

The Royal Spanish Academy: Giving ground slowly but still in denial

David HEAP & Yarubi DÍAZ COLMENARES,
University of Western Ontario

While Spanish saw one of the earliest pioneering proposals for gender fair language (García Meseguer 1977), it was quickly rescinded (1994) in favour of the “house ideology” of the Real Academia Española (Royal Spanish Academy or RAE), which maintains the traditional perspective whereby masculine generics naturally include reference to all human beings, and therefore no inclusive language changes are necessary or even useful.

A strong exponent of this traditional view is Bosque (2012), which is scornful of all attempts at gender inclusive language. Various other commentaries follow this “official” line, with tones varying from the hostile (Roca 2013) to dismissive (Escandell-Vidal, 2020; Mendivil Giró 2020). An official development of some import is the RAE’s “report on the use of inclusive language, developed at the request of the Vice-President of the Government” (2020). Perhaps because of the official nature of the request (and the political context which it reflects) and perhaps because it is co-authored (by four members of the RAE, two of them women), the tone of this Report seems more “conciliatory” in places. Minor concessions are made on a few points : it might be acceptable to use a bit of inclusive language at times, for example, to give women a 'subjective feeling of belonging.'

Possible factors contributing to this slight “softening” of tone include shifting positions amongst other Spanish language Academies. While the different Academies of the Spanish Language largely stands together on all matters relating to grammar, the North American Academy of the Spanish Language (ANLAE) published in (2021) an exploration of various aspects of gender-inclusive language (Escaja & Prunes 2021).

These recent forays have in common one glaring absence: there is almost no attempt to engage seriously with the idea of a measurable gender bias, and consequently, with how gender-fair language can mitigate traditional male-biased stereotypes.

References

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Biographies:

David Heap is a teacher-researcher in French Studies and in Linguistics, at the University of Western Ontario. His research focuses on variable pronominal paradigms in non-standard Romance varieties, and more recently, on language and gender.

Yarubi Diaz Colmenares is a Venezuelan PhD Candidate in French Studies (Linguistics) at the University of Western Ontario. Her doctoral research is focused on the variation of inclusive language and its agreements in French and Spanish.