

Journalism and sociolinguistic change  
The use of non-sexist language in Argentinian news media

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**Abstract**

Linguistic sexism and the use of non-standard alternatives to it have been attentively studied by critical feminist linguists across different languages, countries, and institutions. Among the latter, media institutions have been considered to play an influential role in people's use of language during processes of sociolinguistic change. In the current Argentinian context, particularly, news media have considerably discussed and used non-standard alternatives to the sexist features of Spanish language in the past year. Despite the non-standard uses of Spanish language that journalists make, prior studies on news language have often overlooked journalists' views of their linguistic practices and explained these by giving privileged attention to the influence of pressures from news organizations and audiences' expectations. This study moved beyond previous analysis of news texts and style guides to understand the factors influencing journalists' linguistic practices by combining the analysis of news articles with an ethnographic approach to conducting interviews with their authors and fieldwork.

The results of this study challenge ideas of journalists as, per default, preservers of standard language and reveal how interviewees alternately employ three types of linguistic varieties when mentioning human referents. Moreover, they actively engage in their linguistic practices through self-conscious considerations, individual beliefs and group discussions. This research also questions the ideas of mediacentric perspectives which have focused on official socialization practices, journalistic values and audiences' requirements as factors influencing journalists' linguistic practices. Instead, it indicates that news practitioners' linguistic practices regarding the use of non-sexist language are influenced by several other factors as well. Among these, journalists' intentions and their views of what non-standard language is useful for partly determine the predominant use of one variety or another. Furthermore, the relations that news practitioners establish among them and with other groups motivate certain linguistic choices and journalists' questioning of their own language practices. Journalists, as social actors, engage in conversations with activists and in unofficial socialization dynamics which influence their linguistic practices. By observing the interplay of factors influencing journalists' deliberate linguistic practices, this study supports the perception of news practitioners as active agents who engage in their linguistic practices with meaningful reasons for using different linguistic varieties. Moreover, it encourages the

further study of journalists' linguistic practices in relation to non-sexist language across broader scopes of journalists in terms of the type of topics they write about, the type of newspaper at which they work, and their broader socioeconomic context.

**KEYWORDS:** Journalism, news media, sociolinguistic change, non-sexist language

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## Introduction

In June 2018, a social context marked by demands for women's rights and claims against gender violence, two videos became viral in Argentina. One portrayed a female high school student being interviewed and embarrassed by a male journalist who got outraged by the unconventional way in which his interviewee was speaking (Nicolini, 2018). The second video presented a young girl explaining to her mother how *gender-inclusive language* works and how angry her school teachers became from hearing that kind of speech ("Niña defiende", 2018). While in the first video it is said "Hay pocas diputades que están indecises..." (Spanish for "there are few congresspersons who are undecided", replacing the conventional masculine morpheme *o* for an *e*) (Nicolini, 2018), in the second video the girl states "hay algunos y algunas y algunes que no se sienten ni hombres ni mujeres" meaning "there are some who feel neither men nor women" and ending *some* with the masculine morpheme *o*, the feminine *a*, and the unconventional *e* ("Niña defiende", 2018). Both of them were using a variety of what is known as *gender-inclusive language*, a tendency which initiated decades ago within political groups, feminist and LGBT+<sup>1</sup> movements, which not only aims at reducing the sexist features of Spanish language but also at including non-binary gender identities by modifying Spanish grammatical system through the introduction of "syntactic and morphological variations" (Banegas & López, 2019, para. 5; López, 2018; Marchand, 2018).

Many discussions about linguistic androcentrism in Spanish concern the gender marks of pronouns, nouns and adjectives referring to animated and human referents (Acosta Matos, 2016). Some have to do with the generalized use of masculine forms when referring to professions traditionally associated to men, as in *el fiscal* for *the prosecutor* (Aliaga & Burgos, 2002). Other discussions pertain to the mandatory use of the masculine morpheme *o* as generic when referring to linguistic units of unspecified gender, as in *alguien está*

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<sup>1</sup> The different forms of acronyms used to refer to sexual and gender diversities (e.g.: LGBT, LGBTQA, LGBTQIA+) have been subject of criticism by activists and scholars for grouping meanings related to unequal realities, obscuring the specificity of struggles faced by people from different identities (Spencer & Patterson, 2017) and for marking an order of priority between letters which are not alphabetically ordered. Without ignoring the importance of these discussions and considering that the acronym is constantly evolving, the symbol "LGBT+" will be used in this study as an abbreviation to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender communities and all other possible gender identities which are not included in the initials, without this implying a hierarchical order between the concepts referred to.

*despierto* for *someone is awake*, and when referring to groups of referents of mixed genders, even if masculine members are fewer than female, as in *los romanos* for *the Romans* (Suardiaz, 2002).

Advocates for gender-inclusive language criticize grammar rules which impose the predominance of generic masculine forms as examples of how language “marginalizes women”<sup>†2</sup> (Suardiaz, 2002, p. 157) and avoids the visibility of people with non-binary gender identities (Acosta Matos, 2016). Following that argument, alternatives have been proposed and used in Argentina, Chile, Perú, Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries, predominantly but not only, in the discourse of feminist and LGBT+ activists, such as the symbols @, \*, x and e instead of the masculine morpheme o (*amig@s*, *amig\*s*, *amigxs*, *amigues* instead of *amigos*, for *friends*) (Acosta Matos, 2016).

Less disruptive and more widely accepted forms which also bypass the issue of androcentrism in language have also been frequently used. Among these, the most widely known are: using collective nouns which are indefinite in gender (*la ciudadanía* instead of *los ciudadanos*, for *the citizenship* instead of *the citizens*) and explicitly indicating the masculine and feminine gender either separated by a slash (*ciudadanos/as* instead of *ciudadanos*, for *citizens*) or by duplicating words which is known in Spanish as *desdoblamiento* (*ciudadanos y ciudadanas* instead of only *ciudadanos*, for *citizens*). The last two alternatives, however, have been criticized by those who see in their use a maintenance of binary language and, therefore, an exclusion of other gender categories that are not identified with either masculine or feminine (Fernández Casete, 2018).

It is worth noting that discussions about sexist features in Spanish have not only addressed grammar rules. Other debates about the impact of a patriarchal system in language have focused on the lexical dimension. It has been argued, for example, that the expression *crímenes pasionales* (crimes of passion) to refer to the homicide of a woman expresses a different connotation to the one that the term should communicate to reflect reality. It has been said that the term conveys the idea of a crime caused by the private characteristics of a passionate relationship, performed by someone who is not dangerous, giving an emotional and "Shakespearean"<sup>†</sup> (Sabaté, 2016, p.3) charge to the concept. In opposition to these

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<sup>2</sup> A dagger accompanying a citation indicates that it was originally written in Spanish and was translated by the author.

connotations, and in order to show the cultural and structural reasons that lead to these crimes, the term *femicidio* (femicide) has been proposed and widely used to refer to the murder of human beings just because they are women (Sabaté, 2016).

In debates and proposals to avoid sexism in Spanish language, those described at the beginning as belonging to the grammatical dimension, are currently the subject of most discussions, debates and judgments in favor and against. Although alternative forms to the generic masculine are increasingly used, rejections to non-standard varieties are not few and argue that gender-inclusive language is a “catastrophe”† (Mareco, 2019) threatening conventional language. The alternatives that have been proposed to avoid the use of generic masculine have been negatively criticized for failing to comply with the principle of economy in language, making reading and orality difficult or, in some cases (such as the use of @ and *x* between consonants) making orality impossible (Álvarez de Miranda, 2018).

In general, oppositional arguments are based on the prescriptive statements of the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE)<sup>3</sup>, which “controls the lexicographic discourse about Spanish language and periodically provides the official version of Spanish lexis”† (Aliaga & Burgos, 2002, p. 67). Most of the varieties mentioned above, except for the use of indefinite collective nouns, are rejected by RAE and, therefore, not considered the *right* way of using language. In 2018, the Royal Spanish Academy publicly announced their disagreement with the use of gender-inclusive varieties and considered that the use of alternatives such as the endings *x*, *e* and @ are unnecessary. The RAE has publicly expressed itself, even, against the less disruptive and more widely accepted alternative forms such as the explicit indication of both genders by duplicating words, and stated that:

This type of duplication is artificial and linguistically unnecessary. In nouns that designate animate entities there is a possibility of using the generic masculine to designate the kind, that is to say, all the individuals of the species, without distinction of sexes.† (Real Academia Española, n.d.)

In general, the institution has firmly supported the use of the generic masculine under the argument that “the problem is to confuse grammar with machismo”<sup>4</sup>† (Pérez, 2018).

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<sup>3</sup> RAE stands for the Spanish name of the institution, Real Academia Española.

<sup>4</sup> When used in this study, the Spanish term *machismo* which does not have a direct English word translation should be interpreted as a synonym for male chauvinism and sexism.



However, criticisms against RAE have not been few and have pointed both to the sexist nature of the definitions it offers and to the conformation of its staff, which has had only eleven women out of almost five hundred members throughout history (Remacha, 2016).

