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«Resistance to Gender-inclusive language in Italian left and right political leaders: a comparative critical discourse analysis of national vs. international contexts in speeches in English and in Italian»

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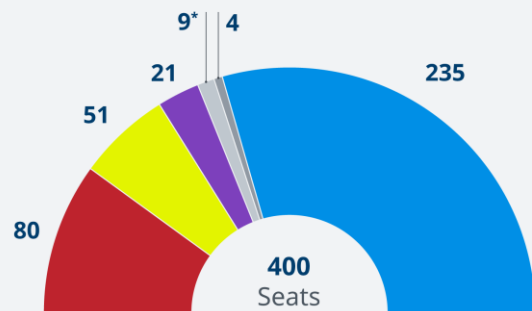




Introduction

Italian Parliamentary Election 2022

Seats in Italy's lower house



Center-right coalition

Brothers of Italy, League, Forza Italia, *Us Moderates*

Center-left campaign alliance

Democratic Party, Italian Left-Greens, +*Europe*, *Civic Commitment*

5-Star Movement

Others

Action-Italy Alive

*Still to distribute



Source: Italian Interior Minister, September 26, 2022, 18:10 UTC

MIUR

Linee Guida per l'uso del genere nel linguaggio amministrativo del MIUR

GUIDA L'USO RAGGIUNTO TOSI RENZE ENERE

CGUE



Left-Wing Parties

- More progressive views in the use of gender-inclusive language, e.g.
 - constant use of feminine/masculine forms, endings, or pronouns whenever possible («*cari colleghi/care colleghe*» *dear colleagues*)
 - use of the *schwa* ending for a neutral gender («*carə colleghə*»)
 - Alternative unmarked forms («*car* collegh**»)

Right-Wing Parties

- More conservative approach to language use because of
 - Moral/ethical reasons
 - Language preservation
- Preserve the use of the «extended masculine» forms for all genders (e.g. «*cari colleghi*»).

Formato, F., & Somma, A. L. (2023). Gender inclusive language in Italy: A sociolinguistic overview. *Mediterranean and European Linguistic Anthropology*, 5(1), 22-40.

Montecchio, L. (2025). Italy's populist radical right and anti-gender discourses: Lega, Fdl and the case of the Zan bill. *The International Spectator*, 60(1), 157-175.

The Two Leaders

Left-Wing View

- **Elly Schlein**
 - Secretary of the *Partito Democratico* (lit. Democratic Party)
 - one of the main opposition left-wing parties



Right-Wing View

- **Giorgia Meloni**
 - Italy's current PM
 - Leader of *Fratelli d'Italia* (lit. Brothers of Italy)
 - the main populist far-right party





- **The study** →
 - identifying instances of resistance to gender-inclusive language in the two political leaders, Meloni and Schlein;
 - examining whether they reflect/do not reflect, in public contexts, the corresponding political stands with respect to gender inclusivity
- **The Method** →
 - Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995; 2003)
 - Qualitative investigation
 - Selection criteria:
 - Materials → Speeches/interviews/official notes on gender inclusivity
 - Examples → Manual search in the materials of instances/claims/statements/phrases in which the two leaders explicitly/implicitly resist gender inclusivity
 - Analysis of results → Contextualising findings with the two leaders' political agenda on gender inclusivity

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. New York: Routledge.



- **The Materials** → Speeches/official interviews delivered in comparable situations in English vs. Italian
 - **Giorgia Meloni:**
 - ✓ GM's Speech in *Piazza San Giovanni* in Rome (Main Party's Convention) – Italian [19/10/2019 – PSG19]
 - ✓ GM's Note on Pronouns for her role - Italian [28/10/2022 – N22]
 - ✓ GM's Speech in Madrid – English [10/12/2022 – MS22]
 - **Elly Schlein:**
 - ✓ ES's Statement on Italian political agenda on trans rights [03/06/2016 – S16] - English
 - ✓ ES's Speech after election as Party's Secretary – Italian [28/02/2023 – PS23]
 - ✓ ES's Interview to *Vogue Italia* – Italian [25/04/2023 – VI23]



Giorgia Meloni [PSG19]

