



IJAHSS



Copyright@IJAHSS

2019's Council of Europe guidelines against sexism and their impact on Italian grammar. The case of neutral (or generic) masculine

Piermauro Catarinella^{1*}; Suhardi Kram²; Aziz Bin Hashim³; Omar Colombo⁴

¹Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Shah Alam, Malaysia

²Faculty of Sports Science & Recreation, Samarahan, UiTM Sarawak, Malaysia

³Education Department, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

⁴Language Centre, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam

***Corresponding Author**

Piermauro Catarinella

ABSTRACT

In 2019, the Council of Europe adopted a specific manual to prevent and combat sexism and invited all European countries to change their policies, legislation, programs, and language to achieve gender equality. Discrimination on the grounds of sex and/or gender constitutes a violation of human rights and is an impediment to the enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Sexism is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, leading to discrimination and preventing women's full advancement. It is widespread and prevalent in all sectors of society and linked to violence against women and girls, whereby acts of "everyday" sexism are part of a continuum of violence that creates a climate of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion, and insecurity that limits opportunities and freedom. Eliminating gender stereotypes and sexism is a top priority for all European countries and language and grammar rules are essential to reaching these goals. This qualitative research aims to analyze how the 2019's Council of Europe guidelines against sexism have interacted with the Italian language, and how its grammar has changed. Last but not least, it aims to determine if Italy has achieved complete gender equality or if sexism still affects women's life.

Key Words: *Council of Europe, Italian grammar, Sexism, Gender equality*

INTRODUCTION

The Council of Europe (Torri, 2019) is not the only international organization to have adopted guidelines for a gender-neutral language. The European Parliament, the World Health Organization, the European Commission, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization also felt the need to create them to obtain an inclusive language for all genders so that the negative impact of sexism could fade away (Ludbrook, 2022). Sexism may affect everyone, due to an individual's ethnicity, age, disability, social origin, religion, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, and migration status. It can also be detrimental for men and boys, especially when they do not conform to traditional male stereotypes. But women and girls suffer disproportionately, they might be the victims in every sector of life. This paper will focus on male-female sexism. It plays a relevant role in language and communications, through words and images, that often put men in higher positions than women. But sexism is also present in the media, online, sports, education, culture, and the private and public sectors. An important part of the recommendations of the Council of Europe is dedicated to the use of the language. Language and communication are essential components of gender equality and must not consecrate the hegemony of the masculine model. Non-stereotypical communication is an excellent way to educate, raise awareness, and prevent sexist behaviour. It encompasses eliminating sexist expressions, using the feminine and masculine or gender-neutral forms of titles when addressing a group, diversifying the representation of women and men, and ensuring equality of both in visual and other representations. The Council of Europe's guidelines apply to all European languages, including their particular nuances. In fact, each language is unique and follows its own linguistic and grammar rules (Frattini, 2022). To understand the grammatical gender of the different EU languages, it is necessary to divide them into three different categories. Languages that:

- 1) make use of the "gender-neutral" (English, Swedish, Danish);
- 2) have two or more genders (Italian, German, French, Bulgarian, Polish, and Croatian);
- 3) do not have gender-oriented nouns and adjectives (Finnish, Hungarian, and Estonian).

For languages in the third category, it is quite natural to speak gender-neutral; those in the first category have few gender-exclusive nouns, and use small tricks - such as the terms without gender connotations that refer to the concept of

individual/person instead of men/women – to reach “gender-neutral” language. In English, for example, “Chairman” can be replaced by “Chairperson”, “Policeman/Policewoman” by “Police officer”, “Fireman” by “Firefighter”, and “Handyman” by “Technician/Repairer”. The situation is more complicated in the Italian language because each noun is accompanied by grammatical gender, and pronouns always agree with that of the noun. This requires the elimination (or at least a clear restriction) not only of sexist expressions (Gheno, 2022) but also of the so-called “*maschile marcato*” or “*generico*” - marked or generic masculine – (Ballerini, 2020). Female nouns must be used for those jobs that, for too long, have been carried out only by men in the past, characterized by a patriarchal vision of society. The Italian language has taken many steps to become really inclusive and respectful towards the feminine gender. In the section “Results and discussion”, it will be analyzed if and how the 2019 Council of Europe’s recommendations have been implemented in the Italian language and how its grammar has changed as a result.

LITERARY REVIEW

Studies on sexism are far from new. Numerous books have been written about this topic because it has been examined and studied from various points of view (social, political, narrative, historical, medical, etc.). In Italy, fights and discussions about sexism were born in 1960 when the “*Fronte Italiano di Liberazione Femminile*” (FILF) - Italian Women's Liberation Front (Marsala, 2020) -and “*il Movimento per la Liberazione della Donna (MLD)*” - Women's Liberation Movement (Pisa, 2018) - began to make specific claims in women’s favor. Due to this research’s specific field, it is valuable and exciting to mention three recent books, published at the end of 2022. One was written by a long-time Italian politician, another by a member of the Italian “*Partito Democratico*” (Democratic Party), and the third by a female journalist.

