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Linguistic Inclusivity in Professional and Public Service Domains

MASTER'S DEGREE PROJECT

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MASTER IN LINGUISTICS: SOCIETIES AND CULTURE



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ORIENTATION
Svetlana Kurtes

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Abstract:

The project intends to focus on highlighting the importance of linguistic inclusivity and, considering realities already present in a variety of European languages in the context of professional and customer service domains, proposing possible solutions for the Portuguese language regarding the asymmetries representing the various genders in text or spoken form. Furthermore, this project aims to explore how certain minority groups (LGBT+, non-binary, etc.) have been addressed and/or referred to and how the Portuguese language and Portuguese speakers are adapting and can further adapt in order to reflect modern-day social diversity trying to introduce a neutral form of the Portuguese language. Finally, the project can have a socially engaged element, trying to raise awareness about the importance of the neutral language forms and promote their usage in professional and public service domains.

Keywords:

Linguistic inclusivity, diversity, neutral language forms, professional communication, public service, minorities

Resumo:

O projeto pretende centrar-se em evidenciar a importância da inclusão linguística e, considerando realidades já presentes em várias línguas europeias no âmbito dos domínios profissionais e de atendimento ao cliente, propor possíveis soluções para a língua portuguesa relativamente às assimetrias que representam os vários géneros num texto ou na fala. Além disso, este projeto visa explorar como certos grupos minoritários (LGBT+, não binário, etc.) têm sido abordados e/ou referidos e como a língua portuguesa e os falantes de português se adaptam para refletir a diversidade social moderna tentando introduzir uma forma neutra no idioma português. Finalmente, o projeto pode explorar um elemento social, tentando sensibilizar o público sobre a importância das formas de linguagem neutras e promover o seu uso em domínios profissionais e de serviço público.

Palavras-chave:

Inclusão linguística, diversidade, linguagem neutra, comunicação profissional, serviço público, minorias

Introduction

The Portuguese language (and its family of Romance languages) relies heavily on gender markers (adjectives, nouns, articles, and pronouns) and the common rule when speakers address large groups of people (or when using the plural) is to use the masculine form, even when the feminine morphological counterpart exists. This phenomenon is known as a “standard norm” (a rule or a certain pattern those speakers of a language use as a standard) in the Portuguese language (Neves, n.d.).

The way languages express and differentiate meaning is a complex topic that is closely linked to human cognition. The category of grammatical gender and how it has been assigned, in relation to our mental images and cognitive processes, is the topic worth focusing on. “The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same worlds with different labels attached” (Sapir, 1949: 162). We can assume that different languages focus the attention of their speakers on different aspects of the environment, be it physical or cultural (Benítez-Burraco, 2017). The discussion around this subject aims to deconstruct this element of the Portuguese language and make it a less divisive factor in today’s society, especially in a professional and public environment in order to make a more equal and inclusive space for all. In the interest of guaranteeing equal treatment for all genders, efforts have been made since the 1980s (e.g. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, New York, United Nations, 1979) to propose the use of a language that is not sexist, neutral and gender equitable in order to avoid prerogatives or the perpetuation of prejudices concerning any gender.

How we speak not only shapes one's actions but can also improve communication with peers, friends, and family and one of the more important assets in a workplace is a good relationship between people (colleagues or clients) and communication is one of the key instruments to achieve this safe environment (Robinson et al, 2020). Not only is it a powerful tool in the current workplace sphere, a means to shape our attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors but it also reflects the world in which we aspire to live and work, and while a language is not sexist in itself, our reality is, and the way we express ourselves postulates those inequalities (Viswanath, 2006). Inclusive and unbiased language avoids stereotypes recognizing the positive qualities of everyone regardless of gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, background, religion or belief, or the lack thereof. Now more than ever, there is a high requirement for good communication skills in almost every job offering, and therefore linguistic inclusivity is a must. Good communication in the workplace gives employees the information they require to perform effectively, helps build a positive work environment, and removes a lot of work inefficiencies. Communication should accurately relay information while maintaining or improving human relationships. Miscommunication has real consequences for a business. A survey led by Expert Market (2021) shows that 28 percent of employees reported miscommunication as the reason why they did not finish projects on time and that miscommunication is costing businesses that average 100 employees around \$450,000 or more a year on average. And CMSWire (2015) reports that 97% of employees consider communication influences their efficacy on the job.

When looking into ways to introduce a change of perspective towards our language and how to make it more inclusive it might be a good idea to make a distinction between certain concepts that are often used interchangeably. These concepts are **gender neutral** language

and **inclusive** language, and this project proposes a distinction between the two concepts, even though they are frequently used interchangeably.

