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“Stop à cette ineptie d’écriture inclusive. Stop à la dictature des idéologies stupides !” – A Critical Analysis of Twitter Comments against Gender-Inclusive Language

Abstract: Gender-inclusive language is a highly debated topic in France and beyond. Research in linguistics and neighboring disciplines has focused on the relationship between linguistic gender and perceived biological sex and/or social gender, as well as on various factors related to the actual use of gender-inclusive language and the masculine generic. However, the arguments opponents of gender-inclusive language put forth in favor of their position have yet to be considered in more detail. This paper aims to shed light on typical arguments against gender-inclusive language and underlying ideologies. To this end, a corpus of tweets with comments against gender-inclusive language published in May 2021 in France, Spain, and Germany was created and examined from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. The results show a strong ideological basis for the comments: proponents of gender-inclusive language are construed as an out-group, and its members are presented as ideologically blinded, manipulating, irrational, dangerous, and so forth. This out-group is contrasted with the in-group – opponents of gender-inclusive language –, and the in-group’s need to fight against the out-group in order to protect *their* language and, with this, the existing social order is highlighted. Thus, it is not so much questions of language use but rather questions of power that are negotiated in this discourse.

Keywords: gender-inclusive language, linguistic attitudes, language and ideology, Twitter corpus, Critical Discourse Analysis

1 Introduction: The debate about gender-inclusive language

Issues of gender equality in language have been a topic of discussion for several decades both in linguistics and in society. Questions of whether women are discriminated against in language were raised in the early 1970s in the Anglo-American sphere during the period of ‘second wave feminism’ (cf., e.g., Lakoff 1975; Key 1975) and quickly spread to other

countries and language communities. While the *invisibility* of women in languages that commonly use a masculine generic¹ was one of the main topics in early discussions, the question of how to address or refer to non-binary gender identities came up with the turn of the millennium.

Gender-inclusive language use includes a variety of linguistic devices, or strategies, many of which aim at avoiding the masculine generic. In French, this can be achieved by naming both linguistic genders (e.g., *étudiantes et étudiants*), by using epicene words (e.g., *la personne*), infinitive or passive constructions (in order to not name the agent), gender-invariable pronouns and adjectives (e.g., *quiconque* instead of *celui qui*), or newly created morphemes (e.g., *Espagnolx*, pl. *Espagnolz* to refer to Spaniards of all genders, cf. Alpheratz 2018, 161–162).² One strategy that has received particular attention is a short version of feminine-masculine word pairs, where the two forms are combined with an interpunct (the so-called *point médian*) or a period (e.g., *les citoyen-ne-s* or *les citoyen.ne.s*) within one word.

In France, the topic of gender-inclusive language reached a broader public after the latter strategy was used in the schoolbook *Questionner le monde* (Le Callennec and François 2017), an event highly debated in the media. Several months later, then French Prime Minister Édouard Philippe stipulated in a memo to “ne pas faire usage de l’écriture dite inclusive” (Philippe 2017; ‘not use the so-called inclusive writing’) in administrative texts. At the same time, however, 314 teachers declared to not teach the grammatical rule ‘le masculin l’emporte sur le féminin’ (‘the masculine prevails over the feminine’) anymore, a formula that designates the principle that adjectives always take the masculine form when they refer to both masculine and feminine nouns (slate.fr 2017). Instead, they vowed to teach, among others, the principle of the *accord de proxim-*

¹ It should be noted that the designation *masculine generic* is somehow misleading because *generic* is not used to describe the reference to a class (e.g. as in *The whale is a mammal.*), but to describe the (supposedly) unmarked, thus gender-neutral use of masculine reference forms (cf., e.g., Kotthoff and Nübling 2018, 91–92). Additionally, many perception studies have proved that masculine forms are often not interpreted in such a way (cf. below).

² These newly created morphemes allow non-binary gender identities to be expressed.

ité, where an adjective referring to more than one noun takes the gender of the nearest noun (e.g., “Les auteurs et les autrices *présentes* vont signer leurs livres.”, Viennot 2018, 88). Recently, in May 2021, a memo about gender-inclusive language use in administration and education, signed by the French Minister of Education Jean-Michel Blanquer, was published (Blanquer 2021). In this document, he encourages the naming of both masculine and feminine forms of personal reference in administrative texts but bans the use of the *point médian* in schools, which, again, led to controversial debates across the country and beyond.

In such debates, numerous arguments both in favor of and against the use of gender-inclusive language are put forth, which is why a closer look at these debates is particularly promising for a better understanding of the prevailing positions. In this paper, the arguments opponents of gender-inclusive language often present are analyzed in more detail. To this end, a corpus of tweets commenting on Jean-Michel Blanquer’s decision described above was created and examined from the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, with a focus on the ideologies underlying the arguments.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the state of research in the area of gender-inclusive language. Section 3 reflects on the relationship between discourse, power, and ideology with an outline of the central ideas of Critical Discourse Analysis. After that, section 4 presents the method and the corpus used for this study, and section 5 explains its results in more detail. Finally, section 6 summarizes the most important findings and shows the necessity of follow-up studies.

