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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58215/ella.58>

Gender and diversity in the language disciplines

Over recent years, issues of gender and sexuality have received increased attention in the field of language studies, both in the context of research and education. This is due to changes in society at large as well as developments in different scientific fields, including second and foreign language didactics. Although research on gender and language subjects is not a new phenomenon, gender and sexuality remain contested issues, raising questions about how they can be addressed in a thoughtful and constructive way, and about what role they may play in language research and teaching. Both students, researchers and educators need more knowledge about how to make room for these issues in teaching and learning. This special issue of the journal *ELLA – Education, Literature, Language* seeks to contribute to this development by examining gender and sexuality perspectives on and in the language subjects and disciplines.

The special issue contains a wide range of topics within the field of gender, sexuality and diversity in language disciplines. The articles examine questions related to gender and sexuality in different geographical and educational contexts. The contributions also display a variety of language practices and language subjects in the discussions they bring to the issue. As such, they provide an entry-point to current discussions on these topics.

Within research on gender and diversity in the language disciplines, textbook analysis stands out in particular as a research strand that has considered gender issues for a long time, and specifically the representation of gender in the textbook genre (see e.g. Bruguellas & Cromer, 2009; Ranchon & Vadot, 2016). Research on language, gender, and sexuality also has a long tradition in linguistics (see Motschenbacher, 2012 for an overview).

Research in the sociology of education indicates that there are gender disparities in the language subjects in secondary and higher education when it comes to recruitment as well as learning outcomes: fewer boys than girls choose to study foreign languages and boys tend to have higher dropout rates in these subjects (Lomotey et al. 2023; Reisel, Skorge & Uvaag, 2019; Schimpke, 2012; 2023). Unequal access to the language subjects could be problematic, both for the students as well as for the quality of education and recruiting to these subjects, if student groups are skewed. Language disciplines in many countries are currently facing budgetary and student recruitment crises that may be exacerbated by the inequalities found in previous research. These inequalities may also affect the recruitment of teachers and teacher students as well as the quality of teaching and curricula development.

Questions of gender diversity, including trans and non-binary perspectives, are also timely. Previous research on diversity and educational practices has considered gender and LGBTQ+ topics in curricula (Røthing, 2021) and textbooks (for an overview, see Höhne & Heerdegen, 2018). Scholars have argued for increasing representation of LGBTQ+ communities and have challenged cis- and heteronormativity in the language subjects (Paíz, 2018; Ranchon & Vadot, 2016; Demirel, 2018; Ruiz-Cecilia, Guijarro-Ojeda & Marín-Macías, 2021; Canale & Furtado, 2021; Gomolka, 2021; Knisely & Paiz, 2021; Motschenbacher, 2021; Sunderland, 2021; Canale, 2022; Canale & Fasciolo, 2022).

The special issue is aimed at a wide public: teachers, teacher students, researchers, publishers, NGOs, practitioners, and policymakers. We hope it will provoke scholarly dialogue and encourage critical research on gender and sexuality in the language disciplines. Most of all, we hope it will help educators create inclusive and welcoming language classrooms for students of all genders and sexualities.

Presentation of the contributions

Ida Marie Wullum investigates aspects of motivation for choosing foreign language subjects in upper secondary schools in Norway. Based on a survey distributed in different schools covering the foreign language subjects of French, German and Spanish, Wullum finds that students in German are more instrumentally motivated, while Spanish and French have more affectively motivated students. The study also supports earlier findings that show that students assume that Spanish is easier to learn. While the study supports previous research showing that boys are outnumbered in the French classroom, Wullum also finds, in contrast to previous studies in the Norwegian context, that many of the boys studying French are affectively motivated.

Heiko Motschenbacher examines the degree of heteronormativity in the textbook series *Link* currently used in Norwegian schools in the teaching of English as a second language. Motschenbacher performs a critical discourse analysis of the textbooks from year 1 through year 7, and finds that the textbooks used by the youngest children show a polarized gender construction with representation of stereotypically binary people and the erasure of non-heterosexual people. However, even if the *Links* textbook aimed at pupils in year 7 still shows weaknesses in the representation of gender and sexual diversity, Motschenbacher finds that this textbook is more inclusive in its representation of gender and sexuality and its questioning of gender stereotypes. As Motschenbacher states in the article, creating new teaching materials is time consuming, and the author invites textbook publishers to provide teachers with learning materials that are as inclusive as possible.

Camilla Skalle, Liv Eide, Anje Müller Gjesdal and Valentina Maul's contribution analyzes the visual representation of gender in textbooks used in Norway for beginners in the foreign language subjects French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. The textbook, at its best, can function as both a mirror of oneself and a window to the worlds of others. Hence, the authors claim that the textbook should be representative of the gender diversity in the foreign language classroom as well as in the target culture. In contrast to previous research, their quantitative analysis shows that there is a relatively equal distribution between girls and

boys in the images used in the textbooks, but that the representation of non-binary identity is almost non-existent. However, as the contributors themselves note, their quantitative approach has limitations and should be supported by qualitative analysis in the future.

Nadav Benjamin discusses the teaching of inclusive language in the Spanish-as-a-foreign-language classroom and how one can remain faithful to the target language while introducing inclusive forms and without enforcing gender stereotypes. Nadav offers five considerations to teaching inclusive Spanish; however, these considerations do not apply only to the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language, but to the teaching of all foreign languages. As Nadav states, the considerations can serve as a guide for teachers who find themselves in a situation with the target language's grammatical patterns on the one hand and non-binary students' right to be named correctly when they ask which linguistic options they have. By reflecting on who the (Spanish) language's traditional forms include and discussing different proposed inclusive forms and who they include or exclude, language educators and students can bring forth a more inclusive language practice making visible minoritized groups through their language use.

David Heap and **Yarubi Díaz Colmenares'** contribution to this special issue is rich in reflection on ethical and respectful translation. The discussions and considerations presented in this article are based on work in the participatory research project *Surviving Historical Memory in Postwar El Salvador*, specifically cases of inclusive translations in Spanish, English, and French. The authors point out challenges they have encountered in the project while pursuing a gender-inclusive translation practice while honoring cultural and historical specificities. The contribution presents solutions to these issues, as they follow the guiding principles of equity, diversity and inclusion, in order to increase the visibility of women in their translations.

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