Gender neutral language refers to the use of a non-sexist language and its purpose is to avoid the choice of terms likely to be interpreted as biased or discriminatory in implying that one sex and/or a social gender is the norm in a selected group of people. In case of the Portuguese language, gender neutral forms require the introduction of new spelling conventions and grammatical forms. For example, the word *amigos/amigas* [friends, m./f.] can take the following proposed form: *amigues* or *amigxs* substituting the marker “o” that represents the masculine by an “e”, indicating the neutral grammatical gender and adjusting accordingly other corresponding grammatical forms (the pronoun “*ele*” [he] changes into “*ilu*” [they, n.] or “*ile*” [they, n.], for example). The use of this type of language also can help fight stereotypes and closes the gap between the gender inequality still present in our society.

The term inclusive language, on the other hand, is used to describe a way of communicating without excluding. It keeps the existing grammatical forms of the Portuguese language by using broader terms, for example “*professores*” [teachers, m.] is replaced with “*educandos*” [educators] or “*corpo docente*” [teaching staff], holding the same meaning but with a more gender-neutral approach without directly or specifically mentioning someone. Inclusive language is more than a matter of political correctness, it can also potentially reflect and influence attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of people. More than just helping us address the inequalities between genders the use of inclusive

language also shines light on people with disabilities that as other minorities are misrepresented in professional and public environments.

In the Portuguese Constitution (1976), the promotion of equality between men and women integrates the fundamental tasks of the State and the fundamental right to personal identity is protected against any form of discrimination. Not only is this enacted in the Portuguese constitution, but also across all other major organizations and unions, such as the United Nations (eg, United Nations. Gender-inclusive communication. United Nations, n.d.), Council of Europe (eg, *Comunicação Inclusiva no SGC* [Inclusive communication at the SGC]) and the European Union (eg. *Linguagem Neutra do ponto de vista do género no Parlamento Europeu* [Gender Neutral Language in the European Parliament]). These and other legal documents highlight the need for a more equal communicative style across languages in order to establish the current situation in the context of linguistic inclusivity in professional and public service domains in Portugal, Portuguese speaking countries and communities, identifying possible issues that certain minority groups (women, LGBTQ+, non-binary, etc.) may face on a daily basis and try to address them.

This project is intended to be a facilitator guide for institutional communication and customer service for Portuguese speakers, Portuguese based institutions, businesses or to people who are learning Portuguese and wish to be more inclusive, drawing inspiration in national and international normative guidelines on the use of inclusive language and promoting equal visibility and symmetry between all genders. It presents alternatives to the use of the universal masculine and several suggestions aimed at the inclusion of all genders who, by any specific circumstances must be mentioned. The project also proposes a manual

with possible solutions to a more inclusive and/or neutral language, allowing for greater flexibility and reflecting modern-day social diversity.

The need to look into this subject and this guide comes from the shortage of the existence of up-to-date manuals of this kind (specially written in English) in the context of professional communication and customer service in general. Additionally, it is necessary to make a further distinction between the concepts of inclusive and neutral language, as has been briefly discussed above.

Objectives of the present project:

- a) To offer a possible answer to the identity issue, and the corresponding gender equality treatment in the language of public administration;
- b) To promote the use of a gender neutral and inclusive language in order to close the gap of inequalities still present in the professional and public domains;
- c) To raise awareness of the possible limitations of the current linguistic norm of the Portuguese language in the context of social representation of various minority groups;
- d) To encourage the use of a broader and more inclusive language in the workplace, which could further improve communication and, consequently, productivity;
- e) To be a facilitator guide for institutional communication and customer service for Portuguese speakers, Portuguese-speaking institutions, businesses or people who are learning Portuguese and wish to be more inclusive with their personal or professional communication;
- f) To improve the quality of employment and to reinforce equality;
- g) To contribute to the further development of democratic citizenship and the specification of the democratic rule of law in order to improve the quality of life of all genders and misrepresented minorities;

Methodology

This project was based on a quantitative and qualitative research about linguistic inclusivity on the Portuguese language and the various ways it can be achieved in the professional and public contexts. The first part of the project focused on investigating gender inclusive language in order to understand better the issues that needed to be addressed. This was achieved by first sending e-mails to various Portuguese gender equality promoting and LGBTQ+ Non-Governmental Organizations followed by an intensive internet search about the subject in many of the Romance languages, it was important to determine if this issue also happened in other languages and how or if languages similar to Portuguese had solved the issue. And finally, the project looked at the various employed by a number of Portuguese-speaking institutions (especially international ones) to see if there was already a system (systems) in use regarding the subject.

