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Backlash and Discursive Struggle in French TikTok Discourse: debates in the comment section of #écritureinclusive

The écriture inclusive, or gender inclusive writing movement in France has engendered high levels of controversy and waves of media and political backlash since it began in the 1980s (Michaud, 2021; Coady, 2018a; 2018b; 2020; Abbou et al, 2018 etc). However, in recent years, social media has become a site of 'discursive struggle' (Bednarek et al, 2021) for the negotiation of cultural ideas, and thus powerful domain of influence in these debates. In 2021, 84% of 18–29-year-olds used at least one form of social media (PEW Research Center, 2021). For younger millennials and Generation Z, this is the space in which discourse is being disseminated and created (McCulloch, 2019; McGlashan, 2020; Rüdiger & Dayter, 2020). This study explores backlash towards the écriture inclusive movement through a corpus based concordance analysis of TikTok comments found under the hashtag, #écritureinclusive, particularly highlighting the comment sections surrounding several online formal debates mediated by the platform @le_crayon. These debates, held in 2022 and 2023 respectively, follow the inclusion of the *iel* non-binary pronoun in *Le Robert* online dictionary in November of 2021, thus capturing a new wave of backlash specifically catalysed by this step forward in the legitimisation of écriture inclusive. A linguistic examination of the microcosmic discursive struggle found in commenter discourse surrounding the @le_crayon debates, allows for a new description of the language and digital space taken up by social media backlash towards gender inclusive language.

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Researcher biography:

Lindsey Stevenson is a second-year PhD candidate in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney. Her research is situated at the intersection of Sociolinguistics, Corpus Linguistics, and Discourse Analysis. Lindsey's doctoral project examines the contentious *écriture inclusive* movement in France, focusing on its use in online and social media contexts, as well as its broader politico-cultural implications. Her wider research interests include language and gender, with previous work addressing public attitudes towards *écriture inclusive*, implicit gender bias in the Australian legal system, and the provision and effectiveness of interpreting services in judicial settings.