linguistic structures are sexist and androcentric and, consequently, propose alternatives to avoid such uses.

The following tables present the stance and proposals of the three manuals analysed, as well as the linguistic alternatives based on the categories explained above: apparent duals or asymmetric pairs, agentives or ergonyms, and generic masculine.

Table 1. Proposals for apparent asymmetric or dual pairs

Name of the manual or report	Proposals for the use of apparent duals or asymmetric pairs
<i>Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language</i> (Pérez, 2011)	Labels them false duals and exemplifies them with words and expressions.
<i>Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards an Inclusive Language</i> (Guichard, 2015)	It deals with apparent duals and uses dual pairs as their terminological synonym. It does not oppose terms of courtesy such as <i>señora</i> (madam) and <i>señor</i> (sir) as long as they are used uniformly and not to describe people's marital status or relationships. Explains the asymmetry in noun phrases such as <i>hombre público</i> (public man) and <i>mujer pública</i> (public woman).
<i>Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues</i> (RAE, 2020)	Does not recognize the term apparent duals or asymmetric pairs. Disassociates itself from the pejorative semantic load, from its perspective, they are words that 'describe'. Provides a list of words and phrases that present an asymmetric designation of women and men without an in-depth explanation.

Source: Created by the authors based on the analysis of Pérez (2011), Guichard (2015) and RAE (2020)

The *Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language* (Pérez, 2011) briefly explains apparent duals or asymmetrical pairs; however, it does not go into further explanations or provide more than examples. The *Manual for Non-sexist Communication. Towards Inclusive Language* (Guichard, 2015) offers few alternatives to avoid them, but does not provide suggestions for their use because its focus lies in pointing out the androcentric and sexist background behind forms of courtesy and nominal phrases, which are used to invisibilize women in positions of prestige and authority, or to indicate a woman's marital status and her relationship to men.

The *Royal Spanish Academy Report on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020) does not provide any alternatives to their use, arguing that the asymmetry in the list of displayed words exists and cannot be changed because the semantic load is the responsibility of the speakers, not of the dictionary or its creators.

Thus, the RAE (2020) does not explain the semantic difference between each phrase or word in the feminine or masculine form, nor does it explain the reason for a sociolinguistic phenomenon that concerns both the structure of the language and the social structure.

Table 2. Proposals for the use of *agents* or *ergonomics*

Name of the manual or report	Proposals for the use of the agentive or ergonym
<i>Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language</i> (Pérez, 2011)	<p>agentive or ergonym is not used; they are addressed as 'occupational' or 'professional' positions, that is, there are missing elements of linguistic terminology.</p> <p>Inflection is suggested in feminine and masculine as appropriate for words ending in: -a, -o, -era/-ero, -ora/-ero, -tora/-tor, -dora/-dor, -óloga/-ólogo, -ónoma'/'-ónomo, -aria/-ario, -ica/-ico, -on/-ona, -enta/-ente.</p> <p>It allows the formation of words ending in: -ante, -ista and the generic masculine of some words ending in -e such as '<i>delineante</i>' and '<i>ponente</i>'.</p> <p>Recommends rules for syntactic agreement between article and noun and/or adjective and noun.</p>
<i>Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards an Inclusive Language</i> (Guichard, 2015)	<p>agentive or ergonym are not recognized, it simply states that they are the 'feminine and masculine forms of professions, positions or jobs'.</p> <p>Categories are divided into two groups:</p>

	<p>1.- Feminization and masculinization are proposed as appropriate for words ending in -o/-a. The cultured feminine inflection -isa is accepted, as are words with two endings -ay-esa, as in <i>diabla, diablesa</i>. As well, as in -ina/-y, -e/-a, -ina, -esa, -isa, -enta/-ente, -z, -l, /-a, -triz, -ora/-or.</p> <p>2.-It proposes respecting nouns that only have one form, that is, those that only admit the feminine or masculine inflection. Thus, it proposes that the gender marker be assigned by the article or the adjective that accompanies the noun such as: <i>el/la orfebre, el/la maniquí</i>. Likewise, it admits the generic masculine in agentives that end in a consonant, for example <i>el/la auxiliar</i> and in military scale grades such as <i>el/la cabo</i>.</p>
<p><i>Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues</i> (RAE, 2020)</p>	<p>It recognizes the inflection in feminine and masculine in some words but does not admit a significant or real change in the meaning of agentives when changing the gender morpheme.</p>

Source: Created by the authors based on the analysis of Pérez (2011), Guichard (2015) and RAE (2020).

Both the *Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language* (Pérez, 2011) and the *Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards Inclusive Language* (Guichard, 2015) offer very broad and linguistically correct alternatives for the feminization of words used to refer to public officials. Furthermore, they recognize the unmarked grammatical gender or generic masculine in some trades, professions and occupations in which the corresponding feminine or masculine inflection may be out of habit or fall into amphibology, however, these arguments are not sufficient, as Bengoechea (2015) says because it is possible to find and implement other solutions.