The project initially focused on neutral language, a type of proposed linguistic norm that highlights the use of newly introduced neutral gender markers, alongside already existing masculine and feminine. The project further established that certain linguistic norm promoting inclusive language already existed in the Portuguese language. This particularly refers to the refraining from using the normative male masculine gender marker (denoting the collective meaning) or refraining from using gender markers altogether, which is known as inclusive language. This gradually became the main focus of the project. As a subject that is only recently been discussed and studied it is complex task to find a definitive and absolute set of answers to what neutral language is and how it can be used. Therefore, the first part of the research consisted in the collection of many news articles and guides from

many institutions like CES (Portuguese Social and Economic Council) or the United Nations, institutions that already started tackling this issue. But, as said previously, this is a relatively new phenomenon and new linguistic norms and conventions are constantly being proposed. The thought of incorporating a corpus in the project was considered but as the guide takes a broad approach and does not specify a certain organization or business, it was decided that a better procedure would be to make it a corpus-informed project instead, since the project is aimed to be open to any context of the professional and public environment. A corpus was started with various examples of specific written texts by organizations but since the project is being created with a real application in mind, the structure of a corpus would not be as appropriate to use. This means that the data was procured in different corpora but other methodological approaches were used in this project.

With this in mind, the corpus had a secondary role in the project, while still being used, it will not be featured as such and will be used to base the examples given along the project, making it a corpus-informed project.

Contextualization and Topic Relevance

As stated before, the current linguistic norm of the Portuguese language could be seen as exhibiting certain limitations when observed from the viewpoint of linguistic inclusivity and neutrality. This is specifically the case of the exclusive use of the masculine gender when addressing the general public, even though there are alternative morphological options. These conventions are deeply rooted and can be explained by historical and cultural factors, its use is widespread through early education and although the Portuguese lexicon has ways to address that issue in a formal environment. In non-professional (private) contexts, however, the interlocutors gave to use gendered language when directly addressing each other.

“If at the beginning of the 20th century, Meillet and Saussure conceptualized language as a social fact in line with Durkheim's sociological thought the development of sociolinguistics has exposed the complex interrelation between language and society, as well as the "embeddedness" in language the social structure and value system of each socio-historical context” (Cunha & Cintra, 1984, pp. 2-3). The use of a system that does not favor a specific gender marker over the other is not just about political correctness it's a way to obtain a more gender equal society. The Portuguese grammar offers us a variety of ways in which we refer to people without favoring one group over the other. It is, therefore, important for institutional communication to be sensitive to the equal symmetry and visibility of all individuals, regardless of their gender identity and their specific circumstances.

The current linguistic norm of the Portuguese language and its limitations in the context of inclusivity and neutrality

The pervasive use of the masculine gender markers in the Portuguese language has been long observed. Going back in time, the first Portuguese grammarian Fernão de Oliveira already had mentioned this limitation of the Portuguese language stating “*Marido e mulher ambos são bons **homens***”, enfim, posto que muitas desproporções ou dissemelhanças se cometem na nossa língua...”¹ (Oliveira, 1536).

Even if the Portuguese grammar seems to have a basic semantic opposition between the masculine and feminine forms and it appears to be symmetrical when referring to humans (masculine gender markers to designate the male sex or gender, feminine gender to designate the female sex or gender), this symmetry is undone when the value of the masculine form takes the spotlight which allows, by extension, that the masculine gender is applied as well to female human beings.

This disproportion or dissimilarity is what makes one of the grammatical genders appear, on account of its dual function, as the general gender (the masculine), as opposed to a specific gender. Instead of having the capacity for feminine reference, the double function (both generic and specific) of terms referring to men, constitutes an important mechanism for reinforcing a model in which man becomes the measure of the human, the norm or point of reference (*e.g. o cidadão* [the citizen, m.], *os funcionários* [the employees, m.], *o diretor*

¹ Lit. “Husband and wife both are good **men**, since many disproportions or dissimilarities are committed in our language” (all translation in this project report is done by the author).

[the director, m.], *os trabalhadores* [the workers, m.], etc.). Subsumed in the linguistic reference to the men, women become practically invisible language-wise and when visible, continue to be marked by an asymmetry that encloses them in a specificity.

It is interesting to compare the first entry of the specific meaning of man with that of woman, in the entries of “man” and “woman”, in the Great Dictionary of Portuguese Language, coordinated by José Pedro Machado for the Society of the Portuguese language:

Homem, s.m. (do lat. homine-). Cada um dos representantes da espécie humana, animal racional (...); O ser humano do sexo masculino (opõe-se a mulher). (Vol. III, p.254)

Mulher, s.f. (do lat. muliere-). A fêmea da espécie humana; pessoa do sexo feminino, depois da puberdade. // (...) (Vol.IV, p.245)²

In this entry the dictionary recognizes “men” as a “representative of the human species” (Machado, 1991, p.254) and “rational animal” (ibid.) furthermore explaining it as “The human being of the male sex (opposing to woman)” (ibid.). In the same dictionary “woman” is described as “Female of the human species” and “person of the female sex after puberty” (ibid.). Men or “male human beings” have sex (accessory property); while women the “females of the human species” are a sex (essential property)” (ibid.).

