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Inclusionary language use = a “mortal danger” ?

A qualitative study of the discourse on inclusionary language use in France presented in the newspapers Le Monde and Le Figaro

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Abstract

An issue of inclusionary language use in France has been debated since the 1980's. Some French actors are in strong opposition to the language policy being changed, others are not. Actors such as linguists-lexicographers, members of the *Académie française*, writers and politicians have contributed to the media discussions that are in focus of my research. Applying theoretical perspectives on language in politics and language and gender, as well as relevant methodological tools from discourse analysis, the thesis search for a deeper understanding of the debate. Hence, the aim of this study is to examine the discourse of inclusionary language use through French media by looking at the two biggest national newspapers in France, which also have political inclinations, one is left-leaning and another one is right-leaning. What are the discursive patterns present in the debate? Are there any indications that the discourse represents political inclinations of the newspaper? With the help of psychological discourse method the analysis is made by finding three themes in the discourse. The findings showed that the discourse is based on the themes *protection and tradition*, *norms and power* and *inclusion vs exclusion*. There were some indications that the two newspapers have political inclinations yet it was not consequential enough to draw an exact conclusion on this.

Key words: inclusionary language use, french language policy, media discourse, discourse psychology, gender equality

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1. Introduction

Language is more than only a means of communication. Language contributes to who we are, how we perceive others and how we identify with culture. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the various voices and perspectives concerning the future of the French language in France. This heightened discourse is connected to the role that the French language plays in the nation's cultural identity. The significance of this phenomenon is validated by remarks that characterise France as a “*nation of grammarians*” where “*spelling has become a national sport with championships*”¹ These remarks reflect the integrated cultural respect for linguistic preciseness and the status of the French language within French society. Given this context, the debate includes not only the French public but also politicians, academics, and linguists, each contributing to the vibrant debate on inclusionary language use. Therefore, it is appropriate to conduct a study focusing on the discourse surrounding inclusive language use within the framework of French language policy. This research will highlight the various perspectives and arguments that shape this highly debated subject.

Since 2017 in France, this debate has intensified in the media more and more. For that reason, this thesis examines the discourse in French newspapers, specifically focusing on the two largest national newspapers known for their political inclinations. The discussion on inclusive language primarily centres around the feminisation of job titles and the controversy surrounding a French gender-neutral pronoun. French media up until 2017 had been fairly silent on the matter of inclusionary language. The only news story found after a comprehensive search is one about an intersex individual who had won the right to identify as a third gender on government documents, and who used the pronoun “‘iel’, a combination between ‘he’(il) and ‘she’(elle) in French” to express gender identity.² The article treated the case as an isolated incident, with no discussion about communities using neutral language or the political heat surrounding it. Currently, the French media is far from silent on this issue, with various articles and interviews

¹ Marie Loison-Leruste, Gwenaëlle Perrier, Camille Noûs. “« Introduction. Le langage inclusif est politique : une spécificité française ? »”, *Cahiers du Genre*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2020

² Hord, Levi C. R. "Bucking the Linguistic Binary: Gender Neutral Language in English, Swedish, French, and German," *Western Papers in Linguistics / Cahiers linguistiques de Western*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 4, 2016

addressing it. This great media coverage justifies the selection of this data and highlights its relevance to this thesis.

1.1 Aim & research questions

This thesis's main aim is to analyse the language and contexts of the contemporary debate on the inclusionary use of language in French media by using discourse analysis. This will be done by the example of the two biggest newspapers in France; *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*. I look into the ongoing public discussions among different social actors - linguists, politicians, members of the *Académie française*. I am interested in what is being said and how it is expressed linguistically as well as in what social contexts this is mentioned. The focus of this study is not on the perspectives of the journalists themselves, but rather on the voices of the various actors they feature and the themes that emerge from their discussions. This approach aims to analyse whose viewpoints are lifted and what thematic content is mentioned in the discourse. I choose these two newspapers because they give a platform for this kind of public discussion. Moreover, they have a certain political inclination and therefore they are well suited for the study. One of the newspapers is left-leaning and the other is right-leaning, this is further explained in the presentation of the data. This study has a complimentary comparative aspect of looking at similarities and differences connected to different political inclinations of the newspapers.

The main research questions are:

- *In the discourse about inclusionary language in two major French newspapers, in what ways do they differ/collide? Is the discourse based on their political inclinations?*
- *What are the discursive patterns being lifted in each newspaper? How does this relate to a bigger context such as a political, historical and societal context?*

1.2 Research limitations

My empirical data is in French and, although I have an advanced knowledge of the French language, there is still a possibility that nuances can get lost in translation. The quotes in the chapter presenting my analysis are translated from French into English. To ensure the quality of my work, I conducted a thorough verification process. I used professional translation tools and referenced bilingual dictionaries to maintain the quality of the original meaning. Moreover, describing the structure of a Romance language in an Anglo-Saxon language presents inherent challenges as there are significant differences in each language. However, it is important to note that this study does not aim to conduct a linguistic analysis. Instead, the focus is on the discourse itself.

1.3 Disposition

The thesis begins with a chapter reviewing previous research to familiarise the reader with the subject of existing studies relevant for the analysis. The subsequent chapter supplies an overview of the history of French language policy, followed by a subchapter explaining contemporary inclusionary language policy. Chapter 4 presents the theoretical background, organised into three sections: Language Policy (4.1), Normative Language Policy (4.1.1), and Language and Gender Equality (4.2). In chapter 5, the data is presented in the following order: *Le Monde* (5.1.1) and *Le Figaro* (5.1.2). Thereafter, the method is presented firstly by broadly discussing discourse analysis(5.2.1) to then introducing discourse psychology(5.2.2). This leads us to the results of the analysed data in which a division of three subcategories is presented: Protection and tradition(6.1), Norms and Power(6.2) and Inclusion vs Exclusion(6.3). Under each theme are the results of the data presented as firstly *Le Monde* and secondly *Le Figaro*. Lastly chapter 7, a discussion is presented on the results in connection to the background and the theories. Further subcategories in this section are conclusion(7.1) and suggestion for further research(7.2).

2. Previous research

This paper takes partial inspiration from a French dossier made by Marie Loison-Leruste, Gwenaëlle Perrier and Camille Noûs where various countries such as Brazil, Germany, Great Britain, Quebec, Sweden and lastly France are examined surrounding the mobilisation of the use of inclusionary language.³ In this they mention that during the year 2017 a strong debate started within French media. The French newspaper *Le Figaro*, in an article, overtly criticised the use of *écriture inclusive* (inclusionary writing) in a textbook for primary school students of ages 8-9. This caused an uproar amongst teachers, more specifically 314 teachers organised a petition which stated that they “*will no longer teach that the masculine prevails over the feminine*”. As a consequence the authors noticed that various actors such as writers, journalists, teachers, academics, activists, institutional actors and politicians started to get further involved in the topic. Eventually the discussion reached everywhere in France, to the point where this debate was a high priority for both media and the political sphere. In the early 1980’s in France there were certain tensions arising around the debate of the feminisation of the language and further on in the end of the 1990’s.⁴ On one side, an argument against feminisation of the language was that it was not enough for the feminist cause to just change the French language, in regard to gender equality. On another side, the *Académie française* had much in that of the position in regards to this political debate which was that “*faced with this ‘inclusive’ nonsense, the French language is now in mortal danger, something for which our nation is now accountable to the future generations*”⁵

Loison-Leruste, Perrier and Noûs argue that in comparison with the other countries previously mentioned, the debate has reached an intensity in France not seen in the other countries. This is due to the fact that this political controversy has been described as an “*argued, polarised confrontation spread across several spheres of social life and focusing on an issue of public action*”.⁶ In relation to this they present two linguistic ideologies that have formed because of France’s history which has interfered with the welcoming of inclusionary language. The first concept is one called ‘standard language’, seen as more superior and more logical hence the need

³ Loison-Leruste, Perrier, Noûs 2020, p. 7

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid p. XVII

for its protection. An ideology which is authoritatively controlled by a linguistic jurisdiction in a top-down idea of language spread enforced on speakers. The *Académie française* and the conservative press are given as examples to illustrate the support of this ideology.⁷ The second ideology presented is one discussing language as the ‘cement of the nation’. A consequential aspect of nation building in 19th century France arrived in using language as a tool. In France, language was the political ambition to spread its grandeur.⁸ The history of the French language and its policy development will follow in the next chapter. Loison-Leruste, Perrier and Noûs conclude that these ideologies are visible today in the reactions of various actors, both political and non-political, to the demands of inclusionary language.