The *Royal Spanish Academy Report on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020) states that feminization is gradual and will be reflected in dictionaries according to the integration of women and men in different areas of work, trades, or occupations. However, the entry for ‘*gubernanta*’ (governess) in the online version of the DLE still registers a sexist definition, as happens with other words that reflect the rejection of feminization, contributing to the conservation of traditional roles between genders, as well as defining the lives of women based on those of men. Recognize the work of women in positions of power, in a way that reflects today's society, is essential.

Table 3. Proposals for the use of the *generic masculine*

Name of the manual or report	Proposals for the use of the generic masculine or unmarked grammatical gender
<i>Manual for the Non-sexist Use of Language</i> (Pérez, 2011)	Use of singular collective nouns. Change of the verb from the third-person singular to the first-person plural and second-person singular. Use of the gerund.
<i>Non-sexist Communication Manual. Towards an Inclusive Language</i> (Guichard, 2015)	Unfolding. Use of common or epicene nouns. Paraphrasing. Find a synonym without gender baggage. Add the words ‘ <i>mujeres</i> ’ (women) and ‘ <i>hombres</i> ’ (men). Add the word ‘ <i>personas</i> ’ (people). Use pronouns. Conjugate verbs from the second to the third-person singular, first- or second-person plural, or establish the wording in an impersonal manner. Change the verb to the imperative.
<i>Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues</i> (RAE, 2020)	Recommends the use of the generic masculine and does not record or suggest unfolding.

Source: created by the authors based on the analysis of Pérez (2011), Guichard (2015) and RAE (2020).

On the one hand, the manuals by Pérez (2011) and Guichard (2015) are in favour of avoiding the use of the generic masculine. Both guides offer valid linguistic alternatives such as the use of nouns that describe a collective, changing the verb from the third-person singular to the first-person plural and second-person singular, unfolding, the use of synonyms with no gender baggage, and pronouns, etc. Both guides offer viable proposals and exemplify how such inclusive language alternatives can be applied; however, the *Non-sexist Communication Manual. Towards an Inclusive Language* (Guichard, 2015) has more specialized language and, more importantly, it gives both varied and specific proposals frequently found in Spanish.

On the other hand, the *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020) does not offer any suggestions for the use of the *generic masculine*, it does not even name it as such, but as *unmarked grammatical gender*, which use it encourages. At the same time, it invalidates the proposal for unfolding because, from its perspective, speakers would get tired of writing and reading it, in other words, they subscribe to the argument of the economy of language.

Discussion

The linguistic proposals analysed in Pérez's *Manual for the Non-Sexist Use of Language* (2011) are in line with the objective of being applied in official documents and within work environments, both governmental and in the private sector. Although the author does an exceptional job in creating and disseminating the first manual used by an institution such as CONAVIM for the prevention of sexism in language, the work has limitations as far as linguistic knowledge, as can be seen in the following example:

- “*El abonado del metrobús solo deberá introducirlo en la máquina ...*” por “*Si posees un abono de metrobús solo deberás introducirlo en la máquina (The metrobus user will only have to insert it into the machine...)*” instead of “*If you have a metrobus pass, you will only have to insert it into the machine...*” (Pérez, 2011, p. 37).

Evidently, “*abonado*” here serves as an adjective with noun value while “*abono*” is a noun, and both are in the masculine form. However, this case is not adequate example of *unmarked grammatical gender* or *generic masculine*, since these terms do not designate people, that is, there would be no need to propose an alternative because ‘*abonado*’ and ‘*abono*’ refer to a type of ticket, respectively an adjective functioning as an inanimate noun

and a concrete noun, an object, not a person. So, as an example of the need to use the generic masculine, it is insubstantial.

The *Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards an Inclusive Language* (Guichard, 2015) uses specialized language and provides examples and explanations both on strategies for avoiding the *unmarked grammatical gender*, and the use of *agentive* or *ergonomics*. More importantly, it explains the reasons for avoiding their use. In the case of *apparent duals* or *asymmetric pairs*, the manual rejects, using sociological and linguistic arguments, the use of feminization when it involves describing heterodox sexual behaviour, that is, when it serves to denigrate, invisibilize or name women according to their relationship to men.

In contrast, the analysis of the *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020) can be considered as lacking dialogue and openness towards the stance of feminist linguistics particularly regarding inclusive language, since it does not recognize linguistic sexism or androcentrism and, therefore, does not provide alternatives to avoid them. Although language does have a formal level of analysis, it also manifests itself in social forms. Its complexity transcends formalism and is inevitably linked to the relationships between language and society, in which discourse structures define and configure the world.

The RAE recommends the use of marked grammatical gender despite there being linguistically correct alternatives to avoid it. The RAE (2020) decides to publish the definitions for posts, professions or occupations without the feminine inflection and, when it is present, said grammatical marker comes in second place or corresponds to a noun derived from a relationship to a man (e.g., *regente/regenta*). Even when the asymmetric designation between women and men is recognized according to the agentives or ergonyms, it does not delve into the definitions of apparent duals and ignores the contrast between the negative and/or pejorative baggage attached to the feminine forms compared to the positive connotations of the masculine forms. That is to say, the *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020) does not fulfil the task providing a complex description of the linguistic phenomena that surround inclusive language; it can be said that by evading detailed explanations it perpetuates and reproduces male domination.