² Lit. Man, s.m. (from lat. homine-). Each of the representatives of the human species, a rational animal (...); The male human being (as opposed to the female). (Vol. III, p.254)

Woman, s.f. (from lat. muliere-). The female of the human species; female person after puberty. // (...) (Vol.IV, p.245)

Linguistic practices, especially those of professional and public service domains, must be in accordance with social practices reflecting them and promoting their development. Thus, there is a need to adapt linguistic practices to the Portuguese socio-cultural reality today and to a new generation of professional and public service domains to promote equality between all individuals, regardless of their gender identity.

Inclusive Language

“To speak is also to value”, as implied by the philosopher Gusdorf (1953). Communication is a powerful device, it is a way of shaping our attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors and that reflects the world in which we live and work. As highlighted earlier, when we speak, we tend to create a mental image or a concept, and communication can become discriminatory if we do not consider the assumptions that influence the language and therefore the concepts and images we create. Language is constantly evolving, words keep changing and the way we use them must follow this change to reflect the social setting we live in. Using gender-sensitive and unbiased language (inclusive language) is a way of rejecting outdated perceptions about men, women, people with disabilities and other groups of people in society. The purpose of this document is to provide some guidance on the use of language and give examples, based on the use of the Portuguese language, that are relevant to the work and public environment of Portuguese speaking settings and to help anyone who uses Portuguese to avoid unintentionally resorting to a discriminatory language.

Portuguese belongs to a group of languages whose nominals and pronominals are marked for gender. They can be either masculine or feminine. Given that, from a lexical point of view, it is rather challenging to create, from existing words in these languages, gender-neutral solutions that could be widely accepted. It is, therefore, advisable to use the grammatical norm already available to us. It is necessary to reinforce a distinction between neutral language and inclusive language (recommended in the administrative and political language), while for a personal and direct approach it is advised the use of neutral language (which will be explored below).

Inclusive language, as noted previously, does not change anything in the already established Portuguese grammar and tries to change the way we communicate by simply using other approaches. The two main aspects of inclusive language are sex and gender specification and neutralization (or the detachment of gender markers). It should be noted that translators must reproduce texts faithfully and accurately in their own language. When an author deliberately uses gender-specific language, the translation must respect that intention. It is therefore of the utmost importance that authors of texts of any nature are fully aware of the principles of inclusive language.

Neutral Language

The use of neutral language has become more prominent in recent years, reflecting various social diversification processes, promoting the visibility of certain minority groups, gender equality, etc. Within the context of the Romance group of languages, of which Portuguese is a member, adaptations of the existing grammatical forms have been gradually introduced

and their usage promoted. More specifically, concrete solutions for the Portuguese language include the proposal of neutral grammatical markers, going beyond the use of the feminine article ‘a’ and the masculine ‘o’ (and the corresponding nominal, pronominal and adjectival forms). The proposed neutral forms allow for a more inclusive form of verbal expression, giving an opportunity to certain minority groups to raise awareness of their specific identity profiles. This specifically refers to individuals who identify themselves as non-binary or/and not associating themselves as belonging to either male or female genders.

Neutral language systems have been gradually emerging, mainly in English-speaking countries, such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom, possibly due to the fact that they are multicultural and socially diverse territories. Additionally, the process has been facilitated by the grammatical structure of the English language, allowing for the use of the pronoun ‘they’ that already denotes the singular non-binary (neutral) gender. However, the grammatical structure of the Romance languages, including the Portuguese language, does not allow the same process. The Romance languages, with their rich morphological systems, differentiate between the masculine and feminine forms of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, demonstratives, and articles. Additionally, when the gender of the referent is not known or if it refers to a group of mixed gender, the Portuguese language will typically use the masculine form. As said previously, where inclusive language serves to fulfill a role of a more “professional” and “serious” environment, neutral language aims to close the void in personal and more direct communication.

When approaching the topic of neutral language, it is hard to grasp which method is the best or the most used, since it is not something officially recognized, there is still an “incubation period” for the systems to set and therefore to be widely used. One of the systems that was found was the “Elu” system (Cassiano, 2019). This system is part of a set of linguistic proposals created to introduce a neutral grammatical gender with a strong emphasis on personal neopronouns (*elu, delu, nelu, aquelu* [they, sing. n.; of them, sing. n.; in them, sing. n.; that one, sing. n.]). The system was introduced as a way to refer to non-binary people or people whose gender is unknown without the need to use the masculine form while also tackling some problems with previous systems.