3. Background

The following chapter begins with a presentation of a historical background to language policy in France that started in the 16th century. What follows is a subchapter presenting the current inclusionary language policy and what has happened in recent years in the social and political sphere.

3.1 Language policy history in France

France’s enthusiasm for its language development and linguistic policy can be traced back to the 16th century. It has been said that the first step for France in the “progressive linguistic unification” of the nation's language has its mark in the beginning of the 16th century. More precisely the year 1539 in Villers Cotterêts, a highly important date. This start is because of François I, who in his power decided that all judgements and royal proclamations will be only in French and not in the earlier vernacular language. This was a first mark of a political power that took a decision of which language should be spoken before any other. This was the first time in French history where it is heard about exclusion in regards to language and politics.⁹

Language policy in France was a key instrument for the formation of the modern nation state and for the evolution of the French language and who had authority. According to Pierre

⁷ Ibid, P. XVIII

⁸ Ibid, p. XIX

⁹ Pierre Achard, Susan Bullock, and Michael Ignatieff. “History and the Politics of Language in France: A Review Essay.” *History Workshop*, no. 10 (1980): p. 175

Achard, the turn of French being used as the language of justice was simply not because it would be used in court, but solely for the interest of the high society in order to control the “judicial machine”. With the gain of control of something of high value, the control is also centralised to one part of the country. With linguistic centralisation followed political, legal, economic and cultural centralisation.¹⁰ At this time, French was mainly used in administrative centralisation by both elites and by the state apparatus. The local dialects were still used by priests and universities along the country. In this period of time, this “linguistic problem” of who was to speak French and not a local dialect was viewed as a political problem.

This continues into the formation of what today is the standing backbone to the french language development; *L’Académie Française*, also known as *Les Immortels*(The immortals)¹¹. L’académie français has one of the highest prestiges of the French literary world and in France. Its origin lies in the desire for an order within literary works that was inaugurated in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu, the French first minister, and this institution is still highly valuable today in France.¹²

A very well known date in French history is 1789, the French Revolution. The people had enough and soon enough the bourgeoisie sought to democratise the use of language from the court nobility such as the use of *vous*(formal version of “you”), of surnames and of *Mr, Mrs* and *Miss*. There were more developments that formed as the Revolution got its shape. Under Napoleon's regime, French entered into colleges and secondary schools which were educational institutions for the bourgeoisie and the military which included admissions tests.¹³ The continuation of the universalisation of the French language went in full speed which can be noticed in a quote from Barrère’s discourse in front of the Committee of Public Sateu in 1792; ‘*The French language is destined to become the universal language since it is the language of the people.*’

The next important step is a set of laws laid down by Jules Ferry, a lawyer and minister of Public institutions of the 1880’s. These laws signified that national education was to be free for both boys and girls, which in 1882 turned to be mandatory education. The most important aspect of

¹⁰Achard, Bullock, & Ignatieff 1980, p. 176

¹¹Poulard, *Wolfestone In*, 15/7 2917 <https://blog.wolfestone.co.uk/academie-francaise-defenders-of-the-french-language>> accessed 15 may

¹²Achard, Bullock, & Ignatieff 1980, p. 176

¹³Achard, Bullock, & Ignatieff 1980, p. 177

schools, according to Ferry, was the fact that they would inform on political doctrine emphasising on independent thought through virtues of nationalism.¹⁴

Through schools, the National French was further imposed as the ‘real’ language of France, very much dismissing other minority languages that had formed throughout time. These languages, Breton, Occitan, Corsican and other regional languages were even being treated as ‘not French’.¹⁵ Through the educational system, ‘correct’ French grammar was taught, which was at the core of the curriculum. This shows how vital the school institutions were for the further unification and for further establishing French as the national language.

With the phenomenon of the globalisation of the English language during the 20th century, France realised they had to aim higher with their language intentions such as with the *Francophonie*. One of the reactions to this phenomenon was Charles de Gaulle's official organ *Haut Comité pour la défense et l'expansion de la langue française*. This organ was initiated in 1962 in order to protect French from the anglicism growing inside the french language and instead promote an attitude that will value the unique frenchness of the language.¹⁶ It laid the grounds for the modern French language policy that was to come and the continued ambition of the French language.¹⁷

Another important date is closer to us in time and in alignment with the concept of ‘protection’ of the French language policy development. This date is July 1994 where Law 94-668 (loi Toubon) was passed by the National Assembly. The intention was to catalogue words originating from modern English that had entered the French language and to adapt them into French equivalents. The French government disapproved of the anglicisms infiltrating the French language and consequently decided to eliminate them.¹⁸ This was not meant to represent *francisation* but rather to represent *déanglicisation*¹⁹

¹⁴State, Sacramento, *Jules Ferry laws establishing free, secular, compulsory education in France: 1880s* <https://www.csus.edu/indiv/c/craftg/hist127/jules%20ferry%20laws%20establishing%20free.pdf> > accessed 15 may

¹⁵Achard, Bullock, & Ignatieff 1980, p. 179

¹⁶ Machill, 1997, p. 491

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epdf/10.1177/0267323197012004003https://trinitycollegelawreview.org/fr-ench-language-law-the-attempted-ruination-of-frances-linguistic-diversity/> > accessed 15 may

¹⁷Ibid p. 491

¹⁸Ibid p.491

¹⁹Idid p.491

3.2.1 Inclusionary language policy

In this study it is important to understand the high ambition of the French language from the French government (the French President, the members of the parliament, the Senate and the National Assembly). This includes how they would like to see the language changed, or not changed as well as which influences can have an impact on its moving corpus. Not all influences are welcomed, as evidenced by the legislation passed in 1994 aimed at curbing the influence of Anglicisms.

In terms of inclusionary language use in the French language, some aspects in the debate are supported, some are not. What is supported is some feminisations of, for example, professional jobs such as actor/actress from masculine; *acteur* to the feminine; *actrice*. Where the debate causes further discussion is surrounding the non-binary pronoun: *iel*. Since 2017, there have been various law proposals in regards to the banning of inclusionary language use from the members of the parliament in the French government forming various other actors to turn into the discourse of this subject²⁰ The latest form of law proposal was a bill made in 2022 from the Senate to the National Assembly where they want to see a change made to the use of the French language. These changes include banning the use of gender-inclusive language in various areas such as administrative documents, publications, school textbooks, paper and digital communications distributed in France emanating from a legal entity governed by public law. Further changes that want to be made in trade unions, media outlets, political parties must be written in the French language as codified by the Académie française.²¹ As is very noticeable, these are quite big changes to be made to any language structure.

Following this chapter is there a theoretical background to further understand language policy, normative language policy and language and gender and its meanings in social and political contexts.

²⁰ In 2017 the French Prime minister, Edouard Philippe, encouraged other members of the government to not use inclusionary language during their work and that the masculine form is the neutral one.

²¹ Sauvegarder la langue française et à réaffirmer la place fondamentale de l'Académie française N° 321 2022 (Assemblée Nationale) Art. 5

4. Theoretical background

In the following chapter relevant theoretical perspectives are presented in discussing language, politics and gender equality in different societal and political contexts. Subsection 4.1 *Language policy* provides a brief theoretical background on language policy. This is followed by another subsection that shortly discusses normative language policy. Subchapter 4.2 *Language and gender equality* gives an insight on how language and gender correlates.

4.1 Language policy

Language policy can be easily described as; *“At the most basic level, the purpose of language policy, like health or education policy, can be understood as the attempt to realise particular outcomes in response to challenges considered important by the political system.”*²² It can also be described as; *a public policy aimed at addressing a social, economic, political or organisational issue related to the management of linguistic diversity in a given territory.*²³

These examples are given to illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon of language policy. It is not always understandable what language policy hopes to achieve since the process is quite complicated and while the bodies deciding on language policy can help a majority, it can also have an effect on a minority. Further explained by Lo Bianco ;

*This is of course a crucial fact about the character of language problems, which requires LPP theory and policymaking, and its analysis, to be distinguished from less wicked policy problems. In democratic states the ideological preferences of social groups involve struggle about which problems, or rather ‘whose’ problems, will be allocated resources and become the focus of policy attention [...] (Lo Bianco Reference Lo Bianco, Hult and Johnson2015: 71–2)*²⁴

²²Leigh Oakes & Yael Peled. “Normative Language Policy in a Complex World.” Chapter 6. In *Normative Language Policy: Ethics, Politics, Principles*,. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) p.137

²³Michele Gazzola, Language Policy as Public Policy. IN: *Epistemological and Theoretical Foundations in Language Policy and Planning*, (Springer International Publishing AG, Cham, 2023), p. 42

²⁴ Leigh Oakes & Yael Peled. 2017, p. 139.

