AUTHOR'S VERSION

DEVELOPMENT OF AN EVALUATION TOOL FOR ASSESSING THE USE OF INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE: AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

M. Díaz-Millón, I. Rivera-Trigueros, Á. Pérez-Contreras

University of Granada (SPAIN)

Abstract

Inclusive language must take into account speakers of any origin, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, race or religion. This is especially relevant in plural contexts, such as those found in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Given the significant place of inclusive language in Higher Education, there is a need to delve deeper into the keys to inclusive language. Therefore, the main objective of this work is to develop an evaluation tool to analyze and describe (gender-)inclusive language, from an institutional language perspective, more specifically, from the perspective of Spanish public universities. An evaluation framework has been developed to assess the presence of inclusive language in different types of texts, including linguistic elements, as well as non-linguistic elements (images, videos, design, etc.). This tool has opened future lines of research, such as, analyzing inclusive language in texts of different genres, produced in different fields and covering different topics. Moreover, this tool helps to offer a description of the characteristics of institutional inclusive language in Higher Education in Spain.

Keywords: Higher Education; inclusive language; gender-inclusive language; Spanish universities; linguistic analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

The way in which language shapes our reality has been long discussed [1]. In this sense, inclusive language can be analyzed based on the assumption that language reflects and (re)produces reality [2]. Consequently, language is the main means to understand the world and build culture. In addition, using or not certain words to designate certain individuals or collectives contributes to their visibility −or invisibility−, recognition and identification [3].

In the light of this scenario, inclusive language plays an essential role in plural contexts –multilingual, multiethnic, multicultural, multigender– as it must take into account speakers of any origin, nationality, sexual orientation, identity, race or religion. As a result, several initiatives giving rise to guides for the use of inclusive and non-sexist language are noteworthy such as those proposed by the European Parliament [4], translated to 22 languages, the Spanish General Council of the Judiciary [5], or Madrid City Hall [4], among others. The scope of these guides is mainly focused on non-sexist language to avoid women discrimination, although it should not be forgotten that

inclusive language covers other aspects beyond gender such as sexual orientation and identity, race or disabilities, to name but a few.

Moreover, it is important to note that the aforementioned plural contexts include not only political and administrative institutions but educational institutions as well. Thus, HEIs are change agents given their role as socializers and knowledge transferors, and they represent a true reflection of society [3], [6]. Therefore, the language used in HEIs must be a reference for raising awareness concerning inclusion. As a consequence, there is a rising interest in an inclusive scope and the use of the language as a vehicle for social awareness, which has led multiple Spanish universities to develop their own guides for inclusive language. As an example, the guide proposed by the University of Granada and the Autonomous University of Barcelona [7], [8] mainly focus on grammatical and lexical aspects to avoid sexist language, but does not make any reference to the use of images, which is an aspect stressed in the guide of the University of Malaga [9], for instance. On its part, the University of Cádiz [9] includes not only guidelines for avoiding sexist language but also to address other aspects of diversity such as disabilities. It is also remarkable the huge differences concerning the length of the guides, while some of them, like the University of La Rioja [10], have a length of less than 10 pages, others like the one from the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria [11] extend to more than 100 pages. It is therefore evident that there is a lack of consensus among the Spanish public universities concerning their guides for inclusive language and there is a need to delve deeper into the keys to inclusive language and to develop tools specifically designed to assess inclusive language.

Hence, the main objective of this work is to develop an evaluation tool to analyze and describe (gender-)inclusive language, from an institutional language perspective, more specifically, from the perspective of Spanish public universities. For such a purpose, the employed methodology consisted of the following phases. First, a bibliographical revision of all the guides for inclusive language published by Spanish universities was carried out. Second, those guides and their common key points were synthesized. Finally, these commonalities were established as a set of inclusive language assessment indicators. As a result of this analysis, an evaluation framework was developed to assess the presence of inclusive language in different types of texts, including linguistic elements, as well as non-linguistic elements (images, videos, design, etc.).

2   METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach used in this investigation project consisted on different phases and was based on the selection of guides for inclusive language published by public Spanish universities and their bibliographical analysis, with the final aim of developing an evaluation tool which would help to assess, analyze and describe the presence of (gender-)inclusive language strategies through a set of indicators that could be applied to texts of different genres, fields and topics.