Before these systems came into place one of the first attempts to avoid the use of gender markers on the Portuguese language consisted of the use of an “x” or “@” instead of the letter that represented the gender marker, this quickly became used in a lot of written texts and e-mails, but created the problem of the inability to be used in speech (e.g., *car@s colegas* [dear, m/f colleagues]). In that sense the “elu” system was based on the gender-neutral pronoun present in Latin called *illud* [that one, n.] and it tries to present the pronouns in an easy way to be recognized in both speech and writing. Furthermore, this system covers other gendered words beyond just the pronouns by the use of neologisms in the following way: when a word is marked for gender (ending in either -o or -a), it is proposed that a neutral grammatical gender is used instead (ending in -e), e.g. *amiga/amigo > amigue* [friend, m./f. > friend, n.]. If the word ends in -co or -ca, it should be replaced by -que (e.g. *medico/medica > medique* [doctor, m./f. > doctor, n.]) voiding the words of binary genders. These rules are only valid when referring to people, when referring to objects, the original gender is kept.

As stated before, this system uses the -x and -@ instead of -o or -a not working in spoken language, serving only in writing. The use of “x” and “@” was also criticized for its use since it discriminatory against people with visual impairments by hindering those who use reading programs through sound and people with dyslexia. In June 2020 (LGBT+ pride month) the official Facebook page (Facebook, 2020) made a neo-linguistic use of the system by using *juntas* [together, n.] (instead of *juntos/juntas* [together, m./f.]) in a Valentine's Day post, live videos, and page cover. This system is also already used by the Portuguese association of LGBTI youth and supporters “rede ex aequo”³ and non-binary characters from the HBO series “*Todxs Nós*” [all, n. of us].

The personal pronoun of Adira, a character in the third season of Star Trek: Discovery, is the singular “they” and its initial translation, both in the dubbing and in the subtitles, ended up being “*eles*” [them], Netflix later redubbed it, changing it to “*elu*” and using the letter “e” in the ending of the words that referred to the character, since a singular pronoun cannot be translated by a plural. During the 2020 Summer Olympics, narrator Natália Lara and commentator Conrado Santana from SporTV also used the “*elu*” system to refer to Quinn, in the women's soccer match between Canada and Japan (SportTV, 2021). The use of neutral pronouns is also starting to be used in other languages such as the pronoun “*hen*” in Swedish, “*elle*” in Spanish, and singular “they” in English.

³ Its objective is to work in support of LGBTI youth and in social information regarding issues of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sexual characteristics.

National and international incentive

It is important to mention that the relevant legislation, promulgated by the Portuguese government, the Council of Europe and the United Nations, promotes equality and inclusivity.

In Portugal, there is the promotion of equality between men and women as one of the fundamental tasks of the State under the terms of article 9, paragraph h) of the Constitution. The right to personal identity has constitutional protection under the Rights, Freedoms and Guarantees – article 26, paragraph 1 – and sex is the first factor of individual identity. The Regulations of the Council of Ministers, amended in May 2006, included, in the Legislative Rules in the elaboration of normative acts by the XVII Constitutional Government, the use of non-discriminatory language in order to “neutralize or minimize the specification of the gender through the use of inclusive or neutral ways (...)” (Decreto-Lei n.º 169-B/2019, Capítulo III, Artigo 17º, Linguagem não discriminatória).

The Council of Europe approved in 1990 a recommendation to Member States with the aim of using language that reflects the principle of equality between men and women, and in 2007 the Council of Europe Recommendation on “Standards and Mechanisms for Gender Equality” considers the “elimination of sexism in language and the promotion of language that reflects the principle of gender equality” as one of the six General Norms to be followed by Member States.

Numerous guidelines have been developed at a national and international scale over the last decade. Many international and European institutions have adopted guidelines on the use of non-sexist language as this project uses many of them as source material (listed in alphabetical order in references), either in the form of documents specifically dedicated to the topic, or through the introduction of specific recommendations in the respective drafting codes. The European Parliament's first gender-neutral language guidelines date back to 2008 (*Linguagem neutral do ponto de vista do género no Parlamento Europeu* [Gender neutral language in the European Parliament]) and have been regularly updated since then.

At the UN, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (which Portugal ratified in 1980) states in its article 5 paragraph a) that: “States Parties take all appropriate measures to modify the patterns and models of socio-cultural behavior of men and women with a view to eliminating prejudice and customary practices, or of any other type, which are based on the idea of inferiority or superiority of one or the other sex or of a stereotyped role of men and women” (Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination, 1979).