To briefly frame the historical development of the field of study in language policy one can see three major developments. Firstly in the 1960' and 1970's where "practical solutions" was the main interest. Secondly, in the 1980's the development of a critical approach. Thirdly, human rights linguistics as a postmodern framework came into fruition in the 1990's. It is possible to add a fourth developmental phase that is quite recently developed and the one we find ourselves in right now. According to the authors Leigh Oakes and Yael Peled, this last phase is referring to the latest linguistic justice debate that found its footing in the 2000's. This debate exists in the sphere of modern normative analytical political philosophy. The fourth phase has not been highly studied seeing how recent its development is.

4.1.1 Normative language policy

According to the authors Leigh Oakes and Yael Peled, normative language policy is good for conducting empirical research on politics and language and its connection to moral debates. One example of a moral debate is justified linguistics in educational matters. 'Normative' in this sense is not a linguistically neutral term. It refers to coercive policy-making by powerful actors such as those who contain some sort of authority on language i.e governments, intellectuals, monarchs etc. This also means that power plays a big role in modern language planning processes and that language policy can clash with moral matters such as equality, autonomy, dignity and liberty.²⁵ This goes to show how language, politics and societal structures are inherently combined and embedded into each other and need to be studied in conjunction with one another. This is further defined by Lia Litosseliti who explains that language can not be viewed as a closed system. Rather that it is subjected to change and is dynamic. Although this is not an easy process as; "*these selections are embedded in(...) broader/institutional and socio-cultural context*"²⁶. Language, therefore, has to be seen in a broader socio-political context through various perspectives ;

²⁵ Leigh Oakes & Yael Peled. 2017, p. 8.

²⁶ Lia Litosseliti, *GENDER AND LANGUAGE: THEORY AND PRACTICE*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2013) p. 10

It then becomes obvious that in order to understand the role that language plays in establishing and maintaining any social relations, including gender relations, we have to look outside of language itself, at the wider social processes in which language plays a part (Graddol and Swann, 1989).²⁷

For this reason, language can be interpreted as a politically non-neutral phenomenon. This moves us further into how language plays an important role in gender which will be presented in the following subchapter.

4.2 Language and gender

Gender and language constitute a vast and complex theoretical field encompassing numerous analytical approaches. Consequently, it is considered more of an umbrella term and “*refers to cross-disciplinary discussions of both the ways in which language is used by men and women, and the ways in which language is used to say things about men and women*”. There are past theorizations of gender linguistics such as ‘deficit’ theory, ‘difference’ theory and ‘dominance’ theory. These theories focus on how women and men differ in language speech whereas in the recent aspects of theorizations within gender linguistics the focus lies on how women and men are constructed through language. These more recent approaches are far more complex as they developed in the 1980’s and 1990’s in reaction to and influenced by the post-structuralism and discourse that “*sees language as social practice*”.²⁸ The reason these theories are more complex today lies in the fact that approaches take several different aspects into accounts within language. These things that are taken into account are how language, identity and social context interact with each other and how they are inherently interconnected and need to be analysed together. According to Sally McConnell-Ginet, a feminist scholar in the field of gender linguistics, gender has been perceived in two contrasting ways: as a mechanism that reinforces male dominance and as a resource for women to resist oppression.²⁹ In order to better analyse the fact that gender and language are inherently correlated we need to analyse them in a bigger social practice and can not abstract them from the bigger societal picture. A fact that needs to be mention is the one that

²⁷ Lia Litosseliti, 2013, p.10.

²⁸ Lia Litosseliti, 2013, p. 2.

²⁹ Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Gender, sexuality, and meaning : linguistic practice and politics*, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 93

gender is inherently complex and which has to be taken into consideration within this theoretical school;

An acknowledgement that gender is complex also involves looking at the ways in which gender interacts with other identity categories such as ethnicity, age, class, race, education, and sexual orientation. In addition, gender is produced through people's participation in *communities of practice* where groups of people engage in a mutual endeavour, such as a classroom or a workplace (see Part II). Current theories are interested in the ways in which gender identities are formed and reproduced, through participation in multiple communities of practice (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992).

Within this complexity, it is essential to recognize the intrinsic connection between language and gender equality. To comprehend how they are interconnected, it is vital to analyse them within a broader social and political context. In terms of language structure can one notice the value that nouns portray and which one is most represented in a gender hierarchy is furthermore represented in the societal structures ;

*"(...)underlying such syntactic conventions may be a gender hierarchy which defines the masculine as the 'most worthy gender'. As a result, masculine nouns are highly visible in grammatical gender languages and carry considerably more weight and emphasis on feminine nouns"*³⁰

In certain languages, such as English, the primary focus of gender-related linguistic debates is on pronouns—specifically, the use of "him" (masculine), "her" (feminine), or "they" (neutral/non-binary). However, in other languages, such as French, gender linguistics encompasses broader implications due to the more intricate structural aspects of the language. These complexities pertain to gender, making it more challenging to comprehend, delineate, or modify linguistic conventions.

5. Method and data

In this chapter is a presentation on the empirical data and how it has been chosen to be used presented in Data (5.1). Following that in Le Monde (5.1.1) and Le Figaro (5.1.2) is the

³⁰ Sara Mills, *Language and Sexism*, (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). P. 31.

background to each newspaper presented as it is important for the analysis to understand the chosen data.

For the methodological framework is discourse analysis in the perspective of discourse psychology presented as the chosen method. Firstly a presentation of discourse analysis and its relevance to media research is presented to give an understanding of the method in this study. Secondly, discourse psychology and its application to my analysis is presented and discussed. Since the interest lies in what is said in the French media and public debate regarding the inclusionary language use in France, discourse analysis is well suited for this.

5.1. Data

The empirical data are the two biggest newspapers in France. The focus of the analysis is not on a single article per se but on the discursive patterns found through various articles and interviews. The texts have been thoroughly read multiple times in order to capture the most relevant concepts and themes for the sake of the analysis and in regards to the research questions. In choosing media as the main data we have to understand and be vigilant about using media as it can be very subjective and influential so an objective perspective is necessary. As a reminder, the data is limited to 14 articles.

5.1.1 Le Monde

One of France's leading newspapers with daily visits of 100.000.000 – 150.000.000 viewers is *Le Monde*, this is a reason for why this newspaper has been chosen as a primary data.³¹ The French newspaper *Le Monde* (The World) has its origin in the 1940's when the then president Charles de Gaulle himself encouraged the launch of the newspaper ; *De Gaulle's idea was to encourage the founding of a "serious" newspaper, along the lines of prestigious, internationally respected titles such as the Times of England or the New York Times.*³² This led to the creation of *Le Monde* in 1944. As time went forward so did the interest of the public in this paper and with the support

³¹ '——' (*eurotopics.net*) <<https://www.eurotopics.net/en/148683/le-monde>> accessed 15 May 2024

³² 'Le Monde S.A. (*Le Monde S.A. - company profile, information, business description, history, background information on Le Monde S.A.*) <<https://www.referenceforbusiness.com/history2/10/Le-Monde-S-A.html>> accessed 15 May 2024

from its government all it did was to rise in popularity. In the 1980's it was seen as a “mouthpiece for the Socialist government” showing its political interest. Today it is one of the most widely-read papers in France and has an open centre-left political stance.³³ *Le Monde* themselves argue of being defenders of “*humanist and progressive values*” while simultaneously not agreeing of being linked to any political party and strive to keep public debate alive in the use of public opinion pieces.³⁴

This is the empirical data because of its significance for French public debate. The chosen texts include articles, interviews, debate and opinion pieces to capture variety in the discourse. Various actors that present arguments and discourse are raised for the study. These actors will be discussed using their names and professions. In collecting data, the amount started out with 15 articles but in order to limit the data the final amount is 7 articles.