Although RAE publicly rejected the use of gender-inclusive linguistic varieties (“La Real”, 2018), the discussion and use of alternatives to the standard have not remained circumscribed to the discourse of the political groups and grassroots movements from where the initiatives had initially emerged (Acosta Matos, 2016). What is more, the debates and use of non-standard varieties have started to occupy a significant place in the public and institutional spheres. Evidence of an ongoing debate is present in the fields of academy, government and media. In April 2019 the National University of La Plata (UNLP) held the first conference on gender-inclusive language (Cybel, 2019). In June 2019, the Faculty of Communication Sciences of the National University of Cordoba offered a course with the aim of providing tools to understand the phenomenon of how gender-inclusive language has been installed “in all social spheres”† (Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación, 2019). Acknowledging that the media have been challenged by people who use non-standard linguistic varieties, the course is mainly offered to “journalists, social communicators, producers and editors of media content, columnists, media conductors and interns; students and graduates of the bachelor's degree in social communication”† (Facultad de Ciencias de la Comunicación, 2019). Moreover, in 2019, the Argentinian government announced the preparation of a guidebook for journalists aiming at “incorporating gender-inclusive language and gender perspective in media”† (“El Gobierno”, 2019). The book is intended for use by journalists and it acknowledges that media “have the power to construct meaning, reproduce and alter socially shared structures”† (“El Gobierno”, 2019). In the past year, various workshops and seminars were held for journalists across the country about gender perspective and inclusive language (e.g., “Taller”, 2018; “Comunicación”, 2018). Such current practices and events imply that these debates are also taking place within media organizations and among news practitioners.

The use of non-sexist alternatives has become part of the media agenda itself with hundreds of articles being published about this sociolinguistic change. The discussion has been present in an immense variety of local (e.g. Mareco, 2019), national (e.g. Scherer, 2019), and international news outlets (e.g. “This Young Girl Explains”, 2018), and the topic has occupied the agenda both of specialized feminist and LGBT+ news media (Marchand, 2018) and of mainstream media (Kolesnicov, 2018).

Moreover, several news outlets, including large mainstream ones, have published news articles in which disruptive varieties of gender-inclusive language are used. While Sosa Villada (2017) used the ending *x* in an article for *La Voz del Interior*, Rikap and Guitart (2019) used the ending *e* in an opinion column on economics for *Perfil*. These examples not only illustrate the presence of non-standard varieties in newspapers but also the heterogeneity with which the different varieties are used. The inconsistency with which linguistic varieties are used has also been noticed by Spanish scholars analyzing articles from newspapers in Spain. As Álvarez de Miranda (2018) points out, there have been articles in which authors changes the linguistic forms, fluctuates, and wrote, in some cases, duplicating nouns in masculine and feminine and then stop doing so and use the generic masculine in other parts of one same text. The author suggests that this poses important questions, for which, in his view "there is no answer"† (Álvarez de Miranda, 2018, p. 25).

### **A phenomenon bigger than a letter**

Notably, complaints and debates regarding linguistic sexism are not exclusive to Spanish language nor to the current Argentinian context. In 1980, linguists acknowledged that English speaking feminists were “trying to produce their *own* linguistic forms which do not diminish them” (Spender, 1980, italics in the original, p. 151). More recently, alternatives to the sexist features of German and French have been addressed by the media and by scholars (Pech, 2018; Sarrasin, Gabriel & Gygax, 2012). The social relevance of this kind of phenomena has motivated its study by sociolinguists across the world. Linguistic practices which underestimate or marginalize women by placing masculinity as central norm are known by critical feminist linguists as linguistic sexism and linguistic androcentrism, respectively (Aliaga & Burgos, 2002). Androcentrism particularly refers to the marginalization of other genders rather than male and the idea that “linguistically, human beings were to be considered male unless proven otherwise” (Bodine, 1975, p. 133). In the case of the English language, several discussions and studies have been carried out, for example, concerning the use of the masculine *he* to refer to referents of indefinite gender (Foertsch & Gernsbacher, 1997). As part of the discussions, the use of the pronoun *they* as a singular has been observed as an alternative to avoid linguistic androcentrism and, more recently, to refer to individuals with non-binary gender identity (Bjorkman, 2017).

Although androcentrism is the term often related to the prescriptive grammar rules regarding generic masculine pronouns in Spanish, the division between marginalization and underestimation is not stark (Suardiaz, 2002). In fact, *sexism* is often used in comprehensive

ways to describe language bias favoring males (Spender, 1980; Fowler, 1991). Therefore, this study uses both expressions (linguistic sexism and linguistic androcentrism) interchangeably to refer to the uses of language which give the male gender a central position and leave other gender-categories in a marginalized, disregarded position.

### **Linguistic sexism and news discourse**

Much research in this field has been done by linguistics and literature scholars. Presumably for that reason, discourses from schools, governmental organizations and language academies have more vastly been analyzed in relation to sexist language (Suardiaz, 2002; Spender, 1980; Lakoff, 1975). Studies of linguistic gender bias in media discourse are rather recent and media's role "in processes of linguistic change is not yet fully understood" (Androutsopoulos, 2014, p. 3; Cotter, 2010; Moschonas, 2014). Still, linguists acknowledge the strong influence that media have in people's use of language and that media's collaboration is necessary to promote language change (Suardiaz, 2002). Moreover, the current context presented above suggests that debates on language change and gender-inclusive language are taking place among news practitioners in Argentina, which might open up the possibility of deepening the understanding of language usage in the media and linguistic sexism.

In media studies, views of media as insignificant for language change are "increasingly perceived as unsatisfactory" (Androutsopoulos, 2014, p. 3) since it is generally assumed that media do have an effect on language (Androutsopoulos, 2014). Research on the relation between media and sociolinguistic change has led to diverse conclusions. It has been suggested that mass media can influence language usage, maintain standard varieties, raise awareness of non-standard varieties and reinforce their stigmatization (Androutsopoulos, 2014). Although valuable, most studies about news media and sociolinguistic change have analyzed journalistic outcomes, such as news stories and style guides (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Cotter, 2014; Fasold, 1987). Considerably less attention has been paid to journalists' practices as experienced by them, despite the fact that ethnographic approaches to the study of news production are widely encouraged by scholars (Cotter, 2010; Peterson, 2003).

In the cases where journalistic practices have been the focus of news production studies, organizational routines and bureaucratic norms have taken the leading roles (Agarwal & Barthel, 2015; Cottle, 2000). Newsroom studies have studied the explicit and formalized norms and values of the journalistic field, such as news criteria as defined in textbooks, but it has less exposed the implicit and "unwritten rules of the social" (Willig, 2012, p. 378).

Consequently, journalists' reproduction of standard language varieties has often been explained as a result of the structure and values from the news-internal community (Cotter, 2014). Likewise, when journalists' uses of non-standard varieties have been observed, these have been explained as echoes of sociolinguistic attitudes already existing in society. The conduct of news practitioners using non-standard language has been generally considered an accommodation to cultural structures, social expectations and audiences' assessments (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Cotter, 2014). Both arguments have led to an oversight of journalists' roles as agents of sociolinguistic change with meaningful reasons and strategies for deviating from the norm. However, the significant variety of linguistic styles visible in Argentinian news suggests that each journalist plays a particular role in relation to the use of standard language or gender-inclusive varieties. In line with Cotter's interpretation that journalists are self-conscious about language usage (Cotter, 2010, 2014), it could be the case that there are individual motives involved in media workers' use of certain linguistic styles.

This study seeks to broaden the theoretical background exposed above, offering an approach that takes into consideration journalists' agency and enables the comprehension of the linguistic changes and varieties visible in the current news discourse in Argentina. In order to do so, it aims at answering what the practices are in which news practitioners engage concerning the use of non-sexist linguistic varieties and what the factors are that influence these practices. By answering this, this study aims at contributing to the current debates regarding alternative language forms, journalism, and gender equality. Moreover, it encourages media scholars to consider journalists' agency in future studies of sociolinguistic change.

To answer this question, this thesis relies on fifteen in-depth interviews with news practitioners currently working at Argentinian print and online news media, conducted in Buenos Aires and Córdoba during April and May 2019. The semi-structured interviews were grounded not only in the theoretical frame but also on the analysis of 2-3 news articles written by each interviewee. Furthermore, both the analysis of texts and the planification and conducting of interviews, were complemented by observation, participation and interaction with news practitioners during the first Gender Inclusive Language Conference, which was attended by journalists, scholars and activists.