2 Research on gender-inclusive language

In linguistics, two fronts seem to be facing each other: on the one hand, linguists who take the position that strategies of gender-inclusive language use are not necessary often refer to structuralist theories (e.g., Kalverklärer 1979; Bosque 2012). They claim that masculine forms can be used in an unmarked, thus gender-neutral, way and consequently do not need to be substituted by alternative forms. Often, they also assert that strategies to make language more gender-inclusive are complicated or even ungrammatical – an opinion supported by the *Académie française*

(cf. Académie française 2017) and the *Real Academia Española* (cf. Real Academia Española 2020, 73–74). On the other hand, linguists who do believe that the masculine generic should be avoided argue along the lines of cognitive linguistics, stating that there is a strong associative connection between the linguistic gender of a form of personal reference and the perceived biological sex and/or social gender of the person this form refers to (cf. Stefanowitsch 2017; Gygax et al. 2019). This assumption is based on a series of psycholinguistic studies which show that the masculine (linguistic) gender often leads to mental representations of male persons, and is thus not interpreted in a gender-neutral way (cf., among many others, Klein 1988; Nissen 1997; Braun et al. 1998; Stahlberg et al. 2001; Brauer and Landry 2008; Gygax et al. 2008).

Besides studies on the perception of masculine generics, research has been conducted on attitudes about gender-inclusive language (cf. Rubin and Greene 1991; Parks and Robertson 2008; Bengoechea and Simón 2014; Slemp et al. 2020; Cremades and Fernández-Portero 2022), on factors that might influence the use of gender-inclusive language (cf. Matheson and Kristiansen 1987; Cronin and Jreisat 1995; Kuhn and Gabriel 2014; Koeser et al. 2015; Patev et al. 2019), on possible societal effects of gender-inclusive language use, especially in the areas of job advertisement/recruitment and children's and adolescents' perception of occupations (cf. Chatard et al. 2005; Gaucher et al. 2011; Vervecken et al. 2013; Horvath et al. 2015; Vervecken et al. 2015), on comprehensibility, legibility, and perceived *aesthetics* of texts written in a gender-inclusive way (cf. Braun et al. 2007; Gygax and Gesto 2007; Blake and Klimmt 2010; Pöschko and Prieler 2018; Friedrich and Heise 2019) as well as on the perception of people who use gender-inclusive language (cf. Johnson and Dowling-Guyer 1996; Vervecken and Hannover 2012). Such studies have shown – to mention just a few examples – that women are more likely to show positive attitudes towards gender-inclusive language than men (cf. Rubin and Greene 1991), that using gender-inclusive language is perceived to be more difficult by people with negative attitudes towards transgender individuals (compared to people with positive attitudes, cf. Patev et al. 2019), or that adolescents report higher degrees of professional self-efficacy when job titles are used both in the masculine and in the feminine form (compared to the masculine generic, cf. Chatard et al. 2005).

Moreover, some studies have found a significant correlation between (non-)sexist attitudes in general and the acceptance or adoption of gender-inclusive language, meaning that people who are less in favor of gender equality in society also reject gender-inclusive language more often (cf., e.g., Parks and Robertson 2004; Sarrasin et al. 2012; Douglas and Sutton 2014). The reasons that opponents of gender-inclusive language outside of academia or the press (for this, cf., e.g., Blaubergs 1980; Pano Alamán 2022) put forth for their rejection have remained largely unanalyzed until now.³ However, the link between attitudes towards gender equality and gender-inclusive language makes it seem likely that ideological beliefs play an important role here. Thus, a closer examination of the arguments opponents often present seems highly promising.

3 Discourse, power, and ideology

There is a close link between language, or, more precisely, discourse, and power. This becomes clear with questions such as: Who talks? What can be said by whom? What cannot be said? Who is being heard? What is accepted to be *the truth*? Making explicit such relations between discourse and power is one of the aims of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (cf. Fairclough et al. 2011, 358; S. Jäger 2015, 12; M. Jäger 2019, 63–65). However, CDA does not represent a fixed academic discipline, a distinct theory, or a clearly defined set of methods (cf. Wodak 2013, xxi–xxv). Rather, it can be regarded as a “problem-oriented interdisciplinary research programme, subsuming a variety of approaches, each drawing on different epistemological assumptions, with different theoretical models, research methods and agenda” (ib., xxi).

Relations of dominance and subordination are often based on ideologies, and, consequently, expressed and reproduced in discourse. The analysis of ideologies is thus crucial for CDA in order to understand how relations of power are represented and perpetuated in discursive prac-

³ An exception is Gómez Sánchez (2022), who analyzes comments in online fora of Spanish newspapers. However, her focus is not on the reasons presented for the rejection of gender-inclusive language, but on the face-work (cf. Goffman 1967) performed with such comments.

tices (cf. van Dijk 2006, 117; Fairclough et al. 2011, 358). Ideology, of course, is a concept which cannot be defined in a single or unequivocal way (cf. Eagleton 2007, 1–31), but for the present study, a preliminary approach might be that ideologies are sets of beliefs which support existing or demand new power relations. These sets of beliefs, or belief systems, define, as van Dijk (2006, 116) puts it, the social identity of a group and are shared by its members. This results in a dichotomy between the in-group ('Us') and the out-group ('Them'), both of whom are often assigned different characteristics, values, or behaviors. Obviously, the representation of the in-group is usually positive, while the representation of the out-group is negative. Analyzing the representations of in- and out-groups can thus be a potent means to perceive underlying ideologies in discourse (cf. ib., 124–127).

In the debate about gender-inclusive language, which is often said to be strongly ideologically based, this polarization of the in-group and the out-group seems to be particularly pronounced. However, in order to gain a better understanding of this process, a closer analysis is necessary. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine in more detail how opponents of gender-inclusive language define their own group, how they define the resulting out-group and how they distinguish themselves from this out-group. This can help to make visible existing or supposed relations of power and underlying ideologies in the discourse.