Pierferdinando Casini is the author of “*C’era una volta la politica. Parla l’ultimo democristiano*” (Once upon a time there was politics. The last member of the Christian Democrats Party speaks); he (Casini, 2023) recalls the last forty years of Italian politics, where women were very few and did not have power at all (Bertini, 2023). The way he speaks about the newly appointed Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (a woman) is sexist because, according to him, she does not have experience, she has a child to take care of and, as a result, she does not have the time to devote to the job of Prime Minister. Because she is a woman and most of the Heads of State in the world are men, she would have trouble maintaining important personal relationships (Di martedì, 2023). The language of the book is not updated with the new Italian grammar rules because the author refers to men and women using “*maschile sovraesteso*” (overextended masculine); he uses the masculine plural form to mention a group of people composed of women and men.

“*Re Giorgia. Controistoria della donna che si è presa l’Italia*” (King Giorgia, the woman who took Italy) written by Susanna Turco, is another book (Turco, 2022) that deals with the new Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who won the elections on 25 September 2022. The author (a woman) uses strong sexist language, calling Giorgia Meloni a “King” (why not Queen?) who took power without having the qualities to lead a country. She comes from a suburban area of Rome, and her political influences are those “fascist” men who joined the “*Movimento Sociale Italiano*” (Italian Social Movement) in the past. According to the author, Giorgia Meloni is not sincere, but cruel and ambitious; she acts like a man because she decided (Guadagnini, 2022) to be named “*il presidente*” (the president with the masculine article before the noun) in official ceremonies. Giorgia Meloni is more of a social media “influencer” than a Prime Minister. It is very common to believe that sexism is a “men vs. women” issue, but this book proves that women also can be sexist, and Turco, of course, is not the only one (Redazione, 2022).

Goffredo Bettini, an important member of the Italian Democratic Party, wrote the book “*A Sinistra, da capo*” (On the left, from the beginning) at the end of 2022. In the first half, the author focuses on his political party’s historical, ideal, and cultural framework (Bettini, 2022). “*Il Partito Democratico*” (the Italian Democratic Party) is the old Italian Communist Party’s successor, where women played very important roles and fought for their rights. In the past Italian political scenario, “*il PCI*” (Italian Communist Party) was perhaps the only political party that fought against sexism. Many female party members reached top positions (Trento, 2020) like Luciana Castellina, Giglia Tedesco, Marisa Rodano, Nilde Iotti, Lina Merlin (to name just a few). Nilde Iotti was the Chamber of Deputies’ President from 1979 until 1992, and Lina Merlin radically changed Italian law by forcing the Parliament to abolish the so-called “bachelorette clause” which, in employment contracts, required the dismissal of female workers who got married. In the half of the book, Bettini recognizes that his political party became more sexist and lost the people’s trust with the general elections on 25 September last year. The Italian Democratic Party, to allow women to reach certain positions, resorts to the so-called “gender or female quotas”, that assure a percentage of jobs to be decided by gender. But these quotas do not help to achieve equal treatment; on the contrary, they are in some ways humiliating because they encourage a system of subordination (Minonzi, 2021).

“*Ninna Nanna*” (Lullaby), 2022 Rita Mattei’s book, is the story of Vincenzina Marchese, wife of mafia boss Leoluca Bagarella (Mattei, 2022). She lives a luxurious life, is intelligent, wields great power in the criminal organization “*Cosa Nostra*” (Italian Mafia), and is highly respected by other Mafia families. Mattei demonstrates that sexism does not exist within the Mafia organization “*Cosa Nostra*”. Mafia women bosses have the same power as men and make important decisions (Vecellio, 2022). This is somewhat surprising if we consider that the Mafia has its roots in Sicily, a region of

southern Italy, which has always been considered conservative and male-dominated. The author shows that sexism is present in the so-called “legal society” but absolutely absent in the criminal one.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research aims to study the guidelines adopted in 2019 by the Council of Europe and understand the effects on the Italian grammar rules. Linguistic sexism is related to the official language but other forms of sexism can exist, even if the language is completely “gender-neutral”. After examining the Italian language’s changes in compliance with the Council of Europe’s guidelines, can we affirm that sexism has disappeared in Italian society? To answer this question, this research will also be based on readings of current Italian newspaper articles (2020-2023) that will help us to understand if sexism still exists in everyday life and its effects on women. Language and words are important; sometimes, changing them is necessary to modify reality (Anelli, 2020). A famous sentence quotes: “Words are actions, and they make things happen. Once they are out of the mouth, you can never get them back and something irrevocable will have happened” (Kureishi, 2022). However, we disagree because we believe that our way of thinking influences how we talk (or write). Thought comes first, then language (Masini, 2020). The Italian language, today, is undoubtedly and absolutely respectful of the female gender because it has become “gender-neutral” but this does not mean that sexism has wholly disappeared (Calzoli, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2019’s Council of Europe guidelines significantly impacted the Italian language due to the political pressure of the international body that drafted them. In fact, the Council of Europe, founded in 1949 and based in Strasbourg, is the oldest and most crucial intergovernmental organization in Europe, composed of forty-six member states, protects and promotes human rights, democracy, and rule of law, and fights against violence towards women. Therefore, each state must condemn discrimination in all its forms and agree to pursue, by all appropriate means and without delay, a policy to eliminate such discrimination. Like the other EU countries, Italy is very sensitive about these issues. Gendered language can contribute to the marginalization of women in the labor market, impede educational attainment, reinforce traditional gender roles, and support harmful traditional practices. It can also empower, advance, and promote inequality between women and men. Due to this, the Italian language underwent a significant change in its grammar. All of these modifications were not only approved by “*Accademia della Crusca*” - the oldest Italian linguistic academy, founded in Florence (Italy) in 1582 and has since been characterized by its efforts to maintain the purity of the Italian language (Betti, 2021) - but also enclosed in the most important Italian dictionaries (Zingarelli, Treccani, Devoto-Oli, Garzanti). For many decades, the Italian language used the so-called “*maschile neutro, non marcato o generico*” (neutral, non-marked, or generic masculine). This form was used, in the plural, to refer to a group of people consisting of women and men - e.g., “*gli studenti inglesi*” (British students), “*i cittadini statunitensi*” (USA citizens), “*i cantanti*” (the singers) - or in the singular - e.g., “*un'alimentazione corretta fa l'uomo sano*”, (proper nutrition makes a man healthy), “*l'uomo della strada*” (ordinary people) -. These sentences use the masculine form, even if they want to include women, but there is no trace of them. It designates all human referents, regardless of their gender (Coluccia, 2021). This way of writing (or speaking) Italian is no longer accepted because women must be mentioned if spoken about (Di Gennaro, 2020). However, referring to a woman with a neutral masculine word, is not regarded as sexist language, as Luca Serianni, professor of Italian language at University of Rome “*La Sapienza*” and “*Accademia della Crusca*” advisory board member, says (Buffo, 2022). Many professional women still prefer to be called by masculine generic nouns. Concretely, let us see how the generic masculine has been replaced.