In the following chapter, the main theoretical perspectives and definitions on which this study is grounded will be explained. Subsequently, the research methodology will be presented and justified, including a description on how the sample was composed. Following this, the main findings of the study will be analyzed, pointing to an understanding of

journalists' linguistic practices as influenced by multiple factors, besides organizational pressures and audience's assessments. Finally, the scientific and social implications of this study will be discussed, highlighting the usefulness of ethnographic approaches to the study of news production for uncovering journalists' views and intentions regarding their linguistic practices and the influence that their interaction with other social actors has on their texts.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **Overview**

Studies of sociolinguistic change have analyzed news discourse in relation to not only gender but also class, ethnicity and migration, among other dimensions (Cotter, 2014; Fought, 2006). Although sociolinguistics is not exclusively linked to feminist linguistics, both fields share a common basis: they consider social and language change as “mutually constitutive processes” (Coupland, 2014 as cited in Androutsopoulos, 2014, p. 5). In the case of the linguistic changes described in the introduction, linked to feminist and LGBT+ activism by their origin and *raison d'être*, the lens from critical feminist linguistics is particularly relevant. This chapter starts by explaining the perspectives of critical feminist linguists regarding the relation between society and language. Subsequently, the field of study of sociolinguistics is characterized as intrinsically connected to media discourse. Finally, the role given to journalists in studies of news discourse is discussed, with special attention to the need of highlighting journalists' agency when studying sociolinguistic change.

### **Critical feminist linguistics**

Critical feminist linguistics arose in the 70's, during the development of second-wave feminism within a context marked by claims for equal rights and the abolition of asymmetrical differences between men and women (Suardiaz, 2002). At the core of this perspective lies the assumption that culture and language are related and that linguistic sexism reflects sexism in society (Suardiaz, 2002). Therefore, a dialectical process is encouraged for social and language change to occur interdependently. Moreover, for the latter to develop, language rules must be defied and new symbols must be used (Spender, 1980).

Feminist linguistics consider that grammar rules prescribing the use of masculine symbols when the gender of the referent is unknown or diverse are “means for making women invisible” (Spender, 1980, p. 146) and marginalizing them (Aliaga & Burgos, 2002). The idea that “all persons are male unless proven otherwise”† (Acosta Matos, 2016, p. 29), which is what Spender describes as the “male-as-norm” rule (Spender, 1980, p. 3), lies at the core of linguistic androcentrism and classifies the world considering the male as standard and other categories as deviations. Thereby, it sustains the patriarchal symbolic system through which the female and other gender categories are oppressed by male supremacy (Acosta Matos, 2016; Spender, 1980).

In the Spanish speaking world, where the use of the generic masculine is long-established, this has led to oppositional views. Non-feminist linguists, following the RAE perspective, believe that non-standard varieties cannot be taken seriously, and they claim that speakers of languages "cannot consciously or deliberately intervene in them to alter their structure"† (Álvarez de Miranda, 2018, p. 12), especially not when it comes to changes in the linguistic system, instead of in a lexical level (Álvarez de Miranda, 2018). While non-feminists linguists consider the generic masculine a harmless mechanism justified by the principle of functional economy, feminists consider it an illustration of patriarchy and advocate for its change (Aliaga & Burgos, 2002). Moreover, advocates of gender-inclusive varieties also see in these, a manifestation against perceptions of language as something pure, without contradictions, and rutable by institutional policies, such as those from the RAE, which they see as marks of cultural domination (Novek, 2019). However, discrepancies regarding which alternative is best have been considerable. While the use of the @ symbol instead of the vowel that demarcates gender had become "widespread in writing" (Bengoechea, 2011, p. 37) in the late 90's and 2000's with the rise of the internet, its limitations quickly undermined its use (Garazi, 2014). Aware of the fact that the @ "does not belong to the alphabet and breaks the sentence line in a different way than the rest of the signs"† (Minoldo & Balián, 2018), and inspired by queer theory and activism, users of gender-inclusive language begun to replace the masculine morpheme *o* and the @ symbol with the *x* (Garazi, 2014). Still, this alternative has been rejected for its impossibility to be pronounced in the orality and, therefore, was replaced by some speakers for the ending *e*, which, in turn, had already been proposed as an alternative in the 70's (Lagneaux, 2018; Minoldo & Balián, 2018; Otero, 2018).

Also among feminist linguists discrepancies have been observed regarding the relevance of language change. Inspired by materialist feminism, several linguists have considered that structural economic factors, not language, determine people's realities and thoughts (Aliaga & Burgos, 2002). From this perspective, language transformations cannot dissolve inequalities since "language will not change until society does" (Spender, 1980, p. 30). Still, from some materialist perspectives, language change is valued because it increases speakers' awareness of structural asymmetries, it is considered a trigger to promote structural changes and a sign of commitment with the abolition of social injustices (Suardiaz, 2002). In fact, recent research claims that even those sectors of feminism which have historically focused on arguing material conditions of inequality, such as feminist anarchism, have now "begun to give importance to language"† (Acosta Matos, 2016, p. 12). Linguistic-

determinism scholars, instead, suggest that gender-biased nouns (e.g. *firemen* in English) influence audience's perception of reality (Vervecken, Hannover & Wolter, 2013) and language is considered a crucial factor in people's construction of reality and the frame of reference through which people interpret the world (Spender, 1980).

Either as signs of commitment with structural changes or as shapers of people's frames of reference, the use of non-androcentric alternatives has been observed with contentment by feminist linguists who notice their increased use in non-governmental organizations, educational and governmental institutions (Acosta Matos, 2016; Aliaga & Burgos, 2002). However, as the context described above suggests, non-sexist alternatives have also been used in the discourse of news media organizations, institutions whose specific language practices have often been the object of study of sociolinguistics.

### **Sociolinguistics and the news**

Among other foci, sociolinguistics analyses language practices paying special attention to how linguistic innovations circulate across media and how audiences respond (Androutsopoulos, 2014). Although all discourses construct reality, news discourses possess a unique importance in the reproduction of ideologies across society (Fowler, 1991). Quantitatively and culturally, the large consumption and distribution of news discourse make it "a major element in our daily experience of language" (Fowler, 1991, p. 9; Androutsopoulos, 2014). Therefore, news discourse and their producers could likely fit into the "highly advantageous position" (Spender, 1980, p. 142) which, according to some feminist linguistics, is occupied by groups who possess the capacity to shape many people's world through linguistic symbols (Spender, 1980).

In media studies, news is understood as socially produced not only through news gathering practices but also through the representation and transformation of reality, linguistic and social changes, into semiotic resources and linguistic styles (Fowler, 1991; Hall, 1977 as cited in Androutsopoulos, 2014). According to Fowler (1991), by coding reality into language, news discourse shapes the world conforming to specific ideologies and values. For example, through discursive differentiation, news is considered to characterize men and women in ways which categorize the latter unfavorably (Fowler, 1991). If the origin of the male-as-norm rule relates to the predominant positions that men have historically occupied in the fields where language is produced (Spender, 1980), then media have arguably been one of those male-dominated fields (Cotter, 2011) sustaining linguistic sexism as reflection of a dominant ideology. Moreover, if women's participation in media organizations has increased



(Cotter, 2011), it becomes relevant to assess whether media have incorporated non-androcentric alternatives, in which ways and for which reasons.

In interpretations of news discourses and their language, media have generally been viewed as following the conventional linguistic styles and, therefore, prescriptively reinforcing language standardization and “the underlying assumption that only one form is right” (Cotter, 2010, p. 190). In the case of Spanish, this *right* and standard form implies the use of generic masculine as prescribed by the RAE.

### **Journalists’ role and news discourse**

The prevalence of standard language in news discourse has mostly been explained by giving news practitioners a passive role according to which “socially motivated standardization pressures” force them to use conventional language (Cotter, 2010, p. 190). Among these pressures, objectivist tendencies seeking to detach the author’s own values from their texts motivate the inclusion of certain “formal attributes” in news stories (Tuchman, 1972, p. 676). Similarly to the effect of impartiality that the use of quotation marks seeks to produce, journalists’ predominant use of standard language can be considered a practice strategically performed by journalists to protect themselves from critics (Tuchman, 1972).

Similarly, the generalized idea is that news language is based on the values and beliefs of the medium itself, not of the journalist (Fowler, 1991). The practice of shaping stories through specific semiotic resources and linguistic styles has frequently been considered a result of the social, political and commercial situation of the news organization and of the journalistic routines and constraints to which that situation leads (Fowler, 1991; Peterson, 2003). This “organizational functionalism” has been frequent in research about news production and has led to a generalized inattention to journalists’ agency (Cottle, 2000, p. 22). Moreover, perspectives emphasizing “the determinacy of bureaucratic needs” (Cottle, 2000, p. 22) have assumed that each journalist’s personal writing style is “irrelevant to the communicative situation” (Fowler, 1991, p. 39), since this one is determined by the ideology, editorial conventions and “institutional requirements of the newspaper and its owners” (Fowler, 1991, 42).

According to Cotter (2010), journalists’ attachment to the linguistic requirements of a newspaper is explained by socialization processes which influence both journalists’ professional roles and the texts they produce. News practitioners belong to a journalistic discourse community which, through routines, rules and scripts, reinforces certain news-editorial decisions and privileges particular shapes for news stories (Cotter, 2010). Among

these routines and scripts, editors are considered to “function as usage monitors” (Cotter, 2010, p. 191) and “institutional gatekeepers” (Peterson, 2003, p. 182), while style guides are considered to work as assistants to routinization (Cotter, 2010). Within the structures from that discourse community which make the standard variety prevail, profession-internal values occupy the main place (Cotter, 2010). A set of writing values such as consistency and grammatical correctness conforms the *craft ethos*, the parameter through which journalists’ professional competence is evaluated (Cotter, 2010, 2014).