Of the three documents analysed in this work, none record or express a position regarding the use of “morphemes” such as “@” “x” and “e” which the use of in nouns, according to José María Gil (2020), implies indistinct gender or no gender. The use of these

signs in the speech chain reflects the speaker's worldview of, however, their inclusion as a norm in academic writing or institutional language often generates resistance, and contrary to it objective, intolerance and incomprehension of the apocalypse postponed. It is possible that, due to this controversy, the documents analysed choose not to suggest their use.

Manuals or guides that promote the use of inclusive language, specifically those that address non-sexist communication, share the initiative of contributing to gender equality through linguistic awareness and recommendation. Despite being disseminated by institutions that enjoy linguistic prestige, the manuals limit themselves to proposals without impositions or sanctions for those who resist the alternative they offer.

Conclusions

The objectives of this work include paving the way for interpersonal and equitable relations between women and men. The analysis of the three manuals for inclusive language allows us to make recommendations, in order to avoid linguistic sexism. The *Manual of Non-sexist Communication. Towards an Inclusive Language* (Guichard, 2015), in particular, allows recommendations on alternatives for the use of the generic masculine or unmarked grammatical gender and the agentives or ergonyms; the explanations, examples and proposals offered are linguistically correct and clear enough to avoid confusing the reader.

However, a warning is needed for the works of Pérez (2011) and Guichard (2015), regarding apparent duals or asymmetric pairs, given the need for a more extensive list that better exemplifies these words and nominal phrases, along with a detailed definition.

The link between language and gender is apparent and unavoidable. Speakers, as social beings, perform linguistic acts that reflect the different microcultures and imaginaries they subscribe to. Given their importance in social organization, institutions such as language academies play a crucial role in reproducing and promoting traditional structures; by underestimating the relationship between language and gender they help maintain the masculine symbolic order.

The analysis of the *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020) shows a resistance to inclusive language, therefore, there is no open dialogue about the subject and its alternatives; it is the mere fulfilment of a commission. The RAE (2020) justifies androcentric and/or sexist denominations and nominal phrases under the argument that they correspond to the use of speakers, although such a stance is true

to a certain extent, as an institution it must commit to social change, that is, it must include warnings about certain uses and delve into functionalist and cognitive reflection of the language, not only the formalist one.

The main obstacle for the dissemination and use of inclusive language lies in the linguistic contradictions present in the manuals analysed here, as well as the lack of a feminist perspective in canonical documents such as the *Report of the Royal Spanish Academy on Inclusive Language and Related Issues* (RAE, 2020). Therefore, the creation of inclusive proposals by feminist linguists is urgent.

The adoption of feminine forms and the identification of linguistic sexism is a challenge even now, more than twelve years after the first manual appeared in Mexico. The most important linguistic changes happen gradually and go hand in hand with social changes; if the relationship between genders is the great revolution of our time, language will take note of it.

This article has analysed the three main manuals for inclusive language in Mexico. It has opened avenues for future research, such as: a) comparing the respective manuals between the different Spanish-speaking communities; b) contrasting the *agentives* and *asymmetric pairs* in the dictionary entries belonging to the ASALE; c) creating manuals for the use of non-sexist language that include vulnerable groups beyond gender orthodoxy; and d) extending the debate on linguistic formalism to disciplines such as anthropology and philosophy.

Based on the experience gained from this research, we are convinced that a guide on the topic at hand should include contemplations on the relationship between language and society, feminism, along with exemplifications and descriptions of categories such as agentives and apparent duals. In other words, these pages serve as a significant outline of the path yet to be followed.

Future lines of research

The completion of this work contributes to the necessary and unpostponable dialogue between those who practice linguistic studies from a traditional perspective and those who, due to their convictions and personal experience, seek to spur social changes through inclusive language. The obtained results, like all knowledge, have produced pending tasks and lines of research for future studies.

The issue of the *morphemes* “@”, “x” and “y” being one of these pending research lines. It would be pertinent to analyse why the most relevant documents on inclusive language do not address these forms. Perhaps the manuals were created at an early stage and, today, these morphemes have gained greater relevance among generations seeking to eliminate linguistic sexism and binary gender categorization.

Likewise, it is necessary to research the creation of neologisms and their possible incorporation into inclusive language guides, such as "*collective*" or "*cuerpa*", terms that have achieved great acceptance within the feminist movement.

Another relevant line of research is the development of new documents on inclusive language, more in line with the third decade of the 21st century, ones which integrate the various views on gender and sexuality and engage in dialogue with formal and academic knowledge, which are one of the main avenues for social change.

Another pending research path lies on whether, once speakers are familiar with inclusive language manuals, they incorporate the proposed structures into their vocabulary and everyday sentences, or whether, on the contrary, they remain passive constructions, alien to practice, even among those seeking social and linguistic change.

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