5.1.2 Le Figaro

Much like *Le Monde* *Le Figaro* is another leading newspaper in France.

The French newspaper *Le Figaro* appeared for the first time in 1826, its interest at the time was in the satirical and spiritual areas. It had an agenda of defining the “French spirit” and was openly against the French monarchy at the time.³⁵ The newspaper has a unique history of going through numerous changes, far too many to include in this chapter, as it has existed for nearly 200 years. The most recent and relevant change it went through was the change to modernity and the media market, making it a grand media outlet in France ; “*Le Figaro would become the leader on the French digital media market*” with more than 24 million unique visitors.”³⁶ *Le Figaro* is an openly politically right leaning news journal in France.³⁷

³³(*French Magazines & Newspapers - French & Reading: A Student's Guide to Francophone Literature & Language Learning - Research Guides at Library of Congress*) <<https://guides.loc.gov/french-literature-and-language-learning/magazines-and-newspapers>>

³⁴*Le Monde, a Generalist and Independent Media* <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/about-us/article/2022/03/28/le-monde-a-generalist-and-independent-media_5979192_115.html>

³⁵ *Le Figaro (Groupe Dassault - Le Figaro)* <<https://dassault.digifactory.fr/subsidiaries/le-figaro>>

³⁶Ibid

³⁷ *Le Figaro (eurotopics.net)* <<https://www.eurotopics.net/en/148679/le-figaro#>>

This is a primary data because of its significance for French public debate that is under the spectre in this study. The chosen data in this journal is, as presented in the previous subchapter, a mix between articles, interviews and opinion articles in order to find variety in the discourse.

5.2 Method

5.2.1 Discourse analysis

Discourse in and of itself can be tricky to define, as the meaning of the concept is quite broad and can be used in many ways. There is not in fact only one approach to discourse analysis, rather it contains a plethora of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches which are perfectly suited for various studies within humanities and social sciences. That being said, we can roughly define a discourse as “*a distinct way to speak of and understand the world(or a section of the world)*”³⁸

Since the recent development of discourse analysis and further in the 1990's it became a favoured approach in the use of Media and Communication studies. This is supported by the fact that with the use of discourse analysis in the Media we are able to turn to language on a wider perspective within humanities and social sciences.³⁹

As Fairclough has argued from a critical and feminist linguistic perspective, the use of media as a form of mass communication is a good reason for the analysis of discourse. Fairclough gives three good reasons why the analysis of language in media is worthy. One reason is that the media has “*signifying power*” where they contain the power of respecting things such as knowledge, beliefs, values, social relations and social identities. Second reason according to Fairclough is that the discourse produced in the media serves a system of power relations. Thirdly he concludes that discourse in media creates “*subject positions*” for the perfect reader.⁴⁰

According to Winther Jørgensen and Phillips the three sub-categories of discourse analysis have a commonality. The fact that the way we speak plays an active role in the shaping and changing of our identities, the world around us and our social relations. This is why no

³⁸Marianne Winther Jørgensen & Louise Phillips, *Diskursanalys som Teori och Metod*, (Lund : Studentlitteratur, 2000) pp. 7

³⁹Michale Kackman & Mary Celeste Kearney, *The craft of criticism : critical media studies in practice*, (New York : Routledge, 2018)

⁴⁰ Litosseliti, 2013, p. 92

matter which perspective of the method one chooses, is it still suitable for studies surrounding culture, society and communication such as a specific social context or more broad societal development trends or tendencies.⁴¹

What is mainly interesting within the analysis is interpreting power relations and the perception that language plays a vital role in shaping reality. Texts and other human expressions are considered crucial to how people perceive the world.⁴² This is also the case for discourse psychology which is presented in the following subchapter.

5.2.2 Discourse psychology

Within the methodological field of discourse analysis, discourse psychology does not focus on the analysis of the “big discourses” in regards to societal changes. Rather its focus lies in analysis of how the pre existing discourses humans strategically use in order to create themselves and the world in certain ways in social interactions and with it, the social consequences that arrive.

One should not be confused by the term psychology in this context. It does not mean that the analysis includes any internal psychological relations. Rather this approach is characterised by a social psychological form. This gives way to produce a research consisting of analysing the relations between on one hand individuals and groups significance meanings and actions and on the other hand broader societal structures and processes.⁴³ Just like Weatherell and Potter further develops on non-language practices in relation to language practices, the analysis ;

*must also focus on institutional practices, on discriminatory action and on social structures and social divisions. But the study of these things is intertwined with the study of discourse. Our emphasis will be on(...) how forms of discourse institute, solidify, change, create and reproduce social formations.*⁴⁴

⁴¹ Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, pp. 8.

⁴² Peter Esaiasson, Mikael Gilljam, Henrik Oscarsson, Lena Wängnerud, *Metodpraktikan-konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*, 3rd edition. (Stockholm : Norstedts juridik, 2007) pp, P. 239

⁴³ Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, pp. 14

⁴⁴ Kristina Boréus & Göran Bergström, *Textens Mening och Makt : metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, 4th edition, (Lund : Studentlitteratur, 2018) pp. 267.

In discursive psychology, the point in the analysis is to find discursive objects or themes in order to then find the relation to a broad context in where it can be placed, the same goes for social structures ;

“(...)one of the aims of discourse analysis is to identify patterns in a corpus of data in order to be able to say something meaningful about it. The key concept here is the interpretative repertoire which is a unit of analysis that allows researchers to go beyond individual or discrete expressions to begin to identify themes, consistencies and patterns across and between texts and to connect these to wider contexts and social formations.”⁴⁵

As with any given method in any type of research are there aspects one has to be vigilant about when conducting one’s research. This, according to Rosalind Gill, (a great follower of discourse psychology) is important as one has to interrogate “*your own assumptions and the ways in which you habitually make sense of things.*”. This inevitably involves a “*spirit of skepticism*” as she puts it. She goes further to say that one should constantly be in a self-aware and questioning state when doing the analysis. In particular when conducting one on media as it can easily turn our perspective elsewhere, further expressed by Gill ;

In my opinion, discourse analysis should carry a health warning, because doing it fundamentally changes the ways you experience language and social relations – much as studying media and communications more broadly can radically shift our perspective and experience of everyday experiences and media.⁴⁶

To conclude this chapter, will the main focus be on identifying patterns in the discourse and highlighting themes as one has to do when looking across a corpus of data, no matter if it is in regards to interviews, or in this case, newspapers and articles.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Rosalind Gill, ‘Discourse Analysis in Media and Communications Research’ in Michael Mackman and Mary Celeste Kearney(eds), *The Craft of Criticism: Critical Media Studies in Practice* (New York : Routledge, 2018)

⁴⁶Ibid

⁴⁷Ibid

6. Results

The analysed data will hereafter be presented in *Chapter 6*. In result of discourse analysis the following themes are defined: *Protection and tradition (6.1)*, *Norms and Power (6.2)* and lastly *Inclusion vs Exclusion (6.3)*. Every theme is presented in a related subchapter and analysed separately for two newspapers - Le Monde and Le Figaro. The division of themes has been made as accurately to the discourse as possible yet the themes might seem similar to each other as the discourse is quite narrow.

6.1 Protection and tradition

6.1.1 Le Monde

In the analysis of Le Monde, a recurrent theme that was found was *protection and tradition*. Below various ideas on the topic of inclusionary language from the perspective of tradition expressed by different actors are presented. The result in this theme is that there is a clear view that the authors distance themselves from the argument of inclusionary language while having a critical perspective on tradition.

In an interview with a respected French linguist and lexicographer, Alain Rey has given his thoughts on the argument for why inclusionary language is seen as a difficult phenomenon. It is difficult in the context of history but he does not give any personal inclination of supportiveness or not and holds a certain distance to this argument; *“Language is a page of history that's a bit frozen, often recounted by geriatric old men! The problem is that it's very **difficult to get rid of old reflexes**.”*⁴⁸⁴⁹ A professor of renaissance literature and editor of the book *L'Académie contre la langue française*, Eliane Viennot, argues that ; *“**Until the 17th century, the names of trades and dignities practised by women were in the feminine**. In those days, we used to say*

⁴⁸ Here and further on, all markings in bold text are my doing in order to amplify specific words from sentences I want to put more emphasis on and raise in discussion.