- 1) Avoid using the words “*Uomo*” (Man), “*Uomini*” (Men) in a universal sense (when women also are included); they may be replaced, depending on the context, by the human species, and population.
 - 2) Always write “*Donne e uomini*” (Women and men) as putting the masculine before the feminine, shows that the man is more important than the woman. It is better to say “*I diritti umani, della persona umana, dell'essere umano*” (Human rights) instead of “*I diritti dell'uomo*” (Men’s rights).
 - 3) “*Il corpo dell'uomo, il lavoro dell'uomo*” (man’s body, man’s work), should be replaced by “*Il corpo umano, il lavoro degli esseri umani*” (Human body, the work of the human beings).
 - 4) “*L'uomo primitivo*” (Primitive man) should be changed to “*Le popolazioni primitive*” (Primitive populations).
 - 5) “*Caccia all'uomo*” (Manhunt) to “*Caccia alla persona*” (Person hunt).
 - 6) “*L'uomo della strada*” (men in the street) to “*La gente comune*” (Ordinary people). Therefore, there are words such as humanity, people, and individual that do not make women feel in a lower position than men (Giordano, 2022).
- A) Avoid using the neutral masculine when speaking of people, categories, and groups.
- 1) “*I Romani, I Greci, Gli Spagnoli, I Malesiani*” (Romans, Greeks, Spanish, Malaysians), better replace with “*Il Popolo/La Popolazione Romano/a, Greco/a, Spagnolo/a, Malesiano/a*” (Roman, Greek, Spanish, Malaysian people).
 - 2) “*I bambini*” (Children) , “*I ragazzi*” (Boys), “*I vecchi*” (Old people) should be turned into “*I bambini e le bambine*” or “*L'infanzia*” (Male and female children or childhood) “*I ragazzi e le ragazze*” or “*L'adolescenza*” (Boys and girls or adolescents), “*Le persone anziane*” (The elderly). 3) “*Gli insegnanti*” (Teachers), “*I vigili*” (Firefighters), “*I commercianti*” (Shop keepers), “*I giovani*” (Young people) become “*Gli inseganti d'ambo i sessi*” (Male and female teachers), “*I vigili donne e uomini o di ambedue i sessi*” (Female and male firefighters), “*Le commercianti ed i*

commercianti” (Female and male shopkeepers), “*Le giovani ed i giovani*” (Young girls and young guys). Inclusive writing is not only an ideology but also a very practical matter because the inclusiveness issue is increasingly present in our lives, despite a solid resistance to the use of a more inclusive language (Vitiello, 2022).