4 Method and corpus

The present analysis required a corpus based on statements of opponents of gender-inclusive language. One medium where people often express their opinions quite bluntly and where a wide range of arguments (in the broadest sense) may be brought to bear is social media. Debates on gender-inclusive language repeatedly flare up, for example, when new language policy regulations are made. This was the case in May 2021, after the French Minister of Education banned the use of the *point médian* and similar strategies in schools (cf. above).

To compile the corpus, *Twitter* comments related to this event were collected manually. Due to the low use of particular hashtags in this debate, it was not possible to compile the corpus using hashtags. Instead,

taking as a starting point newspaper articles on Blanquer's ban which the respective newspapers posted on *Twitter*, tweets were collected that directly commented on the mention of these articles using the reply function.⁴ This resulted in around 600 comments as a reaction to articles from five French newspapers. In order to depict a broad range of arguments, also beyond France, comments on articles from three Spanish and four German newspapers were included, increasing the corpus by about 560 comments. Thus, the final corpus contained around 1,160 tweets.

The following table provides an overview of the newspapers and tweets used as a starting point for the corpus compilation. Information on the publication dates, as well as the corresponding hyperlinks, can be found in the appendix.

Country	Newspaper	Tweet
France	France Info	<i>Jean-Michel Blanquer interdit l'écriture inclusive, "obstacle à la lecture et à la compréhension", à l'école [...]</i>
	Le Figaro Étudiant	<i>Jean-Michel Blanquer interdit officiellement l'écriture inclusive à l'école</i>
	Le Monde	<i>Jean-Michel Blanquer interdit l'écriture inclusive à l'école: une circulaire publiée jeudi proscrit le recours en classe à l'écriture inclusive, considérée comme un « obstacle à l'acquisition de la langue comme de la lecture »</i>
	Libération	<i>[...] @jmbanquer chasse officiellement l'écriture inclusive des salles de classe</i> <i>Le ministre de l'Education nationale a proscrit officiellement le recours au point médian dans les usages pédagogiques</i>

⁴ In the case of *Mediavenir*, attention was drawn to the matter in the form of a breaking news notification without a separate article being published.

Country	Newspaper	Tweet
France	Mediavénir	[...] FLASH - Jean-Michel #Blanquer veut interdire l'écriture inclusive à l'école. Le ministre de l'Éducation nationale estime que cette écriture peut troubler l'apprentissage des élèves dyslexiques. (Le Figaro)
		[...] FLASH - Jean-Michel #Blanquer a officiellement interdit l'utilisation de l'écriture inclusive dans l'Éducation nationale. L'écriture inclusive serait selon lui "un barrage à la transmission de notre langue". (BFMTV)
Spain	20 minutos	Francia veta el lenguaje inclusivo en la educación nacional al considerarlo un obstáculo para el aprendizaje
	ABC	Francia prohíbe oficialmente el lenguaje inclusivo en la escuela [...]
	El Mundo	Francia prohíbe oficialmente el lenguaje inclusivo en la escuela: "Constituye un obstáculo a la comprensión de la escritura"
Germany	BILD	Zu kompliziert für Französisch – Macrons Schulminister stoppt Gender-Sprache
	Frankfurter Allgemeine	Die französische Bildungsgewerkschaft SUD wirft Bildungsminister Jean-Michel Blanque [sic!] vor, der „pädagogischen Gemeinschaft seine eigene Rückständigkeit aufzuzwingen“. [...] #gendern
	NTV	"Pünktchen stören beim Lesen": Frankreich verbietet Gendern an Schulen
	Der Spiegel	Für Friedrich Merz ein Vorbild, für Kritiker ein Beispiel für »Rückständigkeit«: Frankreichs Bildungsminister will per Erlass verhindern, dass an Schulen »gegendert« wird. Frauen sollen anders berücksichtigt werden. [...]

Table 1: Tweets used as a starting point for the corpus compilation.

Although this corpus only depicts a small part of a much larger discourse, it offers a range of interesting phenomena which can help to gain insight into patterns of argumentation in the debate about gender-inclusive language, as will be exposed in more detail below.

In order to analyze how ideologies are expressed in discourse, van Dijk (2004) proposes a qualitative approach, in the form of a *heuristic*, which focuses on different levels of the discourse, like meaning (topics, implications, presuppositions, etc.), propositional structures, sentence syntax, and rhetoric, among others. He argues that strategies in ideological discourse come down to the very general principle of saying positive things about the in-group and negative things about the out-group (cf. ib., 76–77). As ideologies can be expressed on all these levels of discourse, they can be revealed by analyzing these levels in more detail. For example, topics often emphasize particular characteristics of the out-group, and presupposed information can influence what the recipient takes for granted (cf. ib., 78–81). Likewise, modality markers can be used to present information in a certain way (e.g., “It is well known that” or “It is necessary that”, cf. ib., 88–89), and information can be highlighted by putting it right at the beginning of a sentence (cf. ib., 93–94).

Due to the idiosyncrasy of the corpus in this study, not all levels can be treated equally well. For example, discourse forms, expressed in the order of presented information, headlines, conclusions, etc. (cf. ib., 94–96), only unfold in a very limited way because the tweets cannot exceed 280 characters. However, van Dijk’s qualitative approach provides a helpful basic framework and will therefore be used as a starting point for the following analysis.

