

Rosalba NODARI (University of Siena) & Sara GEMELLI (University of Bergamo, University of Pavia)

The Schwa-Pill: Backlash Against Italian Gender-Inclusive Language as a Gateway to Anti-Feminist Discourses

In recent years, online spaces linked to the so-called manosphere—groups where the “male question” is discussed, often framed as being under threat from the achievements of feminism—have proliferated. The manosphere’s claims, which contribute to sustaining existing power dynamics in society such as the unequal distribution of social, economic, and financial resources between the sexes (Ging, 2019), can be interpreted as part of a broader backlash against feminist movements (Faludi, 1991). Alongside these groups, a growing number of women-led pages associated with the so-called pink pill (Shearing, 2024) have gained visibility. While these activists do not explicitly align themselves with the manosphere, they tend to position themselves more generally as anti-sexist. Notably, several of them established their online presence and audience through videos expressing their views on Italian gender-inclusive language, a long-standing issue that has gained increasing attention and sparked widespread debate in both public and academic spheres over the past decade (Fiorentini & Oggionni, 2024). This work focuses precisely on these figures close to the manosphere, analysing their discourse on inclusive language (videos, comments, posts) in order to show how reactions to linguistic change have been strategically deployed as a “Trojan horse” to introduce audiences to broader anti-feminist narratives.

Bibliographical references

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Brief Biography

Rosalba Nodari is a tenure-track researcher and teaches Language Acquisition and Language Teaching at the University of Siena. Since 2018, she has worked first as a research fellow and then as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Siena, where she contributed to several projects. She has taught master’s-level courses at the Universities of Padua and L’Aquila. She is Principal Investigator of the *projects The Lives of Others: Chinese Communities in Tuscany between Educational Needs and Stereotypes (VI.A) and Documents of Educational Experiences on Ottava Rima (DOC.E.O.R.)*. Her main research interests include language, gender, and race, language attitudes, linguistic discrimination, sociophonetics, and the use of oral archives in linguistic research

Sara Gemelli is a PhD student in Linguistic Sciences at the universities of Bergamo and Pavia, in Italy. Her research investigates the representations of femicide in the Italian press and how such narratives are internalized by readers. She has collaborated with international research groups on media discourse and gender-based violence, including the computational linguistics team at the University of Groningen. She holds a Master’s in Linguistics with a thesis on misogyny in Italian incel forums. Her broader interests include discourse and gender, corpus linguistics, Critical Discourse Studies, and the application of frame semantics to social and political issues.