Despite ideas that “journalists’ language attitudes are conservative, prescriptive, and mainstream” (Cotter, 2010, p. 187), sociolinguists recognize innovations and heterogeneity of linguistic styles in media discourse. They acknowledge that vernacular linguistic features “loaded with socio-cultural associations” are gaining access “into domains that have been the preserves of standardness” (Coupland, 2014 as cited in Androutsopoulos, 2014, p. 27). However, when non-standard language usages are recognized, these are usually explained by structural factors of the media environment such as the rise of digital communication, the multimodality of media products and the diversification of target audiences (Androutsopoulos, 2014) instead of the individual motives of news practitioners as potential agents of change committed with the abolition of social injustices (Suardiaz, 2002). This tendency of media production research which Peterson describes as “mediacentric” studies (Peterson, 2003, p. 163) has privileged the attention to influences from the organization on the content. Thereby, the individual social actors taking part in the media production process have often been “reduced to mere agents and vehicles of the institutional structure, acting out predetermined roles” (Peterson, 2003, p. 163).

Among profession-internal constraints and demands, the interaction with audiences is often considered an important factor influencing journalists’ production of news (Cotter, 2010). Journalists’ use of language has been considered an accommodation to the requirements and complaints from their audiences who they seek to address as “pseudo-interlocutors” (Cotter, 2010, p. 17; Hall, 1978 as cited in Fowler, 1991). This relationship with the audience functions as a “motivation for particular ways of using language” (Cotter, 2010, p. 111). In terms of news writing styles, responsiveness towards readers stimulates the prioritization of “ease of comprehension” and clarity (Cotter, 2010, p.118), goals which require precision, maintenance of language standards and, therefore, prescription in language use (Cotter, 2010). In other words, while attachment to the standard language ideology has been explained by the pressures from the news discourse-community and its values, journalists’ use of non-standard varieties has also been explained in relation to external

factors which, allegedly, constrain journalists' practice (Cotter, 2010). Although the standard variety generally prevails in news discourse, when it does not, journalists' role as promoters of sociolinguistic change is often seen as a mere reflection of what is already happening in society and demanded by audiences (Cotter, 2014). Cotter's (2014) description of journalists' tension between the maintenance of the standard language and the promotion of change can, indeed, be interpreted as a tension between one structure and the other, which opens the question of what role does journalists' agency play when linguistic choices have to be made from within that conflicting position.

A comprehensive analysis of sociolinguistic change and news discourse requires the integration of "institutional policies with individual agency" (Androutsopoulos, 2014, p. 6). As in other research fields, there is a need for a comprehensive approach to unveil the relationships in which individuals' agency and social structures complexly interrelate and mutually shape each other (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 11). An ethnographic approach to the study of news practitioners and sociolinguistic change can serve as a bridge to examine journalists' agency "within a cultural system while still recognizing their embeddedness in larger structures of power" (Peterson, 2003, p. 164).

While it is important to identify the role of language policies and style guides in standardization processes, scholars encouraging ethnographic approaches claim that it is also necessary to acknowledge that journalists are engaged in their work not only as texts producers but also as producers of themselves, "as social persons in relation to others" (Peterson, 2003, p. 162). Likewise, despite being organizations with social and economic goals, from such ethnographic perspective media should also be considered institutions driven by social agents who can control their language use (Spitzmüller, 2014) and modify it through their conscious interventions (Suardiaz, 2002). Far from being mere custodians of the requirements from the news-internal community and their audiences, media producers can actively interact with other communities and social groups (Peterson, 2003). Moreover, these cultural identities of journalists and their "prior relations with the social actors he or she is constituting as sources" (Bourdieu, 1998 as cited in Peterson, 2003, p. 181) can influence their interpretive task and must necessarily be taken into account for a comprehensive understanding of their texts (Peterson, 2003).

It is, therefore, implied that in order to understand media linguistic practices like the one presented in the introduction, there is a need to move away from the mere analysis of "profession-specific decision-making constraints" (Cotter, 2010, p. 201) towards an

understanding of journalists' experiences as agents with creative capacity to act (Peterson, 2003) on language usage and change.

## **Method**

### **Methodological approach**

As explained above, studies on journalists' language and its social implications have frequently focused on analyzing journalistic outputs. Specifically, analyses of texts have been considered the preferred source of information about the news making process (Cotter, 2010; Richardson, 2008). Practices and dynamics within the news community, from which texts emerge, have received significantly less attention while media production has not often been seen as the cultural practice that it really is (Peterson, 2003). Such approach to the study of news discourse, although valuable, is limited. The privileged attention to texts has hindered the possibilities to understand the institutional settings and power relationships from which texts are created and the constraints, strategies, practices, and motivations of the people producing them (Cotter, 2010; Richardson, 2008; Schröder, 2007). Thereby, journalists' agency in their social-occupational practice has largely been disregarded as well as the interplay of factors taken into account by them when choosing to use or not use certain linguistic styles.

Furthermore, in the relatively few cases where language-related journalistic dynamics and news production processes were studied, the focus has been on analyzing newspaper stylebooks and the online discussions about such guidelines (Cotter, 2014; Fasold, 1987; Le Lamer, 2012; Moschonas, 2014). Although valuable, the outcomes of these studies were limited by their methods. The results of such research give a privileged position to "normative routines" (Cotter, 2010, p.4), journalistic procedures and pressures from the audience as if these were the only relevant factors in the production of news discourse. This characterization of "language use as strictly determined by material structures" (Berglez, 2006 as cited in Richardson, 2008, p. 153) has been a tendency of materialist approaches. Studying the final text, being either news articles or stylebooks, does not provide in-depth understanding on why and how the creation of these products takes place. In other words, they say too little about the practices which news practitioners experience and the factors they take into consideration in times of sociolinguistic change.

By contrast, ethnographic approaches recognize and seek to comprehend the individual agency that is present within social and institutional discourses (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007). By doing so, this perspective allows the understanding of media production as a field in which "social structure, collective identities, and selfhood intersect" (Peterson, 2003, p. 161). Moreover, such a perspective to the news production process can serve to

comprehensively examine how the “views and intentions” of text producers might be encoded into their texts (Peterson, 2003, p. 163).

The need for an ethnographic attention to news discourse in relation to the journalistic community, its practices, its actors, their interests and relationships between them has been considerably recognized (Cotter, 2010; Blommaert, 1999 as cited in Richardson, 2008). From these perspectives, it is acknowledged that there is a need for researchers to comprehensively study news stories in relation to the journalists’ values and practices which shape them (Cotter, 2010). Unlike the exclusive analysis of journalistic outcomes, an ethnographic approach might allow the understanding of what the practices are in which news practitioners engage concerning the use of non-sexist language and what the factors are that influence these practices. Following that idea, this study integrates the analysis of news stories with ethnographic research, primarily based on interviews with the news practitioners who wrote them.

This thesis’s multi-methodological approach combined in-depth, semi-structured interviews grounded on the analysis of news stories written by interviewees, and fieldwork. For all methodological stages, data were gathered from Argentinian sources. Although there have also been discussions concerning linguistic sexism in Spanish-speaking media from other countries (e.g. Seisdedos, 2019), the sociocultural context explained in the introduction and the exceptional space given to debates and uses of gender-inclusive alternatives in Argentinian media today make it a relevant framework for analysis. Moreover, narrowing the study to Argentinian media was also justified by the access to journalists and by the researcher’s familiarity both with Argentinian media and with their language uses.

Fieldwork was limited to participation at the first Gender Inclusive Language Conference in the country, which took place on April 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> 2019, right before all interviews for this study were conducted. In this academic event, closely tied to the topic under study, the use of non-sexist linguistic forms was discussed (Arrua, 2019). Therefore, the conversations, debates and questions of participants and speakers provided an insightful basis for the development and analysis of the subsequent interviews. Moreover, due to the relevance of the topic in the media agenda and media’s coverage of the conference (e.g.: Terceiro, 2019), the event also became a key site for contacting and recruiting interviewees.

Recruitment of interviewees was also facilitated by the initial contact with journalists during pilot interviews. Five pilot interviews were conducted with journalists working at four online and print news media from Córdoba, Argentina, in December 2018. These conversations were a valuable starting point to gain background understanding of the topic,

assess the feasibility of the project, facilitate subsequent snowball sampling, and enhance the preparation for the next data collection stage. In terms of methodology, pilot interviews supported the advantages of combining interviews with the analysis of news stories. During the pilot interviews in which news stories written by interviewees were used as a base for the conversation, the interviewees seemed to be encouraged in their reflection and rich explanations as to why they tended to choose certain linguistic varieties in their texts.

Moreover, insights from the pilot interviews suggested that there are different types of media, such as mainstream and activist media, and that journalists within each of these tend to use linguistic varieties differently. Furthermore, remarks from interviewees of the pilot interviews who have worked both at mainstream and activist media highlighted the importance of exploring the different kind of factors that news practitioners at each type of media perceive as influencing their choice for linguistic varieties. Therefore, this awareness encouraged the conformation of a diverse sample for the study, with news practitioners working at a wide range of news organizations, from mainstream and conservative to activist.