- B) Avoid words such as “*Fratellanza*” (Brotherhood), “*Paternità*” (Authorship) when they refer to women and men at the same time because they recall their masculine roots (Giorgi, 2020). 1) “*La fratellanza tra le nazioni*” (Brotherhood among Nations) should be turned into “*La solidarietà umana tra le Nazioni*” (Human solidarity among Nations) and “*La paternità di questo capolavoro è attribuita a Laura Rossi*” into “*La maternità di questo capolavoro è attribuita a Laura Rossi*” (The authorship of this masterpiece belongs to Laura Rossi).
- C) Avoid the past participle in the masculine form when nouns are predominantly feminine. If it is difficult or impossible to establish the numerical majority between males and females within a mixed group, the most appropriate choice is to match the past participle with the gender of the sentence’s last noun (Raso, 2019). A sentence like “*Maria, Carla, Giacomo e Luisa sono arrivati ieri*” (Maria, Carla, Giacomo e Luisa arrived yesterday) should be changed to “*Maria, Carla, Giacomo e Luisa sono arrivate ieri*” (the sentence does not change its meaning in English). The fair gender is “*arrivate*” (arrived, feminine plural form) and not “*arrivati*” (arrived but plural masculine form) because the majority of the group is composed of three females (Maria, Carla, Luisa) while Giacomo is a male. “*Ragazzi e ragazze furono visti al centro commerciale*” (Boys and girls were seen at the shopping mall) should be turned into “*Ragazzi e ragazze furono viste al centro commerciale*” (the sentence in English does not change at all), using the past participle’s feminine form “*viste*” (seen) because “*ragazze*” (girls) is the last noun of the sentence.
- D) When the names of political leaders are used, males and females must be treated in the same way (Disch, 2021). For example, we can decide to call both of them by their full names and last names: “*La Signora Thatcher e il signor Reagan*” (Mrs Thatcher and Mr Reagan); or with just a nickname: “*Maggie e Ronny*” (Maggie and Ronny); or with the last name only and the article “the” for both: “*La Thatcher e il Reagan*” (Thatcher and Reagan). Nevertheless, it would be against gender-neutral language to address them in different ways: “*La signora Thatcher e Reagan*” (Mrs Thatcher and Reagan) or “*Maggie e Ronald Reagan*”. (Maggie and Ronald Reagan).
- E) Avoid calling a woman using only her given name, while the man is called by his surname or both. Introducing them in such a way is considered sexist: “*Diamo il benvenuto al signor Mario Rossi e Laura*” (we welcome Mr Mario Rossi and Laura). Alternatively, “*è un piacere avere tra noi Laura e Mario Rossi*” (it is a pleasure to have Laura and Mario Rossi with us).
- F) The term “*Signorina*” (Miss) should be abolished because when we refer to a man, there is only one term, “*Signore*” (Mr) that does not specify if he is married or not. But for females, the noun “*Signora*” (Mrs) means married. The masculine noun “*Signorino*” (Young master) is archaic and does not mean “single” like “*Signorina*”. Why do we not care about men’s marital status but only women’s? Traditionally speaking, “*Signorina*” refers to any unmarried woman. However, it is considered correct to address all women as “*signora*” regardless of their marital status, especially in a professional context. The only exception is teenage girls and very young women who have not yet entered university or the workforce (Broster, 2020).
- G) When speaking of the man-woman couple, it is recommended to address the woman's surname, not only the man’s. Even after marriage, the wife's surname continues to be officially registered and she must sign with her original surname. According to the law, the woman does not need to change her surname (Policarpio, 2019).
- H) Currently, all masculine nouns that refer to qualified professions, jobs, titles, or elective offices have the feminine form; however, it is the woman’s free and legitimate choice to keep using the masculine form for herself (Gheno, 2020). The new rector of one of the largest Italian Universities (Sapienza, 2020) chose to be addressed as “*Rettrice*” (female rector). Female soccer referees Stéphanie Frappart, Yoshimi Yamashita, and Salima Mukansanga (Zerbi, 2022) are now called “*Arbitre*” (feminine plural term of “*Arbitra*”).

Italian nouns can be divided into three different categories:

- 1) “**Nomi di genere promiscuo**” (Mixed-gender nouns) are grammatically feminine because they end with the letter “a”, but refer to both genders (Grammatica, 2022). For example: 1) “*Spia*” (spy), “*Sentinella*” (sentry), “*Guardia*” (police officer), “*Recluta*” (conscript), “*Vittima*” (victim), “*Persona*” (person), “*Astronauta*” (male or female astronaut), “*Atleta*” (athlete). To understand if a mixed-gender noun refers to a male or female, the use of the article (“*il, lo*” for masculine and “*la*” for feminine) does not help but it is a must to make use of gender-oriented adjectives (e.g., “*un bravo atleta*” – male athlete – or “*una brava atleta*”- female athlete).
- 2) “**Nomi di genere comune**” (Common gender nouns) are those having a single form for both masculine and feminine (e.g., “*nipote*” (grandchild), “*cantante*” (singer), “*collega*” (colleague), “*giornalista*” (journalist, reporter), “*insegnante*” (teacher), “*preside*” (dean), “*pediatra*” (pediatrician), “*penalista*” (criminal lawyer), “*agente*” (agent), “*amante*” (lover), “*omicida*” (killer), “*parente*” (relative). Unlike mixed-gender nouns, in which the article always remains the same, its selection (masculine or feminine) allows us to understand their gender (Soriano, 2022). We will have “*il cantante*” (male singer) and “*la cantante*” (female singer); “*il preside*” and “*la preside*” (male and female dean); “*il giornalista*” and “*la giornalista*” (male and female journalist/reporter).
- 3) “**Nomi di genere mobile**” (Mobile gender nouns). They are called this way because they switch from masculine to feminine gender and vice versa by varying the ending, adding a suffix, or modifying part of the noun’s root (Esposito, 2022). The Italian language, under the political pressure of the Council of Europe, has introduced numerous new