⁴⁹ Anne Chemin, “Alain Rey : « Faire changer une langue, c’est un sacré travail ! »”, *Le Monde*, 23/11 2017 https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/11/23/alain-rey-faire-changer-une-langue-c-est-un-sacre-travail_5218905_3232.html > accessed 15 may

"carpenter"(Charpentière), "provost"(Prévôte) or "harvester"(Moissonneuse)."⁵⁰ This is argued in support of inclusionary language and it is understood that another form of tradition is being shown. A tradition from a female perspective that does not conform to the perspective of men and the men's language as something to use as a starting point. This is interpreted in reference to history and the fact that trades many hundred years ago were in fact valued in the feminine gender, and not the, otherwise, predominant masculine gender. Although she argues for the usage of inclusionary language in the names of professions, she also argues against changes in the literature;

*"Don't be fooled, we don't want to impose anything on literature! We're talking about the social sciences, official texts, school texts and journalistic texts, which seek accuracy. To avoid cacophony, we need to establish conventions, which are currently being drawn up, and we are still in the experimentation phase..."*⁵¹

In further mention to tradition, the remake here is that literature will not take any damage on this as actors such as members of the Academie française have warned about to argue against inclusionary language. This change is meant to impact texts that are of relevance for society and that reflect accuracy, not texts in literature. Another reference to tradition can be found in the sentence by Richard Herlin, proofreader at Le Monde, on the changes made to the rules of French language ; *"people's attachment to them, as if they were an **immemorial treasure**, when in fact **they are not**".*⁵² This is argued in support of inclusionary language and that changes made to the French language have to be accepted. This is raised against the *Académie française* which values the language so highly to the point that it should not be disrupted and ruined. This shows another form of protection and how 'people' are highly attached to tradition and see changes made to language as something of high value that risks being lost, instead of seeing language as fluid and unfixed. Further points are being made by Alain Rey who state that the French language habits are today still "**imbued**" with "**anti-feminist ideology**" that has existed in literature since the Middle Ages. Perhaps it is simply too difficult for language to make those changes as he continues in stating that ; "**Resetting creativity into a system as restrictive and standardised as language is complicated: you come up against the deep structure of**

⁵⁰ Cécile Bouanchaud, "Cinq idées reçues sur l'écriture inclusive", *Le Monde*, 23/11 2017 https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2017/11/23/cinq-idees-recues-sur-l-ecriture-inclusive_5219224_4355770.htm >accessed 15 may

⁵¹Bouanchaud, *Le Monde*, 23/11 2017

⁵²Bouanchaud, *Le Monde*, 23/11 2017

French. ⁵³ The strong structure that the French language has because of history and tradition is therefore highly difficult to change.

In a political sphere the current French President Emmanuel Macron expressed his thoughts on inclusionary language use ; *"In this language, **the masculine makes the neuter**. There's no need to add dots in the middle of words or hyphens"*, he continued with an invitation to *"**not to give in to the fads of the times**"*.⁵⁴ This was presented in correlation with a context where the french senate had in order to present a law, proposing a ban on inclusionary language.

6.1.2 Le Figaro

In *Le Figaro* the theme of *protection and tradition* is presented differently than in *Le Monde*. Here, other actors were found that gave their opinions on the matter in a much more opposing sense of inclusionary language while using tradition as a way of argument against it. There are clear indications of conservative views towards inclusionary language.

Bernard Cerquiglini, lexicographer at Larousse, critiques the change to the language in terms of inclusionary use as a part of a new ideology which does not make sense, by stating ;

*'It's all part of a militant approach. **Iel' does not come from a deficiency**. It's about a pronoun, about the language system. **Pronouns haven't changed since the fourth century**. What's more, French is based on two genders. As a result, it is counter-intuitive. **The masculine plays the role of generic, that's just the way it is. It's the way it's worked since Vulgar Latin.**'*⁵⁵

Once again is history being referred to yet in a sense that critiques the situation of changing the language by supporting it with the tradition of history. The discourse is far more aggressive in terms of inclusionary language and is strongly opposed to it. The theme of *protection* around the French language is further imposed through the discourse of "*Anglicism*" that has earlier been mentioned in the thesis. The fact that English is seen as a threat is evident by stating that the non-binary pronoun in french "iel" is not originally French. Rather, it comes from the English

⁵³Bouanchaud, *Le Monde*, 23/11 2017

⁵⁴ Lyssia Gings, "Ecriture inclusive : le Sénat veut l'interdire pour « protéger la langue française »", *Le Monde*, 31/10 2023 https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2023/10/31/ecriture-inclusive-le-senat-veut-l-interdire-pour-protoger-la-langue-francaise_6197508_823448.html

⁵⁵Alice Develey, Maguelonne de Gestas, Marie-liévine Michalik, "L'idéologie woke à l'assaut du dictionnaire Le Robert", *Le Figaro* 12/11 2021 <https://www.lefigaro.fr/langue-francaise/l-ideologie-woke-a-l-assaut-du-dictionnaire-le-robert-20211115>

language and therefore needs protection from its influence. According to Cerquiglini; *The final problem is that this 'iel' is not French. It's Anglicism. 'The mistake some feminists make is to follow English, which has a neuter. In French, however, we don't have one.'*⁵⁶ This discourse was never mentioned in Le Monde and here it is a far more conservative view on inclusionary language.

In *Le Figaro* Alain Rey is also an actor whose voice is raised that also has a theme surrounding *Protection and Tradition* where he presents quite a neutral stance in the changes that inclusionary language makes by yet again referring to historical facts ;

*This language represents thousands of years of collective experiences where there are many things written into it, notably the absence of neutral in French that the masculine has tried to replace. Although it is not made by adding dots or feminine endings to the language that will "fix" this.*⁵⁷

He does not give any further reason on how one should change the language to be inclusionary yet he states that the way it has been changed so far is not correct. He continues with mentioning the overreaction to the whole debate on inclusionary language use. The discourse that follows shows his clear opposition to the fact that a small minority should have such a grand impact on something that has taken several millennia to complete. It seems paradoxical that he gives such a big argument against the change in language while also stating the fact that he does not stand against it.

*We're not going to wreck 1,000 years of history in the name of a few years of ideological reflection by a usage imposed by a tiny minority! It won't work. But I'm not saying I'm against it*⁵⁸

6.2 Norms and power

6.2.1 Le Monde

In the analysis of Le Monde, another recurrent theme that was found was *norms and power*.

Below are various ideas on the topic of inclusionary language from the perspective of norms and

⁵⁶ Develey, de Gestas, Michalik, Le Figaro, 12/11 2021.

⁵⁷ Alice Develey, "Alain Rey : «L'écriture inclusive est vouée à l'échec»" *Le Figaro*, 23/11 2017
<https://www.lefigaro.fr/langue-francaise/actu-des-mots/2017/11/23/37002-20171123ARTFIG00015-alain-rey-l-ecriture-inclusive-est-vouee-a-l-echec.php>

⁵⁸ Develey, *Le Figaro* 23/11 2017

power expressed discursively by different actors. The result in this theme is that different actors hold different views. The discourse is varied and complex with indications that the actors distance themselves from the argument while presenting reasons that both support and do not support inclusionary language.

What has been discovered is that words can be associated with power such as fear where the linguist Alain Rey compares the current language debate as *warlike* and explains how fear can in turn make the french public afraid of simples changes ;

“The warlike nature of the language debate is normal, but it is particularly acute in France, where linguistic unity did not come about by itself: it is the result of a political will that, over the centuries, has always led to violent battles. Today, French is more or less unified, but the fear of linguistic diversity is still very much alive in people's minds(...)”⁵⁹

In describing the nature of the debate surrounding changes to the structure of the French language, it is evident that this political discourse is inherently related to issues of power. This discussion is framed to illuminate the underlying reasons for resistance to inclusive language. Rey does not express personal opinions but rather provides an explanation for the hostility some individuals feel towards inclusionary language. In regards to the theme of power, discourse around history, the masculine gender and superiority is found in a comment from Elaine Viennot;

“The rule of proximity agreement, whereby the last word prevailed and not the masculine, was common. It was eventually challenged and then abolished by the Académie(français) in the name of masculine superiority, as decreed in 1651 by the grammarian Scipion Dupleix, "conseiller du Roy": "Because the masculine gender is the noblest, it prevails alone against two or more feminine genders.”⁶⁰

Here is masculine superiority mentioned to understand how the French language has a history of power structure from the *Académie français* to show that the institution has had a certain bias, and perhaps still does today but this was never mentioned.