5 Ideology in the *Twitter* corpus

The analysis of the corpus clearly showed that proponents of gender-inclusive language are construed as an out-group, while its opponents constitute themselves as a group that *fights* against this use of language and *defends* the *real* language. This dichotomic opposition between the in- and the out-group underlies several argumentative patterns, which are treated separately in the forthcoming section.

a) Gender-inclusive language is ideology.

A frequently recurring argument is that gender-inclusive language is the idea of an out-group which has no foundation in the *real* world, but

which springs from the purely ideological. This becomes evident in the following examples:⁵

- (1) Enfin une connerie en moins ! Restera quelques twittos ridicule et gauchistes sois disante féministe (@VmYStiKe; Tweet-ID: 1390566239374872581)
- (2) Parfait. Maintenant asseyons nous et buvons les larmes des progressistes hystériques. (@idedemasquee; Tweet-ID: 1390396189263245316)
- (3) Der ist wenigstens nicht so so bescheuert wie die Grünen Spinner,! (@Wolfgang49776847; Tweet-ID: 1391113929888239618)
- (4) Das „Gendern“ in Deutschland belegt erneut, das eine links-grün-liberale Medienblase versucht öffentliche Meinung zu gestalten. [...] (@312Pablo; Tweet-ID: 1390756596892962822)

In such comments, members of the out-group are defined by their political or ideological orientation (cf. *gauchiste* ‘leftist’, *féministe* ‘feminist’, *progressiste* ‘progressive’, *grün* ‘Green’, *links-grün-liberal* ‘leftist-Green-liberal’) which, at the same time, is devalued, e.g. by using adjectives with negative connotations as quasi-synonyms to political descriptions (cf. the use of *ridicule* ‘ridiculous’, *gauchiste* ‘leftist’, and *féministe* ‘feminist’ in (1)) or in noun phrases with them (cf. “des progressistes hystériques” ‘hysterical progressives’ in (2) or “die Grünen Spinner” ‘the Green nutcases’ in (3)). Thus, the out-group is presented as irrational, ideologically blinded, in opposition to a *neutral* in-group which does not adhere to any ideology. Hence, as van Dijk (2004, 20) describes it, the ideology of the out-group is opposed to the *true knowledge* of the in-group – and this knowledge refers to the understanding that gender-inclusive language should not be used.

b) Gender-inclusive language is manipulation.

Closely related to this is the presentation of gender-inclusive language as a manipulation by which the out-group wants to influence the in-group, enforcing a new language and, with this, some kind of new *ideological* order. This becomes evident in the following examples:

⁵ The following tweets are cited as they appeared on *Twitter*, neither spelling nor punctuation are modified. Omissions are marked with “[...]”. Each tweet is accompanied by its originator and its ID. Details on the publication dates, as well as the corresponding hyperlinks, are provided in the appendix.

- (5) Oui mais c'est pareil pour ceux qui veulent nous l'imposer. Que ca dégage et vite. (@B4zing4_2; Tweet-ID: 1389367525692092422)
- (6) Cette écriture peut surtout troubler le développement intellectuel de tout enfant, en lui mettant d'ineptes concepts pseudo-progressistes dans la tête, au lieu de simple bon sens. (@Hb77875573; Tweet-ID: 1389445182534426630)
- (7) Enhorabuena. Los ignorantes nos quieren cambiar todo (@MMaria47760992; Tweet-ID: 1390670563992035330)
- (8) Es ist eher umgekehrt, dass bei uns ideologisierte Geisteswissenschaftler und Aktivistinnen anderen eine ideologische Beeinflussung der Sprache aufzuzwängen, die die Gesellschaft spaltet. (@seppenradener; Tweet-ID: 1391015016095260672)

Consequently, the out-group is not only presented as ideologically blinded, but also as dangerous because they want to impose *their* language (and mindset) on the in-group. Supporters of gender-inclusive language are described in the role of the actor, the perpetrator, while the in-group is in danger and must defend itself. This is an interesting case of victimization (cf. van Dijk 2004, 130), especially since supporters of gender-inclusive language see the perpetrator-victim roles reversed: they claim that people who do not use gender-inclusive language are the ones who discriminate against others.

In addition to verbs such as fr. *imposer* 'impose', ger. *aufzuzwängen* 'force upon' etc., which emphasize the pressure that the out-group puts on the in-group, we even find descriptors such as 'terrorists'⁶ for proponents of gender-inclusive language and 'dictatorship' (cf. the heading of this paper)⁷ for their actions.⁸ Thus, banning gender-inclusive language use is presented as a legitimate reaction to this threat, ignoring the fact that by these means, the in-group's reaction to a perceived repression is a no less repressive act. In some cases, even more far-reaching bans are demanded, like in the following examples:

- (9) Il faut interdire l'écriture inclusive dans l'administration ; pas uniquement à l'école (@dodrio37; Tweet-ID: 1390567152105762816)
- (10) Il faut l'interdire partout. (@AoikawaUS; Tweet-ID: 1389267399740956677)

⁶ Cf. "[...] Aber schön zu sehen das die Sprachterroristen eine Globale Seuche sind. [...]" (@Deal2Happy; Tweet-ID: 1391022340792852483).

⁷ For details on this tweet, cf. appendix.

⁸ Cf. also the use of violence metaphors as in (14) (*Sprachverstümm[e]lung* 'language mutilation') and (30) (*Sprachvergewaltigung* 'language rape').