terms - still unknown to many Italians - belonging to this group (e.g., “*il maresciallo, la marescialla*”, (military marshal) “*il capitano, la capitana*” (captain), “*ammiraglio, ammiraglia*” (chief navy officer), “*carabiniere, carabiniere*”, (Italian police officer), “*sindaco, sindaco*” (Mayor), “*ministro, ministra*” (Minister), “*il cavaliere, la cavaliere*” (knighted), “*ingegnere, ingegnera*” (engineer), “*filosofo, filosofa*” (philosopher), “*perito, perita*” (technical expert), “*chirurgo, chirurga*” (surgeon), “*architetto, architetta*” (architect), “*medico, medica*” (medical doctor), “*il pretore, la pretora*” (magistrate’s court judge), “*magistrato, magistrata*” (judge), “*avvocato, avvocat*” (attorney at law), “*deputato, deputata*” (MP), “*il commendatore, la commendatora*” (Italian special title awarded by the Head of State), “*il lettore, la lettrice*” (lecturer), “*il notaio, la notaia*” (notary public), “*ispettore generale, ispettrice generale*” (general inspector), “*allenatore, allenatrice*” (coach), “*ambasciatore, ambasciatrice*” (ambassador), “*consigliere di Corte d’Appello, consigliera di Corte di Appello*” (Court of Appeal magistrate), “*direttore d’orchestra, direttrice d’orchestra*” (orchestra conductor), and “*amministratore delegato, amministratrice delegata*” (CEO). It is clear that now, in Italian, every masculine noun has its feminine, but only some are aware of this. Moreover, these new terms are not always and commonly used as they have not been integrated into “every day” Italian. In Italy, linguistic experts, for the most part, agree that languages are natural processes that evolve by themselves and do not need to be oriented. Socio-cultural circumstances influence the language, not vice versa (Verolino, 2020). But the vast and ultra-rapid creation of so many new feminine words suggests that the Council of Europe politically interfered with the spontaneous evolution of the Italian language (Zoppetti, 2023). That is why they are not felt within the community, as a recent survey conducted in Genova (Italy) - on the perception of gender stereotypes and the use of feminine language - demonstrated. We will analyze its results in future research.

CONCLUSION

Italian is now a full “gender-neutral” language, although many feminine nouns are still not common for many people. For this reason, it cannot be judged sexist to call a woman by a masculine noun. Many newspapers, for example, still refer to a female lawyer as “*avvocato*” (Perri, 2023) even if the feminine “*avvocata*” officially exists. From a linguistic point of view, Italian offers the tools to use an inclusive language, highly respectful towards women. Grammatical rules exist and are easily applicable to speeches and written texts. However, not even institutions or important media often use them, which is why gender equality is not yet concretely achieved (Giugni, 2023). Additionally, gender language issues involve every language (not only Italian). For example, Australian House of Representatives Deputy Speaker Sharon Claydon called out MP and Leader of the Opposition Peter Dutton, reminding him to use her correct title after saying she had long tolerated being called a male as Dutton had done so several times. MP Dutton apologized but, shortly after, and several times, he continued in his speech to refer to Vice President Claydon with the male title “Mister Speaker” instead of “Mrs” or “Madam” (Repubblica, 2022). It is nice to know that the Italian language, among many others, is not the most sexist. According to Focus D&R, Danish is, followed by German, English, and Hebrew while Italian ranks thirteenth, just before Finnish, French, and Korean (Focus 2021). At the bottom of the rankings are Turkish, Filipino, Polish, and, finally, Malay which, out of the 25 languages examined, was the least sexist. If it is true that language reflects what a society is (Consonni, 2023), women are still victims of sexism and gender violence (physical, sexual, psychological, domestic, and sex-based harassment). Therefore, a gap between a respectful and gender-neutral language and contemporary Italian civil society is undeniable. The percentage of female victims of homicide increased from 69% in 2021 to 74% in 2022 (Zancaner, 2022).

The Parliament has adopted numerous precautions to limit the commission of crimes against women; nevertheless, this type of crime has not shown signs of decreasing. Italy welcomes the “*Codice Rosso*” (Red Code) which innovates and modifies the penal and procedural discipline of domestic and gender-based violence, providing harsher sanctions (Gobbi, 2021). This new law punishes the so-called “forced marriages” (an unknown phenomenon in Italy until five years ago but is on the rise due to the massive presence of non-EU citizens in Italy) when young girls are forced to marry someone older than them without their consent (Spatola, 2022). Sexism (especially “body shaming”) is still often used as a political weapon against women. Online sexism is rampant throughout Europe, with women disproportionately affected. One of its aspects is adversely commenting on expressed views or opinions. But, while attacks on men are more often based on their professional opinions or competence, women are more likely to be subject to sexist and sexualized abuse and invective, the extremity of which may be magnified by the anonymity offered by the Internet.

Online attacks not only affect women’s dignity but may also prevent women, including in the workplace, from expressing opinions and result in pushing them out of online spaces, undermining the right to free speech and opinion in a democratic society, limiting professional opportunities and reinforcing the gendered democratic deficit (La Penna, 2020). Normally it is enjoyable to see animals smiling but, recently, the candidate to lead the Italian Democratic Party was attacked not because of her political opinion but because of her purported resemblance to a dromedary (Repubblica, 2023). Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (Greco, 2020) was also a victim of body shaming, through a sexist picture posted by one of her female political opponents; (Giorgia Meloni is getting bald. Too much testosterone makes her nasty and ugly).

Sexist attacks can come from women too. Women are often victims of sexism, especially in professions that, for many years, were the exclusive domain of men. For example, only recently women were accepted as sports TV journalists. But, while men are required to dress professionally or semi-formally, women are asked to be young, thin, and beautiful, often wearing skin-tight attire to make the TV show more “interesting” to men (Perversi, 2022).

