

Proposal Submission for the Backlash Conference

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Title of the presentation: The discussion of gender-inclusive language school textbooks. A comparative analysis of school textbooks published in France and French as a Foreign Language (FLE) textbooks used in German secondary schools.

Abstract: Gender-inclusive language has become a central issue in contemporary debates on linguistic norms and their social significance. In France, the publication of a textbook using abbreviated forms sparked national controversy (Michaud, 2021), ultimately leading to an official prohibition of certain gender-inclusive forms in educational institutions (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports, 2021). While feminised occupational titles and full double forms (e.g., *les étudiants et les étudiantes*) are broadly accepted as part of the standard norm, other strategies – such as abbreviations (e.g., *étudiant·e·s*) and neologisms (e.g., *iel*) – remain contested, even as they gain lexical recognition (Le Robert, 2021).

Schools, as key sites of language mediation, play a crucial role in the transmission and interpretation of linguistic norms (Ammon, 2005). Textbooks are central to this process, not only implementing curricula (Okeeffe, 2012), but also “transmitting gender roles and social values to students” (Amerian & Emaili, 2015, p. 4).

This study investigates how resistance to gender-inclusive language is represented in French educational materials. Specifically, it focuses on (1) school textbooks published in France and (2) French as a Foreign Language (FLE) textbooks used in German secondary schools. Foreign language textbooks occupy a distinct position, as they present linguistic norms while also mediating sociocultural debates across national contexts. Comparing France and Germany is particularly insightful, as both French and German are grammatically gendered languages subject to intense debates on gender-inclusive language. Given Germany's less centralized language policy, German FLE textbooks may however reflect a more open, varied stance.

Using a mixed-method approach combining qualitative and quantitative content analysis, the study investigates (a) the presence and framing of gender-inclusive language debates; (b) the use of the generic masculine versus inclusive forms in tasks and texts; and (c) the point at which such issues are introduced in the curriculum.

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Biography: Paula Blaschke is a research associate at the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf, specializing in French and Spanish linguistics. Her research interests focus particularly on gender-inclusive language in French as well as on North American Francophonie. In her master's thesis, she conducted a quantitative study on the use of and attitudes toward gender-inclusive language in Quebec. As part of her doctoral project, she plans to pursue more extensive research on gender-inclusive language in the educational context.