Suggested Guidelines

“A language free from prejudice is more likely to be accepted by users if it is natural and not overt. must find truly neutral and inclusive alternatives and respect, at the same time, the multilingual nature that characterizes the work environment...” (*Linguagem neutral do ponto de vista do género parlamento Europeu* [Gender neutral language in the European Parliament], 2018)

As said throughout this guide, there is currently a need to adapt our linguistic practices to achieve gender equality and non-discrimination, in particular through a correlative and symmetric representation of gender in language. For this purpose, and since there is no neutral gender in the Portuguese grammar, the following guidelines present a set of language strategies and writing techniques that allow to give visibility and symmetry to the representations of gender or achieve a neutralization or abstraction of the gender reference.

General guidelines

Due to the linguistic and cultural richness of the Portuguese language, it is possible to find a way to express gender equality and inclusivity, following the existing linguistic norms of the Portuguese language and suggesting innovative solutions. In Portuguese, the exclusive use of the masculine to designate a set of men and women is the rule (standard norm). From a practical point of view, it appears that this rule can lead to exclusively masculine mental representations, since they do not allow one to immediately identify the genders that make up the set. As a matter of principle, the generic masculine should be avoided whenever this could result in a blatantly sexist speech. In addition to these extreme situations, the use of generic masculine should be avoided in favor of techniques that allow the use of generic terms referring to people without specifying their gender, or, depending on the context, highlighting all genders equally, as mentioned in the following points.

This section presents suggestions for avoiding the use of the universal masculine, structured around three alternatives taken from various previously mentioned guides and websites of international and national organizations and presented in a systematic and structured way:

- The use of neutral language: seeks to use a common name that does not allude any specific gender (use of synonyms and hypernyms).
- The explicit specification of gender: seeks to refer to specific genders when needed.
- Gender neutral markers and words: introducing innovative grammatical norms into the Portuguese language.

Neutralization or abstraction of the sexual reference

Neutral terms

Names with a single grammatical gender to designate people regardless of their gender.

Instead of:	Use:
<i>O coordenador</i> [Coordinator, m.]	<i>A coordenação</i> [Coordination]
<i>Os políticos</i> [Politicians, m]	<i>A classe política</i> [Political class]
<i>O gerente</i> [Manager, m.]	<i>A gerência</i> [Management]
<i>Os professores</i> [Teachers, m]	<i>O pessoal docente</i> [Teaching staff]
<i>Os homens de negócios</i> [Businessmen, m]	<i>Pessoas do mundo dos negócios</i> [Business world peoples]
<i>O director</i> [Director, m.]	<i>A direção</i> [Direction]
<i>Os enfermeiros</i> [Nurses, m]	<i>O pessoal de enfermagem</i> [Nursing staff]
<i>Os emigrantes</i> [Immigrants, m]	<i>As pessoas emigrantes; comunidades emigrantes</i> [Emigrant communities/people]
<i>Os jovens</i> [Teenagers, m]	<i>Juventude; população jovem; pessoas jovens</i> [Youth, young population, young people]

This method is also very important when addressing someone. Whenever possible the reference should be replaced by their function or entity. For example:

Instead of:	Use:
<p><i>“Exmo. Sr. Presidente do Conselho...”</i> [Esteemed, m. Mr. Board Chairman...]</p>	<p><i>“À Presidência do Conselho...”</i> [The presidency of the coucil...]</p>
<p><i>“Exmo. Senhor Diretor-Geral”</i> [Esteemed, m. Mr. General Director]</p>	<p><i>“À Direcção-Geral...”</i> [To the Directorate-General...]</p>
<p><i>“Sr./a Silva...”</i> [Mr./Mrs. Silva]</p>	<p><i>“Família Silva...”</i> [the Silva Family]</p>

Invariable pronouns

Do not use:	Use:
<p><i>“Os requerentes devem...”</i> [Applicants, m. must...]</p>	<p><i>“Quem requer, deve...”</i> [Whoever requires it, must...]</p>
<p><i>“Os participantes devem...”</i> [Participants. m. must...]</p>	<p><i>“Quem participa deve...”</i> [Who participates must...]</p>

Different grammatical structure

This method uses another way of building a sentence by using the passive, imperative and infinitive forms.

Do not use:	Use:
<p><i>“O candidato deve enviar o seu formulário até...”</i></p>	<p><i>“O formulário de candidatura dever ser enviado até...”</i></p>

[The candidate (m) must send his form until...]	[The application form must be sent by...]
“ <i>Os ministros salientaram que é imperativo assegurar que o país...</i> ”	“ <i>Foi salientada a imperatividade de continuar a assegurar que o país...</i> ”
[The ministers (m) stressed that it is imperative to ensure the country...]	[The imperative of continuing to ensure the country...]