Figure 1: Offensive and sexist picture depicting the candidate to lead the Italian Democratic Party Elly Schlein (Source: https://corrierefiorentino.corriere.it/notizie/politica/23_marzo_02/post-sessisti-su-elly-schlein-bufer-a-sul-sindaco-di-grosseto-anche-da-destra-poi-le-precisazioni-a1d69428-b182-4461-a952-f1bf50d45x1k.shtml?refresh_ce)



Figure 2: Offensive and sexist picture depicting Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (Source: https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2020/08/05/news/le_offese_a_giorgia_meloni_costano_la_vicepresidenza_della_fondazione_cariplo_a_paola_pessina-263819012/)



Women are still victims of many prejudices. When one of them reaches an important, powerful position, many think that it was obtained because she slept with a man (Galici, 2023). In one important TV program weekly broadcast, male journalist Alessandro Sallusti interrupted his colleague Sandra Murri during her reading Palermo’s criminal court verdict regarding a mafia case, saying: “I am so sick of hearing you squawk” (La 7, 2023). Would he use the same language towards one of his male colleagues? Surely not. It cannot be denied that many overtly sexual advertisements exist solely to attract and shock new potential customers (and, of course, this means male customers). There is no doubt that female nudity is often used to make the message interesting and more appealing to obtain greater attention from the public. This ad, for example, went viral in 2022 as the most popular, most likely because of the exposure of the female breast; its sentence is also sexist: “Have you ever thought of restoring the roof of your house”?

Figure 3: Sexist picture of a billboard (Source:<https://www.wired.it/articolo/pubblicita-sessismo-discriminazione-dl-infrastrutture/>)



The word “tetto” means roof, and the ad’s picture recalls “tetta” which means breast. Despite the linguistic changes to make Italian a full “gender-neutral” language, sexism is very much alive, and far from diminishing in Italian society; people need to keep the pressure on to achieve a less patriarchal, less discriminatory, and more equal society.

REFERENCES

- Anelli, F. (2020, February 21). *Perché cambiare le parole può cambiare la società*. L’indiscreto. <https://www.indiscreto.org/perche-cambiare-le-parole-puo-cambiare-la-societa/>
- Ballerini, M. (2020, October 8). “L’universale” genere maschile nella lingua italiana. Una possibile origine. Aratea cultura. <https://www.arateacultura.com/genere-maschile/>
- Bertini, C. (2023, January 19). “C’era una volta la politica”: il libro-evento di Pierferdinando Casini. La Stampa. <https://www.lastampa.it/politica/2023/01/19/news/cera-una-volta-la-politica-il-libro-evento-di-pierferdinando-casini-12593487/>
- Betti, I. (2021, September 28). “La Crusca dice che la “schwa” è inaccettabile. E non sbaglia”. HuffPost. https://www.huffingtonpost.it/entry/lo-schwa-inaccettabile-la-lingua-non-e-frutto-di-un-ragionamento-a-tavolino-it_6152d545e4b06beda473bd18/
- Bettini, G. (2022). *A sinistra da capo*. PaperFIRST Editore. ISBN: 10-8831431994. <https://www.libreriauniversitaria.it/sinistra-capo-bettini-goffredo-paperfirst/libro/9788831431996>
- Broster, H. (2020, February 6). *Italian Word of the Day: Signorina (young lady)*. Ciao. <https://dailyitalianwords.com/italian-word-for-young-lady-signorina/>
- Buffo, S. (2022, September 29). *La lingua italiana ci divide? Ne parliamo con Vera Gheno*. Il Digitale. <https://www.ildigitale.it/la-lingua-italiana-divide-intervistaa-vera-gheno/>
- Casini, P. (2023). *C’era una volta la politica. Parla l’ultimo democristiano*. Piemme Editore. ISBN: 8856688611. <https://www.libreriauniversitaria.it/era-volta-politica-parla-ultimo/libro/9788856688610>
- Calzoli, M. (2022, December 2). *Forme della lingua*. Pannunzio Magazine. <https://www.pannunziomagazine.it/forme-della-lingua-di-marco-calzoli/>
- Coluccia, R. (2021, November 21). *Di mestiere faccio il linguista*. Nuovo Quotidiano di Puglia. <https://www.quotidianodipuglia.it/cultura/linguista-coluccia-crusca-schwa-inclusivita-parita-6320030.html>
- Consonni, S. (2023). *Linguaggio e società*. Tesi online. <https://www.tesionline.it/appunti/scienze-della-comunicazione-e-dello-spettacolo/sociologia-della-comunicazione-interpersonale/linguaggio-e-societ%C3%A0/1020/9>
- Di Gennaro, C. (2020, September 23). *La lingua italiana è discriminatoria? La rivista degli studenti da venticinque anni nelle scuole*. <https://www.zai.net/articoli/interviste/18557804/La-lingua-italiana-e-discriminatoria>
- Disch, M. (2021, February 4). *Parità tra uomo e donna*. Dizionario storico della Svizzera. <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/it/articles/016499/2021-02-04/>
- Di Martedì (2023, January 25). *Puntata del 25 gennaio, 2023*. La 7. <https://www.la7.it/dimartedi/rivedila7/dimartedi-puntata-del-24012023-25-01-2023-469306>
- Esposito, F. (2022, August 3). *Quali sono i nomi mobili e indipendenti?* Area Sosta. <https://areasosta.com/domande-frequenti/quali-sono-i-nomi-mobili-e-indipendenti>