- (11) Il DOIT interdire l'écriture inclusive et sans attendre. (@mchristine55; Tweet-ID: 1389472040265080832)

These formulations are also interesting in regard to their modality (cf. van Dijk 2004, 88–89). Using modal verbs such as fr. *falloir* ‘need to’, *devoir* ‘must’, etc., the demands are not presented as personal opinions, but as an objectively perceivable necessity. It is important to notice that these demands are based on the presupposition that only the in-group is allowed to exert influence on language use (by banning certain uses), while attempts from the out-group to do so are seen as invalid manipulation.

c) Supporters of gender-inclusive language are a minority.

Additionally, supporters of gender-inclusive language are described as a minority, which intends to make their attempts seem even less legitimate, as can be seen in the following comments:

- (12) Tant mieux c bon on va pas changer de langue parce que 4 ou 5 hystériques pleurent parce qu'on a pas mis de E à la fin d'un mot et puis quoi encore? (@Adem0x; Tweet-ID: 1389417225065574400)
- (13) Irgendwann is ja aber auch mal gut mit dem ganzen gleichberechtigungsschmarre... es nervt nur noch. Warum muss eine Mehrheit eine sog. selbstinszenierten und selbstgefälligen Minderheit bedienen ? (@pamaki2811; Tweet-ID: 1391097596261900291)
- (14) Gut, das sich widerstand, gegen diese Sprachverstümmelung regt ! Eine kleine Minderheit versucht hier allen etwas aufzuzwingen. (@Pentiumkiller; Tweet-ID: 1390708361147072513)

From presenting the out-group as a minority also follows that the in-group, i.e., opponents of gender-inclusive language, must represent the majority and, moreover, the norm (*argumentum ad populum*). The commentators thus conclude that their position is the one that should prevail. In their argumentation, they seem to invoke democratic principles, but at the same time, they presuppose that minorities always have to adapt to the majority and that the ideas of a (supposed) minority must not be considered.

d) Gender-inclusive language is useless.

Another set of tweets refers to the supposed uselessness, even absurdity of gender-inclusive language, for example:

- (15) L'écriture inclusive est pour le coup complètement absurde. Encore heureux que ça devienne pas la norme (@Globibuluxx; Tweet-ID: 1389268276010704896)
- (16) Il n'y a même pas besoin de justification, cette horreur n'a pas sa place dans la langue française. (@koala24012; Tweet-ID: 1389462069393625090)
- (17) Lenguaje inclusivo es un tontería, las palabras son solo eso. (@Emilio_ReyesC; Tweet-ID: 1390770931602178049)

Most of the comments do not give any justification for this assertion. Moreover, the actual goal of gender-inclusive language use, namely to contribute to gender equality in society, is hardly ever mentioned; keywords referring to 'women', 'equality', 'discrimination', etc. are extremely rare in the corpus. Rather, the tweeters' personal opinion is presented as a fact that arises from common sense and does not require any further justification or empirical basis (*argumentum ad iudicium*). Hence, the criterion of evidentiality (referring to the *proof*, or source, of the information, e.g., "I have seen/read it", "X told me", etc., cf. van Dijk 2004, 89) seems to be simply "I know it". This goes hand in hand with the almost complete absence of phenomena like hedging or vagueness in the corpus (cf. *ib.*, 90). Verbs of thinking are also very rare.

By presenting their own opinion as a commonly-known fact, the members of the in-group are once again depicted as those who possess the knowledge and are able to think in a rational way.⁹ According to them, members of the out-group in turn do not understand that gender-inclusive language is useless; consequently, they are irrational. This is also reflected by the frequent use of the adjective *absurde* 'absurd' in the French tweets, as well as by various descriptions of the out-group. Apart from the already mentioned adjectives 'ridiculous' and 'hysterical', we find, among others:

⁹ Cf. van Dijk (2004, 127) about reasonableness as an important argumentative strategy.

- (18) A pars les drogués personnel l'utilise (@MtgQuark; Tweet-ID: 1390397540856737796)
- (19) [...] aquí en cambio, cada día más retrasados, retrasadas y retrasades¹⁰ (@Armando-Broncas4; Tweet-ID: 1390388086090108930)
- (20) Bravo, der Sieg des normalen Menschenverstandes über weltfremde Ideologie.¹¹ (@obiwannnnnn; Tweet-ID: 1390905873942331392)

Consequently, these tweets present members of the in-group as those who are in the position to rationally judge the usefulness or uselessness of gender-inclusive language, while members of the out-group are not sound of mind, which is why their judgement is worthless.

e) Gender-inclusive language is complicated.

Another statement we often find in the comments asserts that gender-inclusive language is an attempt to unnecessarily complicate language. This becomes evident in the following examples:

- (21) Enfin une bonne décision comme si la langue française était pas déjà assez compliquée. (@thomas272L; Tweet-ID: 1389452131162279936)
- (22) La langue française est déjà suffisamment dure comme ça [...] (@Rokhonoa; Tweet-ID: 1390396078353264641)

In these cases, the members of the out-group are once again depicted as a threat for the in-group because they compromise language. Apart from this, numerous comments make up another group that seems to be threatened:

- (23) [...] C'est une aberration absolue. Les élèves ont déjà du mal à accorder les noms et les adjectifs, alors ça ... (@Tatane_School; Tweet-ID: 1390719690184478720)
- (24) Bravo à lui ! Cette soupe informe et illisible, discriminatoire envers les enfants dyslexiques et dysphasiques ne méritait pas mieux ! (@DejanteDu44; Tweet-ID: 1391289000242130946)
- (25) De plus cette écriture est discriminante puisque elle est illisible par les ordinateurs vocaux donc les aveugles n'ont pas accès au contenu écrit en inclusive. [...] (@fernandezm33; Tweet-ID: 1390589071689453568)

With such comments, members of the in-group present themselves as protectors, as caring citizens who are concerned about participation

¹⁰ Here, France is being opposed to Spain, where gender-inclusive language has not been banned.