The specification of gender

Specification is a solution to be avoided whenever it is possible (see previously suggested guidelines) since it has the drawback of making texts longer and less elegant. However, it is not always possible to avoid specification. In such cases, two alternatives can be recommended. They are presented below.

Double form

Both genders can be used in a sentence connected by the coordinating conjunction “e”.

- “É aconselhado aos **enfermeiros e enfermeiras** que coloquem as máscaras ao entrar no hospital.”

[It is advised that the nurses,m. and nurses,f. that put on their masks when entering the hospital.]

- “Os estágios especificados destinam-se a **alunos e alunas** do ensino superior, cujo plano inclua um período de estágio obrigatório.”

[The specifies internships are intended for students (m) and students (f) of higher education which plan includes a period of mandatory internship.]

Bars

Both genders are used but separated by a bar that mean “or”.

- **O/A candidato/a** deve requerer o documento dentro de...

[The (m)/The (f) candidate (m)/candidate (f) should require the document within...]

- **O/A candidato/a** será contactado/a dentro de...

[The (m)/The (f) candidate (m)/candidate (f) will be contacted (m)/contacted (f) within...]

Neutral gender as a new grammatical form

The objective of this new gender form comes from a need to overcome the lack of a neutral inflection in the Portuguese language. Through a third gender inflection, we can refer to a person (or a group of people) without determining their gender or to a person using neutral pronouns, but as stated through this project the use of neutral synonyms

(*aluno/aluna/alune=estudante* [student, m., f., n. = student]) and hypernyms

(*mulher/homem=pessoa* [woman/man=person]) should be given priority if possible.

From all of the alternatives that exist the the most widely used in the Portuguese language is the one provided by QueerIST (2021) and is going to be presented in this section. It consists of the change of the letter’s “o” (representing the masculine gender) and “a” (representing the feminine gender) in words and definite articles and changing them into “e” (representing the new neutral grammatical gender).

When should the neutral language be used?

The neutral form should be used to overcome the over-used “universal masculine” form, when the gender of the person is not known and when someone deliberately chooses to use the neutral pronouns (e.g. if they identify as non-binary).

When referring to someone in the third person the gendered personal pronouns are used, i.e., *ele* [he] or *ela* [she]. Personal pronouns should not be assumed, but rather asked, just as we ask someone for their name. It is important to note that the pronouns of someone do not determine their gender, nor does their gender determine their pronouns.

Neo-pronouns

There are today, in the various Lusophone communities, several alternatives to personal pronouns binaries. The use of neo-pronouns is not exclusive to people whose gender is outside the binary, nor do non-binary people necessarily use neo-pronouns. Some of the more frequently used neo-pronouns are “*éle*”, “*elu*”, “*ile*”, “*ilu*”, “*el*” and “*elx*”. They are presented in a more structured and systematic way below.

Articles

	Definite Articles		Indefinite Articles	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Masculine	<i>o</i> [the, m.]	<i>os</i> [the, m.]	<i>um</i> [one, m.]	<i>uns</i> [some, m.]
Feminine	<i>a</i> [the, f.]	<i>as</i> [the, f.]	<i>uma</i> [one, f.]	<i>umas</i> [some, f.]
Neutral	<i>e/ê</i> [the, n.]	<i>es/ês</i> [the, n.]	<i>ume</i> [one, n.]	<i>umes</i> [some, n.]

Contractions of Prepositions and Articles

+	Definite Articles	
Prepositions	<i>ê</i> [the]	<i>ês</i> [the, pl.]
<i>a</i> [to]	<i>ae</i> [to the]	<i>aes</i> [to the]
<i>de</i> [on]	<i>de</i> [on the]	<i>des</i> [on the]
<i>por</i> [for]	<i>pele/pelê</i> [for the]	<i>peles/pelês</i> [for the]

Pronouns

	Personal pronouns		
Masculine	<i>ele(s)</i> [him/them]	<i>o(s)</i> [him/them]	<i>lo(s)</i> [him/them]
Feminine	<i>ela(s)</i> [her/them]	<i>a(s)</i> [her/them]	<i>la(s)</i> [her/them]
Neutral	<i>ê(s)</i> [them]	<i>e/ê(s)</i> [them]	<i>le(s)</i> [them]

	Possessive Pronouns				
Masculine	<i>meu(s)</i> [my/mine]	<i>teu(s)</i> [your/yours]	<i>seu(s)</i> [your/yours]	<i>nosso(s)</i> [our/ours]	<i>vosso(s)</i> [your/yours]
Feminine	<i>minha(s)</i> [my/mine]	<i>tua(s)</i> [your/yours]	<i>sua(s)</i> [your/yours]	<i>nossa(s)</i> [our/ours]	<i>vossa(s)</i> [your/yours]
Neutral	<i>minhe(s)</i> [my/mine]	<i>tue(s)</i> [your/yours]	<i>sue(s)</i> [your/yours]	<i>nosse(s)</i> [our/ours]	<i>vosse(s)</i> [your/yours]