Actors from the *Académie français* have also had their voices raised and the whole establishment has issued a warning against inclusionary language stating it includes “confusion and illegibility”

⁵⁹Gingins, *Le Monde*, 31/10 2023

⁶⁰ Bouanchaud, *Le Monde*, 23/11 2017

where the spelling and grammatical changes would **“put the language in mortal danger.”**⁶¹ As an institution can one interpret them as quite hesitant to inclusionary language or even hostile in their discourse. A member of the *Académie française*, Dominique Bona, expresses concern in regards to the structure of the French language should it continue to be changed by saying; **“...won't we fall into an obsessive hunt for the feminine? Will we weaken the French language by complicating it?”**⁶² This discourse shows a very negative stance to inclusionary language change meaning that this will only do damage to the french language. Another discourse raised by this actor is regarding the feminisation of professions ; **“The higher you go in the hierarchy of professions, the more you reach jobs traditionally done by men, and the more sensitive the subject becomes.”**⁶³ In this context is the discourse about the societal structures that exist and the reason for complications that can arise with inclusionary language stated. The mentioning of hierarchy is a clear indication that power exists amongst jobs between men and women. Seeing how the subject gets more sensitive as the discourse reaches “higher”, or more powerful jobs in other words, shows the domain of power and also norms in this context. Another member of the *Académie française* Danièle Sallenave argues that: **‘the masculine is not neutral, it has been chosen as the dominant gender’**.⁶⁴ This can be related to who chooses which jobs should be changed to inclusionary language and who has the most power in this context, power in deciding which domains in society women can be accepted into.

The institution, *Académie française*, further states that they **“in no way intend to break with the tradition of feminising the names of professions and functions, which stems from usage itself”**, but it categorically rejects the **‘spirit of the system’**. Even so, it admits to having **‘in a way liberated usage, by allowing different forms to compete without seeking to authoritatively prescribe any of them, until the best one wins out’**.⁶⁵ This discourse can be interpreted as feminsation of profession means that it rejects the “spirit of the system” and goes against the ‘norms’ of the system. Further interesting is how they give the encouragement that one or the other must ‘win’, further indicating that one gender or another has more power.

⁶¹ Raphaëlle Rérolle, “Ecriture inclusive : malaise à l’Académie française”, *Le Monde*, 13/12 2017 https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2017/12/13/ecriture-inclusive-malaise-a-l-academie-francaise_5228736_3232.html>accessed 15 may

⁶² Rérolle, *Le Monde*, 13/12 2017

⁶³ Rérolle, *Le Monde*, 13/12 2017

⁶⁴ Rérolle, *Le Monde*, 13/12 2017

⁶⁵ Rérolle, *Le Monde*, 13/12 2017

6.2.2 Le Figaro

The discourse of norms and power is quite different in Le Figaro to the discourse in Le Monde. When searching for the theme *norms and power* in Le Figaro, it was far more challenging to find data to analyse which is interesting as maybe it has something to do with their political inclination. The results that were found indicate clear contrast to Le Monde. In this theme the only author mentioned in Le Figaro has an opposing stance to inclusionary language. Frederic Vitoux, a member of the *Académie française* had an interesting perspective on who should or should not control a language by referring to a proposal from 2017 by French Prime minister Edouard Philippe. This proposal was to encourage other ministers to not use inclusionary language in the workfield.

*“The French language is the common property of all French speakers. **It belongs to no one, because it belongs to everyone. Apart from a totalitarian regime, no government has the power to say that we should speak in a particular way. So I'm wary of any government that takes an authoritarian view of a language that doesn't belong to it. But there can be recommendations!***

And that's what Edouard Philippe is proposing.”⁶⁶

This discourse presents a very generalised argument in concluding that not one sole institutional body should change the language, like a government but indirectly he also implies his support in the fact that the Prime minister had proposed this. Another form of mention to *norms and power* is found in further discussion surrounding this proposal from the Prime minister. The French prime minister states himself that it is not up to the french government to authoritatively give orders to change how to speak or write yet Vitoux states that ; *“Edouard Philippe is within his rights to preserve a common good that he feels does not belong to him. It is therefore a recommendation against those who rightly and authoritatively want to change the language. It reminds us that we do not have to follow the injunctions of a minority of people.”⁶⁷* The clear indication that a minority is not a body that should decide what to change in the language is seen in his statement here.

A third statement found in relation to *norms and power* is from Vitoux saying that the feminist battle is wrongly focused on inclusive writing. According to this actor, should the feminist battle be prioritised in other areas in society ; *“The real feminist battle that needs to be waged today is not about inclusive writing. That's moving into the wrong territory, a battle that has priorities in so many other areas, such as sexual harassment, equality between men and women in different religions, etc. Feminists are fighting the*

⁶⁶ Develey, *Le Figaro*, 22/11 2017

⁶⁷ Develey, *Le Figaro*, 22/11 2017

wrong battle. Attacking the French language and holding it hostage to ill-timed battles is regrettable.”⁶⁸ This can be interpreted in two ways: as a genuine concern for other societal issues or as a strategic use of discourse to shape public perception, suggesting that the issue of inclusionary language is less significant than other social challenges. When someone dismisses inclusionary language as not being a “real feminist battle”, it can be understood as a failure to recognize and value individuals whose identities deviate from the norm. This can similarly be connected to the tension around the feminisation of the language that came in the 1980’s in France, as stated earlier, where it was not seen as doing enough for gender equality.

6.3 Inclusion vs exclusion

6.3.1 Le Monde

In the analysis of the discourse articulated in Le Monde, another recurrent theme that was found was the dichotomy *inclusion vs exclusion*. Below are various ideas on the topic of inclusionary language from the perspective of inclusion vs exclusion expressed by different actors. The discourse is varied with indications that some actors perceive that social change and language are interconnected where women’s invisibility is seen as a problem in the current state of the language. Other actors see inclusionary language as excluding other members of society which is why feminisation of the language is not something to pursue.

As Alain Rey points out in regards to this theme; *“The signifying system that is language must be in tune with the system to which it refers. If social reality changes, the system of representation that is language has to change”*⁶⁹. While he does not state whether it is in support or not, he does state that if society changes then the language system needs to change as well. If the society moves in a certain way, the language has to reflect this and change accordingly. Inherently meaning that society and language have an integrated connection to each other.

⁶⁸Alice Develey, Frédéric Vitoux : «C'est faire acte de sagesse que de renoncer à l'écriture inclusive», *Le Figaro*, 22/11 2017 <https://www.lefigaro.fr/langue-francaise/actu-des-mots/2017/11/22/37002-20171122ARTFIG00006-frederic-vitoux-c-est-faire-ac-te-de-sagesse-que-de-renoncer-a-l-ecriture-inclusive.php> >accessed 15 may

⁶⁹ Bouanchaud, *Le Monde*, 23/11 2017

A teacher-researcher and Chair of the Commission for Combating Stereotypes at the High Council for Equality between Women and Men, Françoise Vouillot, also reassure readers: *"It's probably worth remembering that this is simply an advice aimed at trying to **erase the relative invisibility of women in the French language**".*⁷⁰ This is a discourse in relation to a guide-book named *Practical Guide for inclusionary public communication* that was made from this organisation.⁷¹ This shows the discourse of exclusion women have in French society in terms of how the language is constructed. That the work of inclusionary language is important because there is a lack of women's visibility in the language structure as it exists today.

