

From Enforcement to Resistance: Institutional Guidelines on Gender-Inclusive Language in Comparative Perspective

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Institutions have become central actors in debates on gender-inclusive language. By issuing guidelines, drafting statutes and producing advisory documents, they not only regulate usage but also reflect prevailing political and social conditions. Their interventions range from progressive enforcement to explicit resistance, while the uptake of innovations is further shaped by cultural traditions, institutional authority and public controversy.

This study is based on a multilingual corpus of more than 130 institutional guidelines, which we classify into functional and institutional types, including legislative, administrative, advisory and academic. Although the material spans several languages, the presentation focuses on five – English, Polish, Serbian, Italian and Spanish – chosen for their contrasting grammatical structures and policy traditions. The analysis considers prescribed forms, the rationales offered and the degree of institutional force attached to them, in order to identify where guidelines promote change, where they constrain it and where they are actively contested.

The findings demonstrate divergent patterns of enforcement and resistance. In English, for example, official guidance prioritises neutralisation through gender-neutral titles and the singular *they*, although editorial conservatism persists in formal registers. In Spanish, administrations have institutionalised feminatives, while the Real Academia Española resists non-binary markers. Italian shows growing recognition of feminine professional titles, though central uptake remains uneven. In Poland, language authorities maintain a cautious stance, resisting feminatives despite their wider circulation. Serbia presents a clear reversal: initial reforms were subsequently withdrawn, illustrating how ministries and academies can function as veto players.

The comparison underscores that institutional guidelines are not neutral tools. They operate at the intersection of law, regulation and linguistic standardisation, simultaneously enabling innovation and crystallising resistance.

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