¹¹ This *victory* refers to Blanquer's ban described in section 1.

rights of supposedly weaker groups in society, like children or people with disabilities. Members of the out-group, on the other hand, are depicted as inconsiderate people who are enforcing their interests without regard for others. Interestingly, it is not mentioned that a ban of gender-inclusive language use might also discriminate against or exclude certain groups. The tweeters' solidarity is thus clearly reserved for members of their own group.

f) Gender-inclusive language threatens the *real* language.

According to the comments, gender-inclusive language is not only unnecessary and complicated, but also grammatically wrong, artificial, or unaesthetic. Thus, it endangers the *correct* language – meaning the language's (supposedly) *traditional* use¹² – as is evident from the following comments:

- (26) Merci à lui de sauver le français, langue officielle de beaucoup de pays (@daghedick; Tweet-ID: 1390763451962757129)
- (27) [...] Déjà notre belle langue FRANCAISE perd de sa noblesse !!!! alors il était urgent d'intervenir. (@GaillardDenise; Tweet-ID: 1390754999345504258)
- (28) Un bon point pour lui: cessons ces stupidités et revenons à un français écrit et parlé corrects (@MicheleGuillot1; Tweet-ID: 1389447922786443268)
- (29) A CAMBIO EN ESPAÑA ESTOS MALVADOS LA PROMUEVEN A PESAR DE QUE LA RAE HA DICHO QUE NO ES CORRECTA.¹³ (@Jobancin1942; Tweet-ID: 1390792547790950402)
- (30) Sprachvergewaltigung im Land der Dichter und Denker (@Winiegarske; Tweet-ID: 1390925935160004608)
- (31) Die Kinder erlernen in der Schule eine künstlich erzeugte Sprache die ein paar Spinner toll finden. [...] (@Kai79974889; Tweet-ID: 1390908823980888064)

Consequently, the members of the in-group are presented as language experts who have to save *their* language (cf., e.g., (27)) from the external danger represented by the out-group (which is described particu-

¹² These arguments can thus be seen as *argumenta ad antiquitatem*.

¹³ This is a typical case of an *argumentum ad auctoritatem* which we often find in the discourse about gender-inclusive language.

larly drastically in (30)).¹⁴ In many comments, the tweeters use what they believe to be gender-inclusive language in an exaggerated way to make their point clear, for example in the following comments:

- (32) Bravo.e.s !!!! Je.tu.il.elle m'en sortait-ent plus.e ! [...] (@soa_gti; Tweet-ID: 1390598151694864384)
- (33) Partout et partout il faut l'interdire. (@AoikawaUS; Tweet-ID: 1389267491755597829)
- (34) Pero , pera , pere , los , las , les franceses , fracesas y francesos son diderentes , diferentes y diferentes a los , las , les , españoles , españolas y españoles (@AgustinMaset; Tweet-ID: 1390418787124514820)
- (35) España, somos: Idiotas. Idiotos. Idiotes. (@ManuelMH15; Tweet-ID: 1390689799753932802)
- (36) Ich wusste gar nicht, dass die Franzosen*innen ihre Sprache auch vergendert haben. Das ist jedenfalls eine gute Entscheidung für die Kinder*innen. Ich hoffe, die Deutschen*innen werden folgen. (@Andfisch1899; Tweet-ID: 1390913465896865793)
- (37) Sternchen*Innen auch (@ThorstenD6; Tweet-ID: 1390902377855782914)

This can be regarded as a form of *crossing* (cf. Rampton 1995), by which the commentators stylize and parody some characteristics of the out-group's supposed way of speaking (by using certain features of gender-inclusive language in an exaggerated way) and, at the same time, denigrate them (cf. Higuera Del Moral and Jansen 2017, 138–149). Thus, by means of humor, the tweeters strongly distance themselves from the out-group.¹⁵ Furthermore, they present these strategies not as linguistic devices that can and should only be used in very specific cases (namely, to refer to human beings), but pretend that a whole language is being invented and imposed on others.¹⁶ Thus, comments claiming that

¹⁴ Gómez Sánchez finds similar comments in her study and analyzes them as “Actividades de autoimagen basadas en el conocimiento (real o no) de la lengua” (2022, 25–26).

¹⁵ Cf. also the strategies that Gómez Sánchez analyzes as “Actividades descorteses basadas en la ridiculización y los juegos de palabras” (2022, 223).

¹⁶ It is interesting to notice how in these comments linguistic means to make person designations gender-inclusive are transferred to interjections (as in (32)), adverbs (as in (33)), conjunctions (as in (34)), epicene nouns (as in (35) and (36)) or to nouns that do not designate human beings (as in (37)). These comments also suggest that the tweeters might be unaware of the great variety of linguistic

gender-inclusive language use is *new*, *wrong*, or *ugly* emphasize the in-group's need to fight to maintain language in its *traditional*, and therefore *correct*, form, threatened by the out-group.

g) Gender-inclusive language threatens culture.