Frederic Vitoux discusses the feminisation of the language and the exclusion that it brings in regard to other people than women and men by including transgender people and people suffering of blindness as well ; *Not to mention, that this script will **leave out transgender people and that it is impossible to transcribe into Braille**...*⁷² In this sense is the discourse of the inclusion of women in the feminisation of job titles simultaneously excluding other members of society. In this discourse is he giving reason as to why the feminisation of professions is not perfect for the french language. Danièle Sallenave, a member of the *Académie française*, states that with no change in the language there will not be any change in societal structures that are seen today. The discourse she presents is very much in support of women's inclusion in society yet it is not entirely sure how she regards inclusionary language as one can not easily interpret what is understood with 'unnatural changes ;

Without change, women will remain invisible'. However, this movement must be made on a case-by-case basis, ***without going through 'unnatural changes'***. 'You don't handle language like an object that you take apart and put back together again'. Between fatalism and conviction, ***a majority of academics believe that feminisation will pass the test anyway***.⁷³

Alain Finkielkraut, member of the *Académie française* has an interesting discourse surrounding inclusionary language and specifically the feminisation of professions. According to him, women are already liberated thanks to french language and he is concluding that inclusionary language is an unnecessary addition to what french language is today ;

⁷⁰ Bouanchaud, *Le Monde*, 23/11 2017

⁷¹ https://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/hcefn_guide_pratique_com_sans_stereo_vf_2015_11_05.pdf

⁷² Rérolle, *Le Monde*, 13/12 2017

⁷³ Rérolle, *Le Monde*, 13/12 2017

*What matters is that there are women in these positions. It was in this language that they became emancipated. And now, once the conquests have been made, new artificial battles are invented, proof that the victory has been achieved.*⁷⁴

This discourse goes against what other actors from the academie françias have stated earlier, which is that women need more visibility in the French language in order to access higher professions so this is controversial to what others have said. He clearly has an idea that it is thanks to the French language that women have been ‘freed’ and that now people are ‘inventing’ new ‘forced’ issues.

Another mention on the feminisation of professions is found by Mathilde Ollivier, an ecologist senator representing nationals living outside France. According to her, is there a clear difference whether feminisation matters or not ; *“Yet we know that **women are more inclined to apply for jobs when the advertisement is written in inclusive writing.**”*⁷⁵ In this discourse do we understand the fact that using inclusive writing can have a grand positive effect on the societal structure and on gender equality. Another similar discourse is found from the socialist senator Yan Chantrel who comments on the amounts of proposals against inclusionary language from the French government that were made and their effect ; *“This is the ninth bill about this since 2018. It may seem insignificant, but it's not. **It's an attack by the conservative camp on the feminization of names, and by the same token, on gender equality.**”*⁷⁶ This discourse is directly saying that there is a societal issue, that gender equality is connected to the feminisation of jobs. This issue has a side, and it is the conservative side that does not want to see the feminisation of jobs.

Recently appointed Minister for Education, Jean-Michel Blanquer, for his part, claims that there is only **"one French language, one grammar, one Republic"**.⁷⁷ This was given as a response to a textbook for the educational system on inclusionary language. This discourse is very vague. He is not stating clearly whether inclusionary language is included in this or not, nor is it clear whether it is in support of inclusionary language or not. Thus, making it very unsure who would be included or excluded in this unity of ‘language, grammar and Republic’.

⁷⁴ Rérolle, *Le Monde*, 13/12 2017

⁷⁵ Zineb, Dryef, “De l’écriture inclusive à la transidentité, « iel » dans « Le Monde »”, *Le Monde*, 26/11 2021 https://www.lemonde.fr/m-le-mag/article/2021/11/26/de-l-ecriture-inclusive-a-la-transidentite-iel-dans-le-monde_6103681_4500055.html >accessed 15 may

⁷⁶ Gings, *Le Monde*, 31/10 2023

⁷⁷ Clara Cini, “L’écriture inclusive ou la longue quête d’une langue égalitaire”, *Le Monde*, 05/11 2021 https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2021/11/05/l-ecriture-inclusive-ou-la-longue-quete-d-une-langue-egalitaire_6101010_3232.html >accessed 15 may

6.3.2 Le Figaro

The theme *Inclusion vs exclusion* is also an evident theme captured in *Le Figaro* and there are various comments made from different perspectives. The discourse starts with some actors giving the reasons for why inclusionary language is not useful for some members of society. From other actors there are quite a lot of positive mentions of inclusionary language and that it would include girls and women more in society. There is not a clear political inclination as the discourse is not leaning towards only one side, rather various perspectives in this theme are shown.

Jean Pruvost, linguist and author of *La story de la langue française*, gives reason as to why even the non-binary pronoun in french has a sense of inequality; ***'The pronoun "iel" is useless and discourteous. It's an absurdity. Under the guise of equality, the masculine is always placed before the feminine: in "iel", "il" is placed before "elle".'*** ***This is also the case with inclusive writing, when we write 'instituteur.ice' or 'auteur.ice'***⁷⁸ In this discourse he means that even in inclusionary language usage the changes are made in an unequal manner.

The president Vincent Michel for *Fédération des Aveugles et Amblyopes de France*⁷⁹ states that equal rights and opportunities does not have a correlation with the language construction ;

*"If there is one battle that the Fédération des Aveugles et Amblyopes de France cares about, it is the battle for equal rights and opportunities but to make the question of language construction a subject that would have to do with any kind of sexual discrimination is to demonstrate an incredible lack of culture and fearful confusion"*⁸⁰

He furthermore states the fact that inclusive writing in Braille would never work and would exclude a whole other side of peoples ; (...) ***using inclusive writing would be madness. It's simply impossible to apply.***⁸¹ This discourse is seen in *Le Monde*, that inclusionary language is not useful when turned into Braille, once again mentioning the exclusion of other members of

⁷⁸ Develey, *Le Figaro* 12/11 2021

⁷⁹ This is an organisation in support of blind people in France

⁸⁰AFP agence, "L'écriture inclusive, «une langue incompréhensible» pour les non-voyants", *Le Figaro*, 21/11 2017 <https://www.lefigaro.fr/langue-francaise/actu-des-mots/2017/11/21/37002-20171121ARTFIG00088-l-ecriture-inclusive-une-langue-incomprehensible-pour-les-non-voyants.php>

⁸¹Develey, *Le Figaro*, 22/11 2017

society. Frédéric Vitoux, a member of the académie française says inclusionary writing is a **“faux problème”**, calling it a “false problem” ; **“At a time when we are witnessing a complete loss of meaning in language, imposing a new complexity on writing was madness.”**⁸² This discourse on inclusionary language is in a clear stance of opposition.

A completely different perspective is given according to Danièle Linhart, a labour sociologist at the CNRS in regard to the feminisation of professions ; **“In any case, it's a major step forward. It reflects a new awareness and a change in society. It will enable some women to appear for what they are, no longer having to cobble together a job name or hide behind a male identity”**⁸³ This discourse is clearly in a supportive position on inclusionary language in stating that language and gender equality are inherently incorporated into each other. He further gives a positive discourse on the topic. **“It can strengthen their legitimacy at work and it reinforces in people's minds the idea that the world of work is a world for men and for women.”**⁸⁴ At the same time does he state that it is quite a symbolic phenomenon yet of importance nonetheless.

In the discourse to exclusion and if the French language is sexist, Danielle Sallenave states ; **“That's too simplistic a view of the language. It's clear that for centuries, women had no place in the public sphere and the language reflected that. It was masculine because until 1910, students were boys. When morals and laws change, language has to change too.”**⁸⁵ Perhaps she is not stating directly if she is in support of inclusionary language or not yet here is a clear indication that inevitably language has to change. In the discourse on if it is up to language to help society evolve Danielle Sallenave states:

“In a way, yes. When I go to a secondary school and meet young girls who are in their ninth year and wondering what profession they're going to choose, the fact that the names of professions and jobs are in the feminine will encourage them to say “Why not me? Whereas if they're all in the masculine, they'll think: “It's not for me”. Girls already say “it's not for us” so often...

⁸²Develey, *Le Figaro*, 22/11 2017

⁸³ Léa Lucas, “La féminisation du nom des métiers va être officiellement acceptée”, *Le Figaro*, 20/02 2019
<https://www.lefigaro.fr/decideurs/emploi/2019/02/20/33009-20190220ARTFIG00232-la-feminisation-du-nom-des-metiers-va-etre-officiellement-acceptee.php>

⁸⁴ Léa Lucas, *Le Figaro*, 20/02 2019
<https://www.lefigaro.fr/decideurs/emploi/2019/02/20/33009-20190220ARTFIG00232-la-feminisation-du-nom-des-metiers-va-etre-officiellement-acceptee.php>

⁸⁵Alice Develey, Clair Conruyt, “Danièle Sallenave: «Les femmes doivent être visibles dans la langue française»”, *Le Figaro*, 08/03 2019

*Especially when they come from modest backgrounds. Feminisation can change society in the direction of equality.*⁸⁶

A clear discourse that is advocating for inclusionary language highlights its possibility to positively impact societal structures. The current exclusions that are present in the French language can be addressed through linguistic reforms, promoting better equality. By making the language more inclusive, it is possible to effect a direct and positive change in societal equality.