Table 1. Classification of public Spanish HEIs according to their inclusive language resources.

| HEIs with own guides in Spanish | • Autonomous University of Barcelona
• Autonomous University of Madrid
• Carlos III University of Madrid
• Complutense University of Madrid
• Jaume I University
• National Distance Education University
• Pablo de Olavide University
• Polytechnic University of Valencia
• Public University of Navarra
• Technical University of Madrid
• University of Alcalá
• University of Alicante
• University of Barcelona
• University of Cádiz
• University of Cantabria
• University of Castilla-La Mancha
• University of Girona
• University of Granada
• University of Jaén
• University of La Rioja
• University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
• University of Málaga
• University of Murcia
• University of Oviedo
• University of Salamanca
• University of Santiago de Compostela
• University of the Basque Country
• University of Valencia | HEIs referring to other resources | • Menéndez Pelayo International University
• Miguel Hernández University of Elche
• Pompeu Fabra University
• Rey Juan Carlos University of Madrid
• Rovira I Virgili University
• Technical University of Cartagena
• Technical University of Catalonia
• University of A Coruña
• University of Burgos
• University of Córdoba
• University of Extremadura
• University of Huelva
• University of La Laguna
• University of Sevilla
• University of the Balearic Islands
• University of Zaragoza |
| HEIs with own guides in other languages | • University of Vigo (Galician) | HEIs with no guides | • International University of Andalucía
• University of Almería
• University of León
• University of Lleida
• University of Valladolid |

First, a thorough research of inclusive language guides by public Spanish universities was carried out. Out of the 50 public Spanish universities indexed by the Spanish Ministry of Universities [12], 28 of them developed their own guides for inclusive language; one of them, the University of Vigo, has produced a guide for inclusive language in Galician; 5 of them had not developed to the date of compilation (first term of 2021) any guide for inclusive language; finally, 16 of them referenced guides from other universities, local institutions and governmental institutions such as the Spanish Institute for Women and Equal Opportunities (InMujer). Table 1 provides a detailed classification of Spanish public HEIs according to these criteria. Once the 28 Spanish HEIs own guides were compiled as our initial study sample, a revision of their major key points was made, highlighting their main strategies and recommendations. These recommendations ranged from grammatical and lexical aspects to recommendations on the use of media, balanced representation of genders and addressing gender and disability. As mentioned above, a lack of consensus among these guides around the use of inclusive language was noted.

The next step in our study was to extract major and common key points on strategies and recommendations from these inclusive language guides by public Spanish universities, which were later synthesized to cover all different aspects of verbal, graphic and visual language and communication. Whereas most of the inclusive language guides included strategies for verbal communication, they mostly focused on administrative and institutional fields and stereotypical examples, not bringing attention to gender and the LGBTIQ+ community and graphic and visual language. Nevertheless, the results obtained will be further explained in the following section.

After the phases of documentation, bibliographical revision and extraction of communal key points, authors developed a series of indicators following different criteria for verbal (no gender-specific wording, one gender-specific wording, two gender-specific wording, inclusive characters wording and reference to LGBTIQ+) and non-verbal (balanced representation, angles and lighting) communication. The final structure of sections and indicators was not a straightforward decision, needing some time to evaluate if all indicators would provide relevant information when applying them. All this process led to the final development of the evaluation tool presented in this work, which would be used to evaluate the presence of (gender-)inclusive language features in multimodal texts.

3   RESULTS

After the process described above, a final selection of criteria for assessing inclusive language was obtained. Said criteria were classified in different sections. Each section makes reference to a specific way of wording, except for the last one, which makes reference to graphic and visual language. This classification of criteria allowed us to define a final assessment tool that addressed the application of inclusive language (both verbal and visual) from as broad a perspective as possible.

In this final tool, each criterion is evaluated in terms of its presence or absence in a given text. This sort of checklist would then not measure the extension of application of each criterion, neither would it judge as "good" or "bad" the choice of inclusive language

features used in a text. On the contrary, the objective of this evaluation tool is to account for the presence of features of inclusive language in Spanish texts, as they are suggested and proposed by Spanish public universities.

In the following sections, the classification of the tool is explained in detail.

3.1 Criteria evaluating verbal language

3.1.1 No gender-specific wording

This section includes criteria considering the use of different parts of speech, naming: determiners, verbs, nouns and adjectives. For each part of speech, different strategies were identified. It should be noted that this tool is targeted at analyzing inclusive language in Spanish, so, these criteria are conditioned by the characteristics of Spanish language. In that language, determiners, nouns and adjectives can be gender-neutral or have gender marks. In such cases, the tradition commands that the masculine form of these is the gender-neutral choice in cases where the gender of the person or people we are talking about is not known. This tradition is usually considered sexist. As such, different options are available when addressing language from an inclusive perspective, as stated in the guides for inclusive language of Spanish public universities. These strategies include:

- To omit, when possible, the gender-marked element,
- To choose, when possible, gender-neutral elements, and
- To use verbs in an impersonal-passive form, instead of personal.