Insights gained from the pilot interviews also improved the analysis of news stories sampled in the study by expanding the scope of linguistic practices that were then observed. As the conversations implied, the non-standard endings *e* and *x*, which might be easier for a Spanish speaker to identify in a text because these are harder to pronounce and disrupt the reading, tend to be more rejected by audiences of mainstream media than other varieties. However, there are other types of non-standard language, such as the use of indefinite collective nouns, which seem to be more commonly used at mainstream media and its use is, in fact, encouraged by editors at mainstream newspapers. Consequently, news stories were analyzed by observing not only the cases in which journalists used the easily recognizable disruptive varieties (*x*, *e*) but also the widely accepted non-disruptive varieties (indefinite collective nouns and duplication in feminine and masculine).

In light of these observations and insights gained from pilot interviews, fifteen interviews were conducted in Buenos Aires and Córdoba, Argentina, in April and May 2019. All interviews aimed to provide understanding of the practices and motives influencing linguistic choices which interviewees experience in their roles during processes of sociolinguistic change. It can be argued that one-on-one interviews provide limited insights regarding group interactions in the newsroom, in contrast to fieldwork. However, one-to-one interviews advantageously open more space for the exchange of personal values and opinions which might be opposed to the social norms and expectations of the organization (Cotter, 2010).

Although, strictly speaking, fieldwork was not conducted in newsrooms due to time constraints, interviews were informed by an ethnographic approach and based on interviewees' news texts and, in one case, on their participation at the mentioned conference. In this case, ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Gender Inclusive Language Conference led to initial relationship-building with the journalist who was interviewed later, first informal interactions, and initial exchanges of views on media and gender-inclusive language.

## **Sample**

Most interviews lasted more than fifty minutes. In three exceptional cases, interviews were shorter (27, 35 and 38 minutes) due to interviewees' lack of longer periods of availability. All interviews were conducted with news practitioners currently working at Argentinian news media who have written, at least, one article about gender-related issues as main topic, e.g.: gender violence, abortion law, sexual abuse, etc. There was an expectation that journalists who have written about those topics might be considering the use of non-standard linguistic forms. A previously considered approach was to circumscribe the sample of interviewees only to those journalists who had written articles using gender-inclusive language, such as endings with *a y o*, *a/o*, *x*, *e*, *@*. However, that method would have precluded the possibility of identifying cases in which a journalist intends to use non-standard language but, for some reason, has not done so. Since it cannot be known, beforehand, what a certain journalist thinks about using gender-inclusive language, the consideration of topic areas about which they write, came out as the most practical solution for selecting interviewees. The assumption behind this was that journalists who have written articles about gender related issues are, at least, aware of the current claims for gender equality in society including those regarding non-sexist language. In short, it was assumed that those news practitioners were conscious that there are non-standard linguistic styles available for writing.

Considering that a “news community is not viewed as a monolithic or homogeneous entity” (Cotter, 2014, p. 375) and that social phenomena do not take place in the same way in every context (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007), the sample encompassed news practitioners who perform different roles at diverse print and online news media. In the early stages, the sample was intended to be limited to journalists who work at organizations in which gender-inclusive language has often been used, such as journalists at the newspaper *Página 12*. However, the preliminary findings obtained from the pilot interviews suggested that there are insightful dissimilarities among organizations in which different linguistic varieties are used. Following Cerwonka's and Malkki's (2007, p. 14) idea that social phenomena are distinctively “shaped



by local realities and the agency of particular groups” (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 14) and their practices, the diverse sample composition was formed aiming at the comparison of experiences and perspectives from journalists working at organizations in which non-standard language is either used or not.

Achieving diversity in types of news organizations (with different editorial lines, structures and reach) was thus a proposed target when conforming the sample. However, due to the large amount of print and online news media which are published in Argentina, national coverage was added as an additional criterion to limit the scope. Fourteen interviews were conducted in the country’s capital, Buenos Aires, which has the wider “ideological diversity in its daily press” (Becerra, Marino & Mastrini, 2012, p. 20). One interview was conducted in Córdoba, the second most inhabited city in the country, with a journalist at *La Voz del Interior*, which despite being a provincial newspaper is the third general-interest newspaper in the country for its circulation and advertising revenue (La Voz del Interior, 2010). Moreover, it is owned by the largest national media conglomerate, and identifies itself as “the voice that speaks to the Argentinean people from the center of the country” † (Trimano, 2010, p. 161; Becerra, Marino & Mastrini, 2012). Overall, the sample includes news practitioners (journalists from permanent staffs, external contributors, editors, directors) who work at ten different news organizations.

According to the descriptions given by interviewees themselves, a division can be made between mainstream media, among which some are more conservative than others, and non-mainstream media, among which some are feminist and/or LGBT+ activist. Six news organizations which could fall into the category of mainstream were included in the sample. The largest of them are *La Nación* and *Clarín*. The newspaper *La Nación* is widely considered as following a conservative ideological line and guided by the interests of the ruling sectors and elites of society (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2017; Sidicaro, 1998 as cited in Zunino & Focás, 2018). Among interviewees, there were former and current employees of *Clarín*, which is “one of the highest circulation newspapers in Latin America” (ACCESSWIRE, 2019), owned by the largest media conglomerate in the country, multitarget and characterized by a “centrist and general-interest perspective” (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2017, p. 1777; Becerra, 2015 as cited in Zunino & Focás, 2018). The sample also included a journalist from *Infobae*, an online news portal which ranks first among outlets of this type, is one of the few news organizations with a female director, and combines in-depth articles marked by each author's own perspective with light content characterized by the presence of clickbait (Becerra, 2018; Reporters Without Borders, 2019). Three

interviewees currently work at *Perfil*, a weekly newspaper which presents itself as unique due to its “credibility, and its independent journalism” (Perfil, n.d., p. 42). As it was mentioned, one interviewee works at *La Voz del Interior*, which belongs to *Clarín*’s same conglomerate and is among the ten leading newspapers in the country (Reporters Without Borders, 2019).

Furthermore, four interviewees included in the sample work at the newspaper *Página 12*. This organization could be considered as falling somewhere in between the two main categories differentiated in the sample. On one hand, it is considered one of the best-selling mainstream newspapers in the country in its paper format, and a medium with high impact on opinion formers (Amado, 2007 as cited in Zunino & Focás, 2018; Larrine, 2018). On the other hand, it is also known for being a “left-leaning mainstream newspaper” (Borland, 2010, p. 255) historically related to claims for human rights and characterized by a “progressive editorial line” † (Artese, 2011, p. 115). More precisely, all interviewees from *Página 12* included in this study work at the specialized supplements *Soy*<sup>5</sup> and *Las 12*, closely tied to gender diversity and feminist activism, respectively (Observatorio de jóvenes, comunicación y medios de la Facultad de Periodismo y Comunicación Social, 2016).

Three organizations at which interviewees work would fall into the category of non-mainstream media. Among these, two journalists working at *Latfem* were included in the sample. This online news portal identifies itself as feminist and member of the activist movement Ni Una Menos, and works with correspondents throughout Latin America (Ramajo, 2019). One of those journalists also works at *El Cohete a la Luna*, an online news portal on journalistic research and politics (Verbitsky, 2017). Finally, one of the interviewees is the director and co-founder of *Presentes*, an LGBTI news agency and non-profit organization specialized in the coverage of gender and sexual diversity issues in Latin America (Presentes, n.d.). The diversity of news organizations where interviewees work can be linked to a diversity in the perceived professional roles of news practitioners, since each organizational structure arguably relates in a different manner to journalists’ perception of their roles as language users. In previous journalism studies, choosing a sample comprised

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<sup>5</sup> The Spanish word *soy*, which gives the supplement its name, is equivalent to the expression *I am* in English. The supplement, which defines itself as “the supplement of diversity, difference and weirdness” (Página 12, n.d.) presents in its name a play on words, referring to the diversity that characterizes how its journalists and readers *are*.

only by journalists working “at elite media” has led to unrepresentative “generalizations about journalists” (Reese, 2001, p. 180) and their professional views.

Moreover, large-scale studies relying on broader samples have tended to treat “journalists as typically undifferentiated with regard to their location in the organization” (Reese, 2001, p. 180), thereby overlooking the individual roles of news practitioners who occupy more or less advantageous positions in their organizations (Reese, 2001). In order to overcome these limitations, diversity in the sample of this study was also achieved in terms of the roles that each interviewee is assigned within each organizational structure. As table 1 shows, the sample included directors, editors, a gender-ombudsperson<sup>6</sup>, journalists from permanent staffs, and external contributors. Furthermore, several interviewees also perform additional roles at other online news portals, as opinion columnists and external contributors, work as presenters and producers in television and radio and/or have their own podcasts. Although belonging to activist groups had not been set as a criterion for constituting the sample, at least six of the interviewees are also active members of feminist activist groups, NGOs and other organizations working for gender equality and against gender violence. This particular focus of the sample is presumably a consequence of the procedure followed to conform it, recruiting journalists who have written articles on gender-related issues. Likewise, as a result of the sampling procedure carried out, the majority of the sample was constituted by female journalists, at the proportion of fourteen women and one man.