Finally, some comments refer to a close connection between language and culture, warning that *destroying* language will also destroy culture. This becomes clear in comments like the following:

- (38) Ouf, mais ça ne durera pas ! Nous avons la pression de ceux qui veulent nous decul-turer (@PascalPgreco; Tweet-ID: 1392042733272014848)
- (39) El lenguaje inclusivo es muestra de incultura (@jjaviercf1; Tweet-ID: 1390947527449526273)
- (40) Die Franzosen haben eben noch eine Sprachkultur, die in unserem Land schon längst verloren wurde. (@IngeBunge; Tweet-ID: 1390939614161129472)

With these comments, members of the in-group not only define themselves by sharing the same language (as opposed to gender-inclusive language as the language of the out-group), but also by having access to the same culture. The out-group, in turn, does not have access to this culture, is *decultured*, almost barbaric. This fits with the portrayals of the out-group as irrational described above, and emphasizes once again the danger that the out-group represents – they are depicted as willingly destroying not only language, but also culture. Fighting against gender-inclusive language is thus presented as an act of general benefit (to the in-group) because it also means protecting culture.

means that gender-inclusive language encompasses; they concentrate on very specific devices which seem to be most controversial. In French, this is the period to name both linguistic genders in one word (e.g., *les citoyen.nes*), in Spanish, the new morpheme {e} (which was created to replace morphemes that refer to male or female gender, like {o} and {a}, e.g., *les ciudadanes*), and in German, the asterisk (which is put between the masculine and the feminine form, e.g., *die Bürger*innen*).

6 Conclusion

This analysis of tweets about gender-inclusive language not only gives insight into what arguments are typically put forth by opponents of gender-inclusive language, but also clearly shows that the debate is grounded in a strong ideological basis. Members of the in-group present themselves in a positive way: according to them, they act rationally, do not adhere to any ideology, recognize the danger that gender-inclusive language represents, and protect their own group, especially those who cannot stand up for their rights themselves and whom gender-inclusive language harms the most. Furthermore, they depict themselves as language experts who protect the language of their group from defacement and thus also preserve culture. The out-group, in turn, is presented in a negative way: according to the comments, its members are ideologically blinded, they attempt to manipulate the population, and, although a minority, are a threat to the in-group. Moreover, they are unable to recognize that their language is useless, complicated, grammatically incorrect and unaesthetic. With their attempt to change language, they are at the same time knowingly and willingly destroying culture.

This also shows that the whole debate is less about language itself than it is about power and social order. What is being negotiated is the question of who gets to decide about language, who gets to change it, and who holds the interpretive sovereignty over what is correct, aesthetic, useful, etc. Trying to preserve language in its (supposedly) *traditional*, thus *correct* form means preserving the existing social order and, relatedly, patriarchal structures in society. Hence, fighting against gender-inclusive language really means fighting against those who seem to try to change the existing social order.

Of course, this study is based on a small amount of data which refer to a very specific event. Consequently, its results can only be a first insight and need to be confirmed and extended by further studies. It would be useful to create larger corpora that contain more data from a longer period of time (and thus also on different events) and from more language communities. In addition to that, data from other domains, i.e., other social media, newspaper articles, television debates, or even private conversations, could be useful. Finally, it also seems promising to analyze arguments of those who stand up for gender-inclusive lan-

guage use. Studies could examine, for example, whether the opposition between in- and out-groups is similarly pronounced here, how in- and out-groups are presented, and, ultimately, how questions of power and social order are negotiated.

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Appendix

a) Corpus information

The following newspapers' tweets were used as a starting point for the collection of comments (as described in section 4)

French newspapers

Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
@franceinfo	May 7, 2021; 7.14 am	https://twitter.com/franceinfo/status/1390535462440349697
@Figaro_Etudiant	May 6, 2021; 7.15 pm	https://twitter.com/Figaro_Etudiant/status/1390354592974659590
@lemondefr	May 7, 2021; 9.03 am	https://twitter.com/lemondefr/status/1390563019038539776
@libe	May 7, 2021; 8.01 am	https://twitter.com/libe/status/1390547205455556609
@Mediavenir	May 3, 2021; 7.15 pm	https://twitter.com/Mediavenir/status/1389267257960841224 ¹⁷
@Mediavenir	May 6, 2021; 10.00 pm	https://twitter.com/Mediavenir/status/1390395949835382784

Spanish newspapers

Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
@20m	May 6, 2021; 9.24 pm	https://twitter.com/20m/status/1390386985525723140
@abc_es	May 7, 2021; 2.55 pm	https://twitter.com/abc_es/status/1390651383725109251
@elmundoes	May 7, 2021; 6.42 pm	https://twitter.com/elmundoes/status/1390708724185145346

¹⁷ This article does not inform about Blanquer's ban itself, but about his intention to do so. As it triggered a wave of comments on this topic, it was also included in the corpus.

German newspapers

Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
@BILD	May 8, 2021; 5.25 pm	https://twitter.com/BILD/status/1391051523715747841
@faznet	May 8, 2021; 1.12 pm	https://twitter.com/faznet/status/1390987858190667779
@ntvde	May 8, 2021; 5.54 am	https://twitter.com/ntvde/status/1390877754233540613
@derspiegel	May 7, 2021; 6.36 pm	https://twitter.com/derspiegel/status/1390707029958807555

b) Information on author, date and time of publication, and hyperlink of the cited tweets