3.1.2 One gender-specific wording

This section includes criteria that make reference to the use of gender-marked parts of speech, for example, not only when the subject or object of the sentence is a person whose gender is known to the writer, but also to write sentences where the gender of the subject or object is not known. Depending on that information, different strategies are available to produce a text with an inclusive perspective. It should be noted that some of the proposed strategies extracted from the analyzed guides may seem to be contradictory, as not all guides recommend the same uses of language. In order for our tool to be comprehensive, all different options were included as criteria. Some of these options are:

- When the gender of the subject/object is unknown:
    - To use the masculine form in a generic way
    - To use the feminine form in a generic way
- When the gender of the subject/object is known:
    - To use the feminine form if the subject/objects is a woman
    - To use forms of addressing in a symmetrical way for men and women

3.1.3 Two gender-specific wording

As mentioned in previous sections, Spanish language is characterized by the use of gender-marked nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and other parts of speech. That characteristic makes it possible to produce sentences where one or several parts of speech are double, specifically mentioning two genders. A lot of debate has been going around this practice,

as it is one of the most commonly employed by different sectors of Spanish society actively applying a gender-inclusive perspective to language. The revised guides for inclusive language by Spanish universities propose several ways to address this practice, including:

- To double only the main term of the sentence,

- To double the main term of the sentence and all accompanying elements, and

- To double only the article defining the main element.

For these three possible options, new strategies are opened in relation to the order of the doubled elements (first masculine, first feminine, or alternation), or the concordance with the rest of the accompanying elements (to make concordance with the closest element, only in masculine, etc.).

3.1.4 Inclusive characters wording

This section includes some criteria regarding one of the latest trends in the use of inclusive language in Spanish: inclusive characters. This trend proposes the use of certain characters, such as "@", "x", "e" or "/" to avoid the use of gender-marked forms or the doubling of the main elements of the sentence (as described in previous sections).

3.1.5 Reference to LGBTIQ+

One of the characteristics of the guides for inclusive language published by public Spanish universities is that some of them include references to the LGBTIQ+ community. The recommendations around the way of referring to the community include:

- To (not) assume that the subject/object is heterosexual,

- To make express mention of non-binary people, and

- To address trans people with the pronouns they are identified with.

3.2 Criteria evaluating graphic and visual language

This final section of the model evaluates items dealing with the treatment of visual elements such as images and videos in multimodal texts. The indicators included in this section are in line with the proposals made by Spanish universities and include both indicators evaluating the visual presence of women in texts, as well as the way women and interactions between women and men are represented. Some of the proposals included in this section are:

- To represent men and women in a balanced proportion,

- To represent interactions in terms of equality,

- To avoid negative stereotypes and sexualized images of women,

- To not limit the presence of women to aesthetic purposes, and

- To represent women and men in similar spaces, from similar angles and with similar lightning, chromatic patterns, frames, etc.

4   CONCLUSIONS

In this work, authors have described the design process of an assessment tool targeted at evaluating the presence of inclusive language in texts. This task has been approached from an institutional perspective. More specifically, from the perspective of HEIs in Spain. As shown in previous sections of this work, public Spanish universities have produced a significant amount of guides for the use of inclusive language, accounting for the increasing interest raised in recent years by this issue: producing respectful texts towards all genders and all identities.

For that reason, the main objective of this work was to develop an evaluation tool to analyze and describe (gender-)inclusive language. This objective has been achieved, and a comprehensive evaluation framework with indicators evaluating the application of inclusive language strategies has been developed. This tool, divided in different sections addressing different features of inclusive language in Spanish, covers all the proposals, suggestions, and recommendations made by Spanish public universities in their guides. This is, it incorporates, in a comprehensive manner, the point of view of inclusive language of Spanish educational institutions.

This tool is then useful to evaluate the presence of (gender-)inclusive language features in texts, including multimodal texts (which incorporate audio-visual elements). Given its broad scope, this tool could be used to evaluate inclusive language not just in educational or institutional texts, but also in other types of texts, such as websites, information materials, etc. As the intention of this tool was not to judge if the strategies applied for inclusive language are positive or negative, its usefulness relies on the identification of inclusive language, from the perspective of Spanish HEIs. So, this tool is useful for identifying inclusive language awareness.

As such, future research lines may include testing the feasibility and validity of this evaluation tool for different types of texts and for different contexts other than the educational one.

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