Table 1: List of interviewees

Label	Media	Classification	Role	Gender	Articles
J1	La Nación	Mainstream - Conservative	Permanent staff	Female	A1, A2
J2	La Nación	Mainstream - Conservative	External contributor	Female	A3, A4
J3	Clarín	Mainstream	Gender editor	Female	A5, A6
J4	Infobae	Mainstream	Permanent staff	Female	A7, A8
J5	Perfil	Mainstream	Editor	Female	A9, A10

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<sup>6</sup> The term gender-ombudsperson was chosen to refer to the Spanish expression *Defensora de Género*. This role is similar to that of news ombudsmen, but with the particularity that it seeks to observe what is published in the newspaper from a gender equality perspective.

<b>J6</b>	Perfil	Mainstream	Gender-ombudsperson	Female	A11, A12
<b>J7</b>	Perfil	Mainstream	External contributor	Female	A13, A14
<b>J8</b>	La Voz del Interior	Mainstream	Permanent staff	Female	A15, A16
<b>J9</b>	Soy (Página 12)	Non-mainstream. Gender-diversity supplement	Editor	Female	A17, A18
<b>J10</b>	Soy (Página 12)	Non-mainstream. Gender-diversity supplement	External contributor	Female	A19, A20
<b>J11</b>	Soy (Página 12)	Non-mainstream. Gender-diversity supplement	External contributor	Male	A21, A22
<b>J12</b>	Las 12 (Página 12)	Non-mainstream. Feminist supplement	Permanent staff	Female	A23, A24
<b>J13</b>	Latfem	Non-mainstream. Feminist news portal	Director	Female	A25, A26, A27
	El Cohete a la Luna	Non-mainstream. Center-left politics news portal	Permanent staff		
<b>J14</b>	Latfem	Non-mainstream. Feminist news portal	Permanent staff	Female	A28, A29, A30
<b>J15</b>	Presentes	Non-mainstream. Gender-diversity news agency	Director	Female	A31, A32

In terms of ethics, all interviewees were informed in advance about the nature of the study and about the fact that the conversation was going to be recorded and transcribed (see appendix A). In all cases, interviews were conducted in Spanish, and the quotes used in this thesis were translated by the researcher. Moreover, interviewees were given the opportunity to share comments off the record as this could be convenient for them when talking about the structures of the organizations at which they work. For similar reasons, interviewees were able to decide whether they wanted their answers to be treated anonymously. In this respect, none of the interviewees required anonymity in the presentation of data. Consent forms were signed by each interviewee and archived (see appendix B). In April 2019, approval for the project was received from the Ethics Review Board of the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication (ESHCC) (see appendix C).

For the reasons given above, the sampling method to select interviewees was purposive. Additionally, snowball sampling among news practitioners who had written articles about gender-related issues facilitated finding interviewees who were particularly interested in the use of non-sexist language. In-depth interviews were conducted in person and their semi-structured design focused on interviewees' interpretation of their roles, their practices concerning linguistic choices, and the relations of those choices with personal motivations and other possible influencing factors (hierarchies, style guides, audiences, etc.) (see appendix D). Furthermore, the analysis of news stories was integrated into the structure of interviews, during which copies of articles were observed together with their authors, and questions were asked about why a word had been written in a certain way and why in some articles they used different linguistic varieties than in other texts.

Critical readings of two to three news articles per interviewee written by them from 2017 to 2019 allowed the preliminary identification of linguistic choices and strategies being used by journalists, the kind of topics where certain linguistic features appeared, the missed opportunities in which authors used standard sexist varieties and the level of consistency in their writing style. The overall sample consisted of 32 news articles, most of which were focused on gender-related topics such as the lives of transgender families and gender-based violence (see appendix E). Such revision of the interviewees' texts not only illustrated linguistic patterns of usage (Cotter, 2010) but also grounded the subsequent discussions and comprehension during the interviews. In an iterative way, a first preliminary reading of two to three news articles of each specific author provided the foundations for the first interview. Topics for the semi-structured interview were adapted to these previous readings aiming to understand, among other things, why a certain linguistic form was used in a specific context, what the motivations were to write a particular article with a specific style, etc. Subsequently, and understanding that ethnographic approaches require unsteady and circular movements in the data collection and analysis (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007), the insights resulting from the interview about linguistic strategies, limiting and motivating factors were taken into account in the examination of the next set of news articles and interviews. Moreover, the approach and structure of the interviews was also permanently readjusted with base on contextual circumstances and events which "one can never fully anticipate" (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007, p. 20). As an illustration, when the first gender editor in the country was appointed during the data collection period, the novelty and uniqueness of this designation led to comments and insights about the potential role of gender editors during the first interviews

which had not been anticipated but necessarily led to an adaptation of the subsequent interviews.

Although the positivist approach to validity as correspondence with the truth seems problematic when applied in qualitative research on social phenomena (Kuzmanić, 2009), several measures were taken throughout the research process as an effort to assure that interviews led to answers to the research question and to reduce the possible impacts of the interviewer on interviewees' responses and interviews' results. Firstly, the pilot interviews served as a mechanism to assess the structure of the subsequent interviews, to revise the questions being asked, and to judge the capacity of the topic list to "reflect the specific concepts it aims to investigate" (Alshenqeeti, 2014, p. 43). With basis on the insights gained from those pilot interviews, the topic list and the researcher's interviewing skills were improved. Additionally, follow-up questions were reiteratively asked during the interviews as a means to reduce the possibilities of misinterpreting interviewees' perspectives, and allowing interviewees to object and rectify interviewer's interpretations. Moreover, a "self-reflective stance" (Kuzmanić, 2009, p. 49) was taken while conducting the interviews, to control the potential effects of power asymmetry between interviewer and interviewees, for example, by adapting in all cases to interviewees' choice of time and place for the meetings. Self-reflexivity and questions of validity were also considered during the data analysis in order to detect any possible counterevidence and exceptions to the researcher's judgments (Appleton, 1995). With that aim, recordings and transcripts of the interviews were repeatedly listened to and read while developing the coding and analysis.

## **Data analysis**

Articles written by interviewees were searched using the online databases of the news outlets' websites. Among the dozens of texts initially found, a first preliminary analysis was conducted to select two to three articles from each journalist. The criterion for selecting the articles to be used in the study and for informing the interviews was to focus on those in which there were one or more non-standard linguistic varieties being used and those in which non-standard language could have been used, but instead, the journalist used the generic masculine. Thus, articles with little or no reference to human subjects were discarded from the sample. As an example, the rationale for including article A23 in the analysis was the early identification that several linguistic varieties were used in the same text alternately to mention human referents: the standard generic masculine (*guiados* for *guided*), the ending *e* (*alumnes* instead of *alumnos* for *students*), the ending *x* (*lxs chicxs* instead of *los chicos* for

*the kids*), and the duplication of words in masculine and feminine (*compañeros y compañeros* instead of *compañeros* for *classmates*). Subsequently, a more detailed reading of each article was conducted prior to the interviews. In this case, the aim was to examine the linguistic varieties used in relation to the textual context, other linguistic varieties used in the same article, the topic of the story, the section of the newspaper in which it was published, the year in which the article had been published, and the linguistic varieties used in the quotations of people interviewed. The insights gained from this analysis were documented and integrated into the topic lists used for the interviews.

During the transcription of the interviews, a preliminary coding was carried out simultaneously, based on the segments of greatest interest of each interview. This first set of initial codes was edited and improved guided by a revision of the literature and concepts from the theoretical framework. At this stage, key codes formulated with basis on the theory were: Language change as a sign of commitment with the expansion of rights and democratization; prioritization of ease of comprehension, clarity and readability; news media as a male-dominated field; style guides and language policies of the media organization.

Using this first set of codes as a starting point, the detailed and analytical reading of each of the transcripts and the simultaneous coding were conducted using the software Atlas.ti. Transcripts from fifteen interviews were uploaded to this software. After editing the preliminary codes and adding new ones, based on the reading of the transcripts, the outcome of this coding were 207 codes, which in turn, were clustered into 18 sets (see appendix F). The insights and results obtained from this exhaustive analysis are presented in the following section.

## Results

### Overview

Unlike the exclusive analysis of news articles, the integration of such texts with an ethnographic approach to conducting in-depth interviews and fieldwork, favored a comprehensive understanding of the practices in which news practitioners engage concerning the use of non-sexist linguistic varieties and the factors influencing these practices. In this chapter, the main findings of this approach will be explained.

First, journalists' linguistic practices in relation to linguistic sexism will be described by specifying the three types of linguistic varieties which interviewees tend to use in their texts when mentioning human referents. A distinction will be made among standard, widely accepted, and disruptive varieties, in order to examine in which cases and how these are used. Second, it will be argued that interviewees' uses of linguistic varieties are often grounded on conscious considerations, individual beliefs, and group discussions.