- Qualcuno nel Pd ha detto: di lunedì mattina ci saranno solo i **parrucchieri** che sono chiusi. Quella mattina davanti a Piazza Montecitorio c'erano 30 mila **parrucchieri** [Someone in the PD said: "On Monday morning, the only places closed will be the hair salons." That morning, there were 30,000 hairdressers in front of Piazza Montecitorio.]
- [...] Si fa quello che si deve fare per fermare l'immigrazione illegale. Per farlo serve un governo di **patrioti**, [...] [We must do whatever it takes to stop illegal immigration. To do that, we need a government of patriots]
- Ora parlano di togliere la dicitura "padre" e "madre" sui documenti. Perché la famiglia è un nemico, l'identità nazionale è un nemico, **l'identità di genere** è un nemico. Per loro tutto ciò che definisce è un nemico. È il gioco del pensiero unico: ci devono togliere tutto quello che siamo, perché quando non avremo più un'identità e non avremo più radici, noi saremo privi di consapevolezza e incapaci di difendere i nostri diritti. [Now they're talking about removing the terms "father" and "mother" from official documents. Because the family is an enemy, national identity is an enemy, and **gender identity is an enemy**. For them, anything that defines us is an enemy. It's the game of groupthink: they must strip us of everything we are, because once we no longer have an identity and no longer have roots, we will be devoid of self-awareness and unable to defend our rights.]
- Noi vogliamo che gli **italiani** tornino a contare [We want Italians to matter again]



Results* - Giorgia Meloni [N22]

- «il **Signor** Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri» [Mr Prime Minister]
- «**La** presidente» [Prime Minister, feminine article]
- Leggo che il principale tema di discussione di oggi sarebbe su circolari burocratiche interne, più o meno sbagliate, attorno al grande tema di come definire la prima donna Presidente del Consiglio. Fate pure. Io misto occupando di bollette, tasse, lavoro, certezza della pena, manovra dibilancio. Per come la vedo io, potete chiamarmi come credete, anche Giorgia [I read that today's main topic of discussion is supposedly a series of internal bureaucratic memos—some more, some less misguided—surrounding the big question of how to refer to the first female Prime Minister. Go ahead. As for me, I'm focused on Italians' utility bills, taxes, jobs, ensuring that law courts' sentences are carried out, and on the budget. As far as I'm concerned, you can call me whatever you like—even Giorgia]



Giorgia Meloni 3 [MS22]

- Good morning to all, **patriots!**
- Identity is the main enemy of the globalist mainstream, and all of us who defend it are the target of the "passionaries" of progressivism. Everything that identifies us is under attack. The **person** is under attack, and with it the very value of human life. Of every single human life, because each of us carries a unique and unrepeatable genetic code, and this, like it or not, is sacred.
- It is under attack the sexual identity, which the LGBT lobbies would like to tear down by blows of gender propaganda in schools, in the media, in institutions with that principle of "self id" - I am not what I am but what I feel - which strikes first of all **women's rights and achievements**.
- Under attack is the work of our **people**, crushed by monstrous taxation that stifles freedom of enterprise, by the downward competition caused by unregulated globalization, by speculative finance that takes over the real economy and reduces **workers'** rights.
- Under attack is the **Fatherland**, the highest value that holds all others together, because it is together community, borders, history and identity. A **Homeland** that we want to save from the drift of the single globalist, liquid and standardized model, but also from internal secessionism [...]
- Let it be clear that loving the **Fatherland** does not mean not believing in Europe, because Nation and Europe are not contradictory values. Only the left in bad faith can claim this, because they have always hated the **Fatherland** and began to love Europe only when they became orphans of the Soviet Union. In fact, they tried to turn the Europe of peoples and diversity into a kind of Soviet state, all bureaucracy, top-down impositions and homogenization.
- To love the **Fatherland** means to love **the land of the fathers**, which is not only the land as a place of affection and identity, but is also the land in which we live and in which we want to be able to continue to cultivate, breed, drink, breathe and enjoy the beauty of Nature.
- And I want to publicly thank Santiago Abascal for wanting to promote the "Madrid Charter," which I wholeheartedly signed. It is an extraordinary manifesto of values to join forces and help our **brothers** in Latin America to free themselves from the yoke of social-communist-inspired governments that are starving their peoples. They are **brother peoples**, in their veins runs so much Spanish and Italian blood.