16. Focus, D&R (2021, June 29). *Curiosità Qual è la lingua più sessista del mondo?* Focus. <https://www.focus.it/cultura/curiosita/lingua-piu-sessista-danese>
17. Frattini, S. (2022). *L'Europa e il linguaggio fluido. La diversità linguistica in Europa*. Unire.it. https://unire.unige.it/bitstream/handle/123456789/4729/allegato213084172.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y&group=a_n
18. Galici, F. (2023, January 19). *"Molte più molestie in ambito politico". La rivelazione di De Girolamo*. Il Giornale. <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/personaggi/molestie-ambito-politico-rivelazione-nunzia-de-girolamo-2106851.html>
19. Gheno, V. (2022, July 29). *Le parole non sono neutre (a proposito di distinzione di genere)*. Volerelaluna. La Politica Puntoacapo. <https://volerelaluna.it/in-primo-piano/2022/07/29/le-parole-non-sono-neutre-a-proposito-di-distinzione-di-genere/>
20. Gheno, V. (2020, December 10). *La questione dei nomi delle professioni al femminile una volta per tutte*. Valigia Blu. <https://www.valigiablu.it/professioni-nomi-femminili/>
21. Giordano, D. (2022, January 6). *Il termine genere umano è inclusivo, il termine uomo è esclusivo*. La svolta. <https://www.lasvolta.it/361/il-termini-genere-umano-e-inclusivo-il-termini-uomo-e-esclusivo>
22. Giugni, L. (2023, January 7). *Lilia Giugni, contro la rivoluzione sessista*. Il Manifesto. <https://ilmanifesto.it/lilia-giugni-contro-la-rivoluzione-sessista>
23. Gobbi, N. (2021, July 20). *Le modifiche legislative del Codice Rosso*. Gobbi, Negro, Piazza Studio legale. <https://www.gobbipartners.it/le-modifiche-legislative-del-codice-rosso/>
24. Grammatica, I. (2022). *Nomi di genere promiscuo*. <https://grammaticaitaliana.net/nomi-di-genere-promiscuo/>
25. Greco, A. (2020, August 5). *Offese a Giorgia Meloni su Facebook, Paola Pessina si dimette dalla vicepresidenza della Fondazione Cariplo*. La Repubblica. <https://www.repubblica.it/economia/2020/08/05/news/le-offese-a-giorgia-meloni-costano-la-vicepresidenza-della-fondazione-cariplo-a-paola-pessina-263819012/>
26. Guadagnini, R. (2022, October 31). *Io sono Giorgia, la capotrena. Sulla richiesta di Giorgia Meloni di essere chiamata il "Signor Presidente del Consiglio"*. Micromega. <https://www.micromega.net/giorgia-meloni-presidente-consiglio/>
27. Giorgi, G. (2020, October 1). *«Il titolo dell'ultima enciclica del Papa è sessista», l'accusa di We are Church: «Così esclude le donne»*. Open. <https://www.open.online/2020/10/01/titolo-enciclica-papa-sessista-we-are-church-esclude-donne/>
28. Kureishi, H. (2022). *Frase attribuita ad Hanif Kureishi*. Frasi-celebri. <https://www.frase-celebri.net/frasi/MjI0OTAy/>
29. La Penna, B. (2020, April 19). *Sessismo da tastiera: quando il patriarcato è anche online*. BL Magazine. <https://www.blmagazine.it/sessismo-da-tastiera-quando-il-patriarcato-e-anche-online/>
30. La 7. (2023, January 29). *Non è l'arena. Programma settimanale di approfondimento condotto da Massimo Giletti*. Puntata del 29 gennaio, 2023. <https://www.la7.it/nonelarena/rivedila7/non-e-larena-puntata-del-29-1-2023-30-01-2023-469981>
31. Ludbrook, G. (2022). *Introduzione. Riflessioni sul genere nel linguaggio, pag. 1*. ISSN 1824 – 4483. Rivista telematica di studi sulla memoria femminile. https://www.unive.it/pag/fileadmin/user_upload/dipartimenti/DSLCC/documenti/DEP/numeri/n48/04_Ludbrook_Introduzione.pdf
32. Marsala, I. (2020). *Origini e Storia del Movimento Femminista Italiano*. LUISS. Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche. http://tesi.luiss.it/28472/1/085822_MARSALA_ISABELLA.pdf
33. Minonzo, D. (2021, February 21). *Quote rosa al governo. Il merito non ha sesso*. La Provincia. https://www.laprovinciadico.com.it/stories/Homepage/quote-rosa-al-governo-il-merito-non-ha-sesso_1387166_11/
34. Mattei, R. (2022). *Ninna nanna. Una storia d'amore e di mafia*. All Around Editore. ISBN- 13-979-1259990501. <https://www.lafeltrinelli.it/ninna-nanna-storia-d-amore-libro-rita-mattei/e/9791259990501>
35. Masini, F. (2020, August 5). *Le lingue influenzano il nostro modo di pensare?* Linguisticamente. <https://www.linguisticamente.org/lingue-e-pensiero/>
36. Perri, L. (2023, January 14). *Chi era Martina Scialdone, la giovane avvocatessa uccisa dall'ex. Si occupava di violenza sulle donne*. Secolo d'Italia. <https://www.secoloditalia.it/2023/01/chi-era-martina-scialdone-la-giovane-avvocato-uccisa-dallex-si-occupava-di-violenza-sulle-donne/>
37. Perversi, M. (2022, February 2). *Giovane, magra e bella. La tirannia sessista in televisione*. Bossy. <https://www.bossy.it/giovane-magra-e-bella-la-tirannia-sessista-in-televisione.html>
38. Pisa, B. (2018, June 6). *Il movimento liberazione della donna nel femminismo italiano (MLD). La politica, i vissuti, le esperienze*. Aracne Editrice. DWF. <https://www.dwf.it/tag/movimento-liberazione-donna/>
39. Policarpio, I. (2019, May 28). *Come firma la donna dopo il matrimonio?* Money.it <https://www.money.it/come-deve-firmare-la-donna-dopo-matrimonio>
40. Raso, F. (2019, May 24). *Sull'accordo del participio passato*. Lo SciacquaLingua. Noterelle sulla lingua italiana. <https://faustorasoblogspot.com/2019/05/sullaccordo-del-participio-passato.html>
41. Redazione (2022, October 25). *Lilli Gruber contro Giorgia Meloni e la scelta di chiamarsi "Il presidente". La conduttrice ha preso una netta posizione riguardo alla scelta di definirsi al maschile della presidente del consiglio*. TODAY, Spettacoli&TV. <https://www.today.it/media/tv/giorgia-meloni-scelta-maschile-lilli-gruber.html>