No. in paper	Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
[Heading]	@hephbe	May 6, 2021; 7.40 pm	https://twitter.com/hephbe/status/1390360800913760258
(1)	@VmYStiKe	May 7, 2021; 9.16 am	https://twitter.com/VmYStiKe/status/1390566239374872581
(2)	@idedemasquee	May 6, 2021; 10.00 pm	https://twitter.com/demasqueen/status/1390396189263245316
(3)	@Wolfgan49776847	May 8, 2021; 9.33 pm	https://twitter.com/Wolfgan49776847/status/1391113929888239618
(4)	@312Pablo	May 7, 2021; 9.53 pm	https://twitter.com/312Pablo/status/1390756596892962822
(5)	@B4zing4_2	May 4, 2021; 1.53 am	https://twitter.com/B4zing4_2/status/1389367525692092422
(6)	@Hb77875573	May 4, 2021; 7.02 am	https://twitter.com/Hb77875573/status/1389445182534426630

No. in paper	Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
(7)	@MMaria47760992	May 7, 2021; 4.11 pm	https://twitter.com/MMaria47760992/status/1390670563992035330
(8)	@seppenradener	May 8, 2021; 2.59 pm	https://twitter.com/seppenradener/status/1391015016095260672
(9)	@dodrio37	May 7, 2021; 9.20 am	https://twitter.com/dodrio37/status/1390567152105762816
(10)	@AoikawaUS	May 3, 2021; 7.15 pm	https://twitter.com/AoikawaUS/status/1389267399740956677
(11)	@mchristine55	May 4, 2021; 8.48 am	https://twitter.com/mchristine55/status/1389472040265080832
(12)	@Adem0x	May 4, 2021; 5.10 am	https://twitter.com/Adem0xx/status/1389417225065574400
(13)	@pamaki2811	May 8, 2021; 8.28 pm	https://twitter.com/pamaki2811/status/1391097596261900291
(14)	@Pentiumkiller	May 7, 2021; 6.41 pm	https://twitter.com/Pentiumkiller/status/1390708361147072513
(15)	@Globibuluxx	May 3, 2021; 7.19 pm	https://twitter.com/Globibuluxx/status/1389268276010704896
(16)	@koala24012	May 4, 2021; 8.09 am	https://twitter.com/Tetouchaud/status/1389462069393625090
(17)	@Emilio_ReyesC	May 7, 2021; 10.50 pm	https://twitter.com/Emilio_ReyesC/status/1390770931602178049
(18)	@MtgQuark	May 6, 2021; 10.06 pm	https://twitter.com/MtgQuark/status/1390397540856737796
(19)	@ArmandoBroncas4	May 6, 2021; 9.28 pm	https://twitter.com/ArmandoBroncas4/status/1390388086090108930

No. in paper	Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
(20)	@obiwannnnnn	May 8, 2021; 7.46 am	https://twitter.com/obiwannnnnn/status/1390905873942331392
(21)	@thomas272L	May 4, 2021; 7.29 am	https://twitter.com/thomas272L/status/1389452131162279936
(22)	@Rokhonoa	May 6, 2021; 10.00 pm	https://twitter.com/Fujit0ra_/status/1390396078353264641
(23)	@Tatane_School	May 7, 2021; 7.26 pm	https://twitter.com/Tatane_School/status/1390719690184478720
(24)	@DejanteDu44	May 9, 2021; 9.08 am	https://twitter.com/DejanteDu44/status/1391289000242130946
(25)	@fernandezm33	May 7, 2021; 10.47 am	https://twitter.com/fernandezm33/status/1390589071689453568
(26)	@daghedick	May 7, 2021; 10.20 pm	https://twitter.com/daghedick/status/1390763451962757129
(27)	@GaillardDenise	May 7, 2021; 9.46 pm	https://twitter.com/GaillardDenise/status/1390754999345504258
(28)	@MicheleGuillot1	May 4, 2021; 7.12 am	https://twitter.com/MicheleGuillot1/status/1389447922786443268
(29)	@Jobancin1942	May 8, 2021; 12:15 am	https://twitter.com/Jobancin1942/status/1390792547790950402
(30)	@Winiegarske	May 8, 2021; 9.05 am	https://twitter.com/Winiegarske/status/1390925935160004608
(31)	@Kai79974889	May 8, 2021; 7.58 am	https://twitter.com/Kai79974889/status/1390908823980888064
(32)	@soa_gti	May 7, 2021; 11.23 am	https://twitter.com/soa_gti/status/1390598151694864384

No. in paper	Account	Date and time of publication	Hyperlink
(33)	@AoikawaUS	May 3, 2021; 7.15 pm	https://twitter.com/AoikawaUS/status/1389267491755597829
(34)	@AgustinMaset	May 6, 2021; 11.30 pm	https://twitter.com/AgustinMaset/status/1390418787124514820
(35)	@ManuelMH15	May 7, 2021; 5.27 pm	https://twitter.com/ManuelMH15/status/1390689799753932802
(36)	@Andfisch1899	May 8, 2021; 8.16 am	https://twitter.com/Andfisch1899/status/1390913465896865793
(37)	@ThorstenD6	May 8, 2021; 7.32 am	https://twitter.com/ThorstenD6/status/1390902377855782914
(38)	@PascalPgreco	May 11, 2021; 11.03 am	https://twitter.com/PascalPgreco/status/1392042733272014848
(39)	@jjaviercf1	May 8, 2021; 10.31 am	https://twitter.com/jjaviercf1/status/1390947527449526273
(40)	@IngeBunge	May 8, 2021; 10.00 am	https://twitter.com/IngeBunge/status/1390939614161129472
[Foot note 6]	@Deal2Happy	May 11, 2021; 3.29 pm	https://twitter.com/Deal2Happy/status/1391022340792852483

