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“Political Dimensions of Écriture Inclusive in Parisian Universities” (joint work with Céline Pozniak)

Abstract:

Écriture inclusive (EI) (i.e. shortening expressions like “étudiants et étudiantes” to “étudiant·e·s”, “étudiant(e)s” etc.) has long been the topic of public debates in France. These debates have become more intense in recent years, often focusing on the higher education system and culminating in the formulation of three separate laws banning it for public administration. In this paper, we investigate the foundations of these conflicts through a large quantitative corpus study of the (non)use of EI in Parisian undergraduate brochures. Our results suggest that Parisian university professors use EI not only to ensure gender neutral reference, but also as a tool to construct their political identities. We show that both the use of EI and its particular forms are conditioned by how brochure writers position themselves on non-gender related issues within the French university’s political landscape, which explains how conflicts surrounding a linguistic practice have become understood as conflicts about larger issues in French society. Our paper thus provides new information to be taken into account in the formulation and promotion of non-sexist language policies, and sheds light on how feminist linguistic activism and its opposition are deeply intertwined with other kinds of social activism in present-day France.