42. Repubblica, TV. (2022, December 15). *Australia, deputato si rivolge alla Speaker della Camera al maschile. Lei lo richiama, lui continua*. Reptv. <https://video.repubblica.it/mondo/australia-deputato-si-rivolge-alla-speaker-della-camera-al-maschile-lei-lo-richiama-lui-continua/434165/435118?ref=search>
43. Repubblica, R. (2023, January 28). *Napoli, dirigente Fi scrive sui social: "Schlein animale", e attacca Ruotolo che ha sollevato il caso: "Vediamo quanto vale"*. La Repubblica. <https://napoli.repubblica.it/cronaca/2023/01/28/news/napoli-consigliere-fi-schlein-animale-e-pubblica-foto-cavall-i-rimosso-dallincarico-385453649/?ref=RHLF-BG-I385422803-P17-S1-T1>
44. Sapienza, U. (2020, November 13). *Antonella Polimeni è la nuova rettrice per il sessennio 2020-2026*. Sapienza, Università di Roma. <https://www.uniroma1.it/it/notizia/antonella-polimeni-e-la-nuova-rettrice-il-sessennio-2020-2026>
45. Soriano, R. (2022). *I nomi di genere comuni e i nomi promiscui: definizioni e cosa sono i falsi cambiamenti di genere*. Studenti Top. <https://www.studentitop.it/grammatica/nomi-di-genere-comuni-e-nomi-promiscui/>
46. Spatola, G. (2022, December 19). *"Farai la fine di Sana". Ragazza pakistana rifiuta le nozze combinate*. Il Giornale. <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/nazionale/si-ribella-matrimonio-combinato-e-denuncia-genitori-e-2097470.html>
47. Torri, L. (2019, July 2). *Cos'è il Consiglio d'Europa? Come funziona?* Orizzonti Politici. <https://www.orizzontipolitici.it/cosa-e-il-consiglio-deuropa-come-funziona/>
48. Trento, R. (2020, March 8). *Le donne comuniste italiane e la vera storia della mimosa*. La Voce del Trentino. <https://www.lavocedeltrentino.it/2020/03/08/le-donne-comuniste-italiane-e-la-vera-storia-della-mimosa/>
49. Turco, S. (2022). *Re Giorgia. Controstoria della donna che si è presa l'Italia*. Piemme Editore. EAN: 9788856689488. <https://www.ibs.it/re-giorgia-controstoria-della-donna-libro-susanna-turco/e/9788856689488>
50. Vecellio, V. (2022, December 9). *Una "ninna nanna" di Cosa Nostra*. Articolo 21, liberi di...Il dovere di informare il diritto ad essere informati. <https://www.articolo21.org/2022/12/una-ninna-nanna-di-cosa-nostra/>
51. Verolino, A. (2020, May 14). *Il cambiamento linguistico: che cos'è e come funziona. Le parole evolvono, con esse la nostra capacità di includerle nella lingua: vediamo che cosa significa rapportarsi al cambiamento linguistico*. Il Mercurio. <https://unaparolaalgiorno.it/articoli/l-evoluzione-delle-parole/il-cambiamento-linguistico-che-cos-e-e-come-funziona-33>
52. Vitiello, R. (2022, June 1). *Linguaggio inclusivo in italiano: guida pratica per chi scrive per lavoro (e non). Strategie e consigli per scrivere testi rispettosi delle differenze di genere*. TMD Magazine. <https://www.tdm-magazine.it/linguaggio-inclusivo-in-italiano-guida-pratica/>
53. Zancaner, L. (2022, November 23). *Violenza sulle donne: in calo i reati spia, aumentano le violenze sessuali*. Il Sole 24Ore. <https://www.ilssole24ore.com/art/violenza-donne-calo-reati-spia-aumentano-violenze-sessuali-AEVfIEJC#U401966238695RuE>
54. Zerbi, D. (2022, November 30). *Qatar 2022, Stéphanie Frappart è la prima arbitra di una partita ai mondiali di calcio*. LIFEGATE. <https://www.lifegate.it/mondiali-stephanie-frappart-arbitra-calcio>
55. Zoppetti, A. (2023, June 5). *Il catechismo linguistico: interventismo e prescrizioni (ma non sugli anglicismi)*. DICIAMOLO IN ITALIANO. <https://diciamoloinitaliano.wordpress.com/author/zoppaz/>