Subsequently, interviewees' different perceptions of non-standard varieties and their usefulness will be presented as a factor motivating their preference for one type of varieties or another. Moreover, their interpretations on what non-standard varieties are useful for will also offer an explanation to the inconsistency with which language is being used in the news. The choice for the standard variety will also be introduced as a strategic and deliberate practice influenced not only by adherence to journalistic values, but also by journalists' materialist view of social change and their choice of strategies to promote it.

Journalists' preference for using one type of varieties or another will also be linked to the type of media organizations at which they work and to the way in which they perceive their role as journalists. Furthermore, the type of socialization and learning dynamics performed at each newsroom will also be presented as a factor influencing journalists' linguistic uses in different manners. While few of the sampled organizations appear to have well established standardization practices, these seem to be less strict and less influential at the organizations where most interviewees work at. Contrastingly, most interviewees' linguistic preferences seem to be highly influenced by what they learn from their social interactions with activists. Moreover, it will be suggested that unofficial socialization dynamics and bottom-up learning processes inside newsrooms also influence journalists' use of language.

Finally, journalists' perceptions of their relationship with their different interlocutors will be presented as factors influencing their linguistic practices in different ways. On one



hand, journalists' attention to the people used as sources and/or portrayed in their stories will be described as a motivator for particular ways of using language in their texts. On the other, it will be emphasized that, although news practitioners are aware of their readers' characteristics and expectations, they do not necessarily use the linguistic variety preferred by their audiences.

In the following sections, these results will be deepened, explained and illustrated with data from the analysis of texts and interviews.

### **Multiple journalists, multiple practices**

The analysis of 32 sampled stories written by interviewees shows that news practitioners combine standard language with two other types of linguistic varieties when mentioning human referents. First, the standard variety, namely, the generic masculine *o* was used by all interviewees, at least once, in the sampled stories. Besides this one, there are non-standard varieties, among which a distinction can be made, according to interviewees, between those which are widely accepted in society and those which are disruptive and "much more contested" (J14). The first group contains the employment of indefinite collective nouns, considered by some interviewees as a "virtuous use of language" (J6) and the duplication of words in feminine and masculine, used in twelve sampled stories, and which in comparison to the rest of the varieties rejected by the RAE "is the one that would be most enabled by the Spanish language" (J7). The group of disruptive varieties is formed by the endings *x* and *e*, used in ten and eleven sampled stories, respectively. Other varieties which have also been criticized for disrupting the reading, such as @ and \* were not visible in any of the sampled articles, except for one case (A13) in which the variety @ is referred to between quotation marks as object of discussion.

Although the sample was not aimed to be representative but to ground the interviews by providing an overview of the varieties being used, its analysis did present three important insights. First, journalists working at different types of news organizations tend to use one type of variety more predominantly than the others. Second, the predominant use of one type of linguistic variety by a journalist does not imply that the same journalist does not use the other varieties. Third, in most cases, the different varieties seem to be used inconsistently by journalists alternating between them in the same newspaper, or even in one same article. In what follows, journalists' use of these varieties in the sampled articles will be described.

**Standard variety.** The generic masculine is present, at least once, in analyzed articles written by all interviewees. In the mainstream newspaper *La Nación*, a journalist used it in “todos” [everyone] when stating that professions traditionally associated to men are now for *everyone*. It was also used by the director of LGBTI news agency *Presentes* (J15) to describe the inhabitants of a city as “curiosos y atentos” [curious and attentive], although this is the only case in which the standard variety is used in that text. Interestingly, the generic masculine seems to be more visible than the other varieties in the analyzed texts published in mainstream newspapers. A sampled article published in *Clarín* (A6 by J3) contains 28 words with the masculine morpheme *o*, that is, every time the author refers to a group of children and kids, “niños, chicos”, their neighbors “vecinos”, or their younger siblings “hermanitos” although the text describes the lives of both, boys and girls, whose parents are in prison. Only in three exceptional cases, the author uses the duplication of words when referring to boys and girls “niños, niñas” and their parents “padres y madres” [fathers and mothers]. In other sampled stories published in mainstream news outlets, the use of the standard variety is entirely privileged. Both sampled articles from *Infobae* exclusively used the standard masculine variety when mentioning human referents. This was, for example, the case in a story about a couple of a transwoman and a transman (A8), in which they are both referred to as “ellos” [they] and “ambos” [both] using the generic masculine.

It is worth clarifying, however, that the standard variety is not always used in the same way. In an article written by the gender-ombudsperson at *Perfil* (J6), two of the three times in which the generic masculine is used this is followed by a remark in which the author justifies the use of the standard variety in those specific cases. When commenting on an article authored by her male colleagues at the same newspaper, the gender-ombudsperson wrote “With success, the authors [los autores]-in masculine because they are all males-suggest that...” (A11). While the use of the generic masculine *o* in *los autores* would have been grammatically correct without any further explanation, the clarification suggests that the author tried to mark something specific about the people the text was referring to.

Although the use of generic masculine is more visible in articles from mainstream newspapers, in comparison to those from activist media, the sampled stories also indicate that this is not an absolute division. One of the interviewees who works at the gender-diversity supplement *Soy* (J11) chose only the standard variety for both of his articles included in the sample, for example, when saying “numerosos profesionales” [many professionals] and did not rely on any of the non-standard varieties in the rest of both texts. Moreover, both types of

non-standard varieties, those widely accepted and the disruptive ones, have also been used in mainstream media.

**Widely accepted varieties.** Often, the generic masculine is used alternatively with the duplication of nouns. In an article published on *El Cohete a la Luna* (J13), about the murder of a girl (A27), the journalist used the duplication three times to refer to “las vecinas y vecinos” [instead of “los vecinos” for “the neighbors”]<sup>7</sup>, and used the masculine morpheme *o*, “los vecinos” three times to refer to the same group of people. An article by another journalist (J1), published in *La Nación* shows the same combination, as she duplicated “el papá, la mamá” [instead of “los padres” for “the parents”], and later used the generic masculine to write “los familiares” [the relatives]. In other sampled articles, however, the duplication of words is used in a highly recurrent and even exclusive way. The gender editor at *Clarín* (J3) tends to use this strategy often as illustrated in A5 in which the duplication of words is used every time the author describes a group of referents of mixed genders, completely avoiding thereby, the use of the generic masculine, as in “jugadoras y jugadores” [instead of “jugadores” for “players”], “actrices y actores” [instead of “actores” for “actors”].

The use of indefinite collective nouns seems to be less common. It was only visible two times in the sampled articles, although the counting and use of this variety is complex since it is not easily adaptable to all words due to the characteristics of the Spanish language. In another article by J3 the duplication of words is used five times, while the author relies only once on the indefinite noun “personas” to refer to imprisoned people [instead of the generic masculine “presos” for “prisoners”] (A6).

**Disruptive varieties.** Besides the widely accepted varieties described above, sampled stories also presented a varied use of the non-standard ending *e* and the ending *x*. The ending *e* was used in eleven sampled stories, while the ending *x* in ten, most of which were published in feminist and LGBT+ activist media.

In most cases, the use of these varieties was combined with the ones described above. Such is the case of an article in the feminist supplement *Soy* (A17) in which “compañeres” [instead of “compañeros” for “colleagues”] appears only four lines before the standard

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<sup>7</sup> Although this form of notation is arguable for naturalizing the use of the generic masculine as standard, it has been used in this study to facilitate the explanation and translation into English of terms used by journalists.

“algunos” [some]. In other article from *Soy* written by a different journalist (J10), the *x* is used eleven times when referring to “lxs afrodescendientes” [the afro-descendants], “lxs afroargentinxs” [afro-argentinians] and “lxs africanxs” [africans] who are adults, while instead the duplication of words is used in the same text when mentioning “the afro-descendant boys and girls” (A19).

Furthermore, in feminist and LGBT+ media, disruptive varieties have also been used in combination with each other (*e* and *x* alternatively). As an example, a journalist at *Latfem* (J14), replaced the masculine morpheme *o* with the ending *e* in twenty words in one of her articles (A29). For example, she wrote “les usuaries” [instead of “los usuarios” for “the users”]. Yet, the same journalist chose the ending *x* in other articles, such as in “varixs autorxs” [instead of “varios autores” for “various authors”] (A30). Moreover, in activist media, the endings *e* and *x* are used alternatively within a single text, as in A25, which includes the words “hijxs” [instead of “hijos” for “children”] and “elles” [instead of “ellos” for “they”].

The ending *e* is, however, not exclusive of activist media. Two of the sampled texts from mainstream media *La Nación* and *Perfil* use it in direct quotes from sources and interviewees. One of these articles included the words “amigues” [instead of “amigos” for “friends”] in a quote by a source, while in the rest of the text, the journalist (J1) used the standard variety, “hijos” [children] when writing with her own voice. The ending *x* is also used in direct quotes from sources in three analyzed stories. This is particularly interesting, since the ending *x*, like the ending *\** and the @ symbol, cannot be orally pronounced in the Spanish language when positioned between two consonants.

