

# Exploring Attitudes towards Gender Inclusive Language in Spanish by L2 Learners

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Gender inclusive language is understood as language that “acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities” (Linguistic Society of America, 2016). This research area has gained considerable attention in recent years, partly due to increasing movements that aim to fight sexism, inequalities, and discrimination (Bernardo-Hinesley & Arias Álvarez, 2024; Knisely, 2020; Michnowicz et al., 2023). Parallel to this growing area of research, speakers of different languages have introduced new gender inclusive forms with the goal of including speakers who might not identify with more traditional or prescriptive binary gender forms. This is the case for Spanish, which distinguishes between masculine and feminine nouns (Real Academia Española, 2016) but does not offer any means of expressing non-binary identity from a prescriptive point of view (Papadopoulos, 2022). In this regard, several descriptive studies have been published (e.g., Papadopoulos, 2022; Parra & Serafini, 2022), yet not many researchers have focused on systematically exploring the attitudes towards gender inclusive language in Spanish by employing empirical methods (e.g., Michnowicz et al., 2023; Rodríguez Iglesias, 2018).

Considering this gap in research, this study explores implicit attitudes towards the different inclusive language forms in Spanish (-@, -e, -x, and -o/a) when compared to the default use of masculine gender (-os), traditionally used to refer to groups that include both females and males. For this purpose, 268 L2 learners of Spanish at two higher education institutions in the US were recruited. As part of a larger research project, they were prompted to complete a written matched-guise test (Lambert et al., 1960) using a 6-point semantic differential scale (Osgood, 1964). This analysis considers the impact of three independent predictors on student attitudes: participants’ gender, sexuality, and political opinion.

Results from statistical analyses (factor analysis and multiple linear regressions) of the written matched-guise test provide evidence of significant interactions between the different morphemes used to express grammatical gender in Spanish and the three social predictors included in the analysis. Specifically, the use of -e is perceived as the most inclusive form among participants (particularly, by non-binary participants), while -o is considered the least inclusive form, in comparison to the other morphemes. The other forms were also considered inclusive, perceived as most to least inclusive in the following order: -o/a, -x, and -@. As such, results from the matched-guise test suggest that L2 learners of Spanish in the US are aware of the different inclusive forms in Spanish, and show acceptance of all five forms (prescriptive or not), albeit with significant differences regarding the influence of the three independent variables analyzed for this study.

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Table 1  
Participants' background information

Gender		Sexuality		Political opinion		Level of Spanish	
Female	188	Heterosexual	200	Left	176	Elemental	100
Male	70	LGBTQ	68	Center	54	Intermediate	69
Non-binary	10			Right	38	Advanced	54
						Culture & Linguistics	45
Total	268	Total	268	Total	268	Total	268