	Demonstrative pronouns					
Masculine	<i>este(s)</i> [this/these]	<i>esse(s)</i> [that/those]	<i>aquele(s)</i> [that/those]	<i>mesmo(s)</i> [same]	<i>outro(s)</i> [other/s]	<i>tanto(s)</i> [many/much]
Feminine	<i>esta(s)</i> [this/these]	<i>essa(s)</i> [that/those]	<i>aquela(s)</i> [that/those]	<i>mesma(s)</i> [same]	<i>outra(s)</i> [other/s]	<i>tanta(s)</i> [many/much]
Neutral	<i>éste(s)</i> [this/these]	<i>ésse(s)</i> [that/those]	<i>aquéle(s)</i> [that/those]	<i>mesme(s)</i> [same]	<i>outré(s)</i> [other/s]	<i>tante(s)</i> [many/much]

	Relative and Interrogative Pronouns	
Masculine	<i>cujo(s)</i> [whose]	<i>quanto(s)</i> [how much/many]
Feminine	<i>cuja(s)</i> [whose]	<i>quanta(s)</i> [how much/many]
Neutral	<i>cuje(s)</i> [whose]	<i>quante(s)</i> [how much/many]

	Indefinite Pronouns						
Masculine	<i>muito</i> [much]	<i>pouco</i> [little]	<i>tanto</i> [much]	<i>nenhum</i> [none]	<i>algum</i> [some]	<i>certo</i> [certain]	<i>ambos</i> [both]
Feminine	<i>muita</i> [much]	<i>pouca</i> [little]	<i>tanta</i> [much]	<i>nenhuma</i> [none]	<i>alguma</i> [some]	<i>certa</i> [certain]	<i>ambas</i> [both]
Neutral	<i>muite</i> [much]	<i>pouque</i> [little]	<i>tante</i> [much]	<i>nenhume</i> [none]	<i>algume</i> [some]	<i>certe</i> [certain]	<i>ambes</i> [both]

Nouns and adjectives

Gender-invariant words remain invariant for the neutral inflection. The gender can be marked by the determiner (o estudante, a estudante, ê estudante [the, m./f./n. student]).

The following table shows the different endings in each of the grammatical genres, followed by an example.

Masculine	Feminine	Neutral
<i>menino (-o)</i> [boy]	<i>menina (-a)</i> [girl]	<i>menine (-e)</i> [child]
<i>patrão (-ão)</i> [boss]	<i>patroa (-oa)</i> [boss]	<i>patroe (oe)</i> [boss]
<i>colaborador (-or)</i> [worker]	<i>colaboradora (-ora)</i> [worker]	<i>colaboradore (-ore)</i> [worker]
<i>européu (-eu)</i> [european]	<i>européia (-eia)</i> [european]	<i>européie (-eie)</i> [european]

Numerals

Only the ordinals and the following cardinals: “um/uma/ume”, “dois/duas/dues” and those that refer to hundreds (except “cem”) are marked for gender.

Masculine	Feminine	Neutral
<i>dois</i> [two]	<i>duas</i> [two]	<i>dues</i> [two]
<i>trezentos (-os)</i> [three hundred]	<i>trezentas (-as)</i> [three hundred]	<i>truzentes (-es)</i> [three hundred]
<i>primeiro (-o)</i> [first]	<i>primeira (-a)</i> [first]	<i>primeire (-e)</i> [first]
<i>segundo</i> [second]	<i>segunda</i> [second]	<i>segunde</i> [second]

Conclusion

As noted previously, the Portuguese language relies heavily on gender markers and the common rule when speakers address large groups of people or even someone unknown is to use the masculine form, even when the feminine morphological counterpart exists, and although the way we speak is not inherently sexist or biased we should pay attention to how this way of speaking and acting influences our mind and in some way erases the other genders in our speech and literature.

And as we have seen our language does not need to suffer big changes in order to be more inclusive, the only thing missing is our will to make that change and to challenge our binary perspective of the language. National and international incentives are already available and incentivized in order to make the world a more inclusive and respectful place to those around us and to better communicate on professional and personal level.

Many may say that this subject is a way of "butchering" the Portuguese language and its many years of history, see it as a way to "appease" to a vocal minority that does not matter, but a language is supposed to evolve and fulfill the needs of its speakers through time. Our language must allow us to equally address everyone respectfully in order to dignify everyone that uses it in order to express themselves and the world around them.

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