

An Analysis of the Use of Inclusive Language among Italian Non-Binary Individuals: A Survey Transcending Binary Thinking

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of gender-inclusive language among Italian non-binary individuals. In English-speaking countries, the epicene pronoun ‘they’ and neo-pronouns such as ‘xe’ and ‘zim’ have been adopted by nonbinary individuals and LGBTQA+ allies alike. In this debate, Romance languages are a very interesting case, since they are inflectional languages characterised by gender markers for all variable parts of speech. In Italy, activists are trying to spread language awareness to dismantle gender discrimination conveyed through language. Projects such as ‘Italiano Inclusivo’, ‘Progetto Genderqueer’, and scholars such as Gheno (2019a, 2019b) are involved in the analysis and promotion of inclusive language, while one of the most important research institutions, the Accademia della Crusca (2020), refuses to accept any alternative. It is against this background that this study analyses the state of the use of inclusive language among the Italian non-binary community. Through a survey submitted to several Italian LGBTQA+ online groups, the study investigates non-binary individuals’ preferred pronouns, their selection of suffixes when writing or speaking about themselves or other non-binary individuals, how they refer to a group of mixed binary and non-binary people, and further proposals of inclusive forms. Gender-inclusive language is more than a matter of political correctness. Understanding the mechanisms behind its use is important because interpersonal communication contributes to gender stereotyping and misgendering. Even if these results are not blanket truth, they can contribute to the analysis of the connection between language, gender, and society, to overcome social polarisations and promote acknowledgement and respect.