Results* - Elly Schlein [S16]

- A momentum for political change seemed to have arrived last year, when the Italian Constitutional Court clarified that **trans people** must have access to gender recognition without being forced to undergo surgical sterilisation.
- Additionally, some city councils and the Ministry of Equal Opportunity have been involved in the development of best practices that would guarantee better rights for **trans people**.
- [...] Italian politics have been distant to the needs and demands of **trans people** and what can be done to improve the political response.



Results* - Elly Schlein [PS23]

- **Care tutte e cari tutti**, ce l'abbiamo fatta. Abbiamo vinto. [Dear all, we did it. We won]
- Ma voglio pensare anche **alle tante e ai tanti giovani** che hanno oggi espresso il loro primo voto [But I also want to think of the many young people who cast their first vote today]
- tutte **le iscritte e gli iscritti, le volontarie e i volontari** [all members, volunteers]
- ma voglio ricordare anche in particolare **quelli** che l'hanno fatto all'estero [but I also want to give special mention to those who did it abroad]
- A tutte **le sostenitrici e sostenitori** [all supporters...]
- Un grazie di cuore lo voglio fare alla squadra nazionale della mozione Schlein e al mio team, senza **i quali** tutto questo non sarebbe stato davvero possibile. Vi ringrazio tutte, vi ringrazio **tutti** [...] [I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to the national team behind the Schlein movement and to my team, without whom none of this would have been possible. Thank you all...]
- a difesa di **quei poveri** che il governo colpisce e che non vuole vedere, **di lavoratrici e lavoratori** precari sfruttati, per alzare i salari e per alzare le loro tutele, la sicurezza sul lavoro [in defense of the poor whom the government targets and chooses to ignore, of exploited precarious workers, to raise wages and strengthen their protections and workplace safety]
- Noi saremo al fianco **degli studenti e delle studentesse** e non li faremo passare [We will stand by the students and we will not let them pass].
- Lavoreremo per l'unità e posso garantire già da oggi che il mio impegno sarà quello di **essere la segretaria di tutte e di tutti indistintamente** [We will work toward unity, and I can assure you right now that I am committed to serving as the everyone's secretary, without exception].



Results* - Elly Schlein [VI23]

- Innanzitutto c'è bisogno di un ingrediente fondamentale, cioè l'essere molto **convinti** di quello che si dice. Bisogna avere approfondito gli argomenti. Non mi fido dei **politici** che fanno i **tuttologi**... [First and foremost, there is one essential ingredient: you have to be absolutely convinced of what you're saying. You need to have a thorough understanding of the issues. I don't trust politicians who act like they know everything...]
- In linea generale penso che dobbiamo riuscire a entrare in connessione con le persone che vogliamo rappresentare e dobbiamo farlo con un linguaggio inclusivo, che si rivolga **a tutti e a tutte**. [Generally speaking, I think we need to be able to connect with the people we want to represent, and we need to do so using inclusive language that speaks to everyone.]
- Faccio spesso una battuta: non lasciamo l'internazionalismo ai **nazionalisti** [I often joke: let's not leave internationalism to the nationalists]
- I **nazionalisti** puntano il dito verso il basso [**Nationalists** are pointing the finger downward]
- Io vorrei vedere i **sovranisti**, quelli che difendono il diritto di ogni Stato ad agire autonomamente [I'd like to see the sovereignists—those who defend every state's right to act independently]
- se diamo a ciascuno la risposta commisurata ai suoi bisogni leviamo il terreno a quella narrazione che mette **gli uni contro gli altri**, più fragili [If we give each person a response tailored to their needs, we undermine the narrative that pits people against one another, especially the most vulnerable]



Analysis of Results

- *Giorgia Meloni*
 - Resists to gender inclusivity in public language
 - Use of nouns/terms that remind of a masculine-oriented identity
 - Consistent with her party's agenda
- *Elly Schlein*
 - Uses of inclusive language BUT uses dual gender
 - No instances of schwa or gender neutral language (vs her own statements/principles)
 - Shows signs of resistance to gender inclusive language with use of masculine pronouns extended to both genders
 - Inconsistent/contradictory with her party's/her personal agenda



- *Limitations of the Study*
 - Limited dataset considered for both speakers
 - Different communicative settings
 - Differences in language of the materials
- *Future Research*
 - Larger dataset
 - Similar communicative situations
 - Comparable language settings
 - Other media (social media statements, videos, etc.)



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*Thank you for
your attention!*