7. Discussion

To return to the research questions: *In the discourse about inclusionary language in two major French newspapers, in what ways do they differ/collide? Is the discourse based on their political inclinations? What are the discursive patterns being lifted in each newspaper? How does this relate to a bigger context such as a political, historical and societal context?*

Hereafter the chapter presents a discussion of the results in connection to aspects from previous research, the theoretical background and the chapter on methodology. The results present varied and complex discourses on inclusionary language. The results show differences in the discourse, in some finding there are indications of political inclinations. Le Figaro shows a discourse which is more conservative and traditional and Le Monde presents a discourse that is more progressive than Le figaro. Yet it is not possible to make a clear generalisation based on the results. The discourse shifts depending on the actor and the contexts so it is not possible to underscore any distinct political inclinations.

As seen in previous research the authors argued for two different linguistic ideologies that formed because of French history; ‘standard language’ and language as the ‘cement of the nation’. These two linguistic ideologies are visible in the result of this discourse analysis. Firstly the notion of ‘standard language’ is reflected in the discourse of the *Aadémie françias* who see the language as superior and logical, where inclusionary language includes, as they expressed, ‘confusion and illegibility’. Even though there are members from the *Académie françias*

⁸⁶ Alice Develey, Clair Conruyt, *Le Figaro*, 08/03 2019

presented in the result who support inclusionary language, the whole establishment is clearly in opposition to it. When a prestigious institution such as the *Académie française* has existed for 400 years and during these four centuries, 10 women in total have been included, is it the language or the institution where one needs to start the change for inclusion? As there was a mention in the discourse that no authority has the right to decide on how the language structure should be, the fact that the *Académie française* is greatly influential is tangible, this means they have a certain power in this debate. As mentioned in the context of normative language policy, which refers to coercive policy making by influential actors, one can discern a connection between the Académie Française and its significant influence over the structure of the French language. Additionally, the ideologically grounded conceptualisation of language as the “cement of the nation” remains prominent in the discourse, serving as a key reason against rapid changes to the language. This perspective is comprehensible given the historical background of French language policy, which illustrates the strong and intricate nature of the language's structure and its deciders over time. From the result I could see a discourse of a ‘hierarchy of professions’ which can be interpreted as a hierarchy in society. The fact that the subject gets more sensitive around feminising those professions that have always been ‘traditionally done by men’ shows a truth that women and men have different equalities in society and its structures. This is why some argue for the fact that language has to change as language policy and gender equality are inherently connected. This can be connected back to what Sara Mills said about gender hierarchy and societal structures. There exists a societal perspective that serves greater significance to the masculine over the feminine. Historically, French language policy has been predominantly shaped by men, resulting in a linguistic framework that favours certain groups while marginalising others. This aligns with the notion that power significantly influences modern language planning processes and that language policy can conflict with moral considerations such as equality, autonomy, dignity, and liberty.⁸⁷

This dynamic is particularly relevant in the current discourse on the feminisation of the French language and the use of inclusionary language. The historical dominance of masculine forms in the French language proves the steady impact of historical power structures on contemporary linguistic practices. In the 17th century women were excluded from professions and with that the respective feminine version because of a belief that men were more superior. This can be interpreted as a question of gender and power. This indicates that normative language policy has

⁸⁷Lia Litosseliti, 2013, p.10.

been, for a long time, accurately following the language policy history in France. The discourse presented in *Le Monde* illustrates the inherent connection between language and social reality, suggesting that linguistic changes can influence societal perspectives. This implies that language inherently includes or excludes individuals based on who have authoritative control over linguistic norms. This perspective is further supported by theoretical frameworks on language and gender equality, which confirms the role of language in shaping and reflecting social hierarchies and power dynamics.

Perhaps the question is not only about gender equality or who is ‘allowed’ to fit into a society based on norms and be visible or not. It is furthermore a question of distinctive generations, one being more traditional and closed and another seeing change as necessary. The point is that the generation with a more traditional perspective are the ones that have a grand influence on the language, such as the *Académie française*. Having said that, when any new phenomenon enters a well established societal structure, inevitably, there is often controversy that follows. Even in the most egalitarian language communities such as in Sweden there was controversy when the non-binary pronoun “Hen” entered the language as was mentioned by Loison-Leruste, Perrier and Noûs.⁸⁸ A question that materialises for me is, does change to a language equal destroying something that has long been built or could that change equal evolution and growth? Supposedly one can argue that the answer lies in the eye of the beholder and can not be explained in a simple sentence, it takes continuous discussions and collective cooperation. Considering that the feminisation of the language has been an ongoing discussion since the 1980’s proves that this is not a simple and quick debate. This is a reason as to why, still today, there are various perspectives into how inclusionary language is a difficult phenomenon for the French language. Much like Loison-Leruste, Perrier, and Noûs argue in their dossier, a key political issue that may have been overlooked in the debate is also evident in the discourse. That change in gender norms in modern democracies around the world is taking place right now. One can argue that a modern western democracy, like France, can not move in a direction which is suitable only for their own convictions, rather they have to follow along with the contemporary international change. As they claim in the dossier, the international debate is not even being raised in France nor in French politics, which is reflected in the results as well. The fact that the discourse only mentions any international influence in relation to being a threat, appears as animosity towards any outside

⁸⁸Loison, Perrier, Noûs. 2020, p. VI

influence.⁸⁹ Yet as C. R Hord mentioned in his paper, the languages that are gendered grammatically, such as French, have less “linguistic room” than “natural gendered languages” such as English.⁹⁰ This being the case, who should be the decider of which route the language change should take? Given that this phenomenon affects both individuals and society as a whole, the question arises: should the responsibility lie with governmental bodies, linguists and experts, or official authorities on the French language such as the *Académie française*? The discourses has proved highly complicated, and only time will tell which direction the structure of the French language will take and who will ultimately decide this.

7.1 Conclusion

In sum, the results show that the discourse presented in the two French newspapers presents various similarities but more differences. There are indications of political inclinations, yet a definitive conclusion on this is challenging. *Le Monde* demonstrates more support for inclusionary language than *Le Figaro*. This discourse is not definitive but gives a reflection of broader political, historical, and societal contexts. The debate over inclusionary language in France is part of a larger conversation about how societies balance tradition and modernity, how they address historical inequalities, and how they navigate the tensions between preserving cultural identity and embracing progressive change. This dynamic interaction between language, politics, and society proves the complex nature of cultural evolution in contemporary France. This thesis does not aim to solve this complexity but to illuminate the interesting debate around inclusionary language. It highlights the perspectives of different actors in relation to historical, political, and social contexts. Though the findings are intriguing, the research is too narrow to generalise about the discursive patterns on inclusionary language use related to language policy and gender equality in the two newspapers. To achieve more conclusive results, future research could involve quantitative data collection through, for example, qualitative interviews. A recognized flaw in this thesis is the limited data collection method. Media analysis may lack the depth that is needed for detailed insights, making it harder to draw precise conclusions. A broader and longer study would better represent the discourse and investigate the social dilemma further. Despite these

⁸⁹Ibid

⁹⁰Hord, Levi C. R. 2016

limitations, this thesis wishfully contributes valuable insights into the complex and evolving discourse on inclusionary language in France. It highlights the importance of a continued collective debate and research in understanding how language reflects and shapes societal values. This thesis hopefully opens ways for future studies and discussions, encouraging a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between language, politics, and society.

7.2 Suggestion for further research

To further expand this research, future studies could examine the current state of French inclusionary language use in Canada and identify differences compared to the French system. This would involve analysing how Canada has structured its language policy regarding inclusionary language. Additionally, further investigation into the discourse among French politicians, particularly how different political parties present arguments for and against inclusionary language use, would provide valuable insights.

Another direction for research is to compare language politics in other countries with gendered languages, such as Spain or Italy, to identify similarities and differences in the discourse surrounding inclusionary language. This comparative analysis would enhance our understanding of how various linguistic and cultural contexts influence the approval and resistance of inclusionary language policies.

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