**Inconsistency.** As illustrated above, there is a visible tendency for interviewees working at mainstream media to use standard varieties and non-disruptive ones, and for interviewees working at activist media to use the disruptive *e* and *x* more regularly. However, as also illustrated above, these general tendencies do not imply that there is consistency in journalists’ use of linguistic varieties. Especially, journalists who tend to use predominantly the first two types of linguistic varieties tend to combine and switch between them.

Two sampled stories written by J8 and published on the online portal of *La Voz del Interior* are an example of this. Both stories were about child sexual abuse and both were published on the same day. In the first one (A15), the word “niños” is used four times as a masculine generic to refer to boys and girls who are victims of sexual abuse. In the second one (A16), the author does not use the generic masculine at all. Instead, she uses the

expression “niños y niñas” three times, that is, duplicating the noun every time she refers to boys and girls who are victims of these crimes.

This lack of consistency is also present in sampled articles using disruptive varieties. In some cases, two, three, or four different varieties are combined in one same text. In an article by J12, the endings *e*, *x*, the duplication of words, and the generic masculine are used alternately, with expressions such as “todes” [instead of “todos” for “everyone”], “lxs chicxs” [instead of “los chicos” for “the kids”], “las y los estudiantes” [instead of “los estudiantes” for “the students”] and “guiados” [“guided” in standard form] (A24).

Besides all these practices concerning the grammatical linguistic dimension, the analysis of articles also shed light on the non-standard uses of language that journalists make concerning non-grammatical linguistic dimensions. On a lexical level, for example, the word *travesticidio*<sup>8</sup> which has not been accepted by RAE, was used in three sampled stories (A7, A22, and A31).

### **Self-conscious and deliberate language uses**

In combination with the analysis of stories, in-depth interviews provided important findings on how the use of linguistic varieties is experienced by journalists. Moreover, findings supported the idea that journalists’ language usage is not solely determined by external pressures from the organization they work at and their audience. Instead, interviewees’ assessments and choices for one variety or another appear to be filtered through their self-conscious considerations, individual beliefs and group discussions, which are, therefore, not irrelevant to the communicative situation.

The self-consciousness and individual considerations that journalists engage in when choosing the linguistic style in which they write are traceable in the comments from interviewees working at both small activist media and large mainstream media. Interviewees at the large mainstream newspapers, *La Nación* and *Clarín*, who tend to prefer the duplication of words in their writing, highlighted that their choices on which type of variety to use are made individually. Moreover, they acknowledged that the way in which they are using language might not be the same way in which their colleagues at the same organization are doing it. In addition, these journalists also assured that they use widely accepted linguistic

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<sup>8</sup> The term *travesticidio* refers to the murder of a transvestite person motivated by hatred (“Por primera vez”, 2018).

forms (duplication of words and indefinite collective nouns) with certain intentions in mind and with conscious attention during writing. When asked about the use of “el papá, la mamá” [instead of “los padres” for “the parents”] in one of her articles (A2), a journalist from *La Nación* explained:

I always try to mention everything with as much detail as possible so that you can visualize it well. In this case I'm sure I did it to get the mother in as well. And many times I do my best to show the woman there, or I put the woman first and then the man. I definitely do that and I do it consciously when I'm writing. Many times I guess that I might fail and write in a way that excludes the woman but when I have the possibility of being aware, for sure. In fact I can read you some of my articles in which it's, like, this one that you found, that I can tell you, ‘yes, I did this with that particular intention’. (J1)

As the quote above suggests, at large mainstream organizations, interviewees do not engage in linguistic practices as mere respondents to standardization pressures but, instead, as social actors who can deliberately control their language use (Spitzmüller, 2014). In the case of journalists working at activist media, where the presence of non-standard varieties seems to be even greater, interviewees also manifested having to take their own decisions and considerations about which type of linguistic variety to use in each specific case. As an illustration, an interviewee from *Presentes* mentioned that she tends to choose the *x*, almost exclusively, when talking about non-binary people. In a different direction, an interviewee from *Latfem* indicated that she frequently uses the ending *x* because it leaves unanswered the question of which gender she is referring to and, therefore, it simplifies discussions regarding male-transgender and feminist groups who reject the use of *e* and would rather use *o* or *a*, respectively<sup>9</sup>.

Moreover, interviewees from different types of media expressed that they are still undergoing the process of learning and deciding which is the best alternative for them. In general, they see it as a conscious decision in constant process and a challenge that, favorably, keeps them thinking about and evaluating alternatives as they communicate:

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<sup>9</sup> As described by interviewees, the use of the ending *e* is often rejected by transgender men who wish to be identified with the masculine variety (*o*) so that the linguistic gender matches their masculine gender identity. Similarly, rejections to the ending *e* are held by some feminist groups which consider it a perpetuation of the way generic masculine makes women invisible.

I think that's what's interesting about the language that's called inclusive language, that it's done in the moment, and that while you're talking and using it, it is making you think about why I'm going to use that letter. (J9)

Although this level of self-consciousness and reflection is distinguishable in the opinions of several interviewees, some journalists also expressed that their linguistic choices are often a result of their personal instinct and feelings. Female journalists specialized in gender topics, who alternate the use of *x* and *e* in their articles, commented that many times their choices are a product of their personal intuition and immediate beliefs on what they feel looks nicer or sounds better to them. In addition, journalists specializing in gender issues also mentioned experiencing negative feelings and discomfort when using a generic masculine which they feel does not represent themselves as women, it annoys them and hurts them, as the statement from a journalist at *Latfem* illustrates: “I can't write in totalizing masculine, not anymore, I can't do it, besides it doesn't come out, no... I can't do it. I mean, it hurts me” (J14).

While some of these journalists stated that the use of generic masculine has always made them feel uncomfortable, others offered an extended picture that links this discomfort to their work as gender specialists. In some cases, it was claimed, the discomfort with the use of generic masculine began to arise when, in their articles, they had to cite sources, experts and specialists from different fields, who were mostly but not exclusively women, and who would become invisible with the use of masculine as generic:

Because of the topics that I do, in general, specialists and experts are women. So I started to realize that maybe I would call eight people and they were all women and I wrote ‘los especialistas’ [the specialists] and I said ‘this doesn’t make sense’ ...

Maybe they were seven women and one guy and just because there was one guy it was ‘los’, you see? So then I said no, okay, ‘las y los’. (J3)

In other cases, similarly, journalists had to write stories in which the characters involved in the newsworthy event were men and women and journalists felt that they needed, in some way, to show that there had also been women playing a role in the events. These cases, interviewees’ sense of discomfort in telling the story in a standard way, and their belief that the discomfort could be resolved by using gender-inclusive varieties, were factors that led several journalists to question their linguistic practices.

Still, in some cases, individual beliefs and discomfort can also lead journalists to use standard language. Five journalists, two from mainstream newspapers *La Nación* and *La Voz del Interior* and three from feminist and LGBT+ supplements *Las 12* and *Soy*, mentioned that they have not yet fully incorporated non-standard varieties in their own speech and writing style. They admitted that using non-standard varieties sometimes feels artificial, uncomfortable, challenging and difficult to sustain in an entire text even though they consider it valuable and important. This was expressed even with more emphasis by two journalists who, in addition to writing, work in television and radio. Additionally, other journalists, admitted feeling uncomfortable with the use of certain non-standard varieties, like the ending *e*, because they consider it something associated to a younger generation than theirs and, therefore, would feel like they were “pretending to be young” (J1) if using it<sup>10</sup>.

Besides journalists’ awareness of the individual considerations in which they recurrently engage, editors from mainstream media *Clarín* and *Perfil* described specific situations in which the selection of words to avoid sexism was done as a result of group discussions. In the case of *Clarín*, a conversation developed in the newsroom while working on a collectively produced audiovisual story for women’s day. As the interviewee recalled, the story was based on interviews with nine women and one trans woman. This characteristic of their sources led the team of journalists to carry out a strategic “exercise” (J3) to avoid inaccurately headlining the text *interview with ten women*, to avoid writing *interview with ten people* because that would not have looked good from an aesthetic point of view, and to avoid using disruptive varieties. The result of this group discussion was a headline which bypassed the difficulty by only mentioning two human referents individually: “From aircraft mechanic to prison director: see what a day in their lives is like” (“De mecánica”, 2019).

However, across most media included in the sample, this type of decisions taken in a group and agreed manner were presented more as exceptions arising from specific situations than as a rule. Interviewees who work at *El Cohete a la Luna* and at *La Nación* expressed that they believe that, in general, news organizations do not hold regular discussions nor agreements regarding the use of standard and gender-inclusive varieties. According to J13, that lack of agreement is visible in the wide heterogeneity in which articles from each author

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that this journalist also acknowledged that she is in her early thirties and does not consider herself to be old. Still, she considers the ending *e* related to a younger generation than hers, although other journalists in the sample who often use the ending *e* are the same age or older than her.



are written on *El Cohete a la Luna* (some people write with *x*, some with *e*, etc.). Moreover, an external contributor at *La Nación* (J2), expressed that the lack of unified criteria at mainstream media might be a result of the lack of importance given to the matter in these organizations.

The circumstances appear to be rather different in feminist and LGBT+ media in which unified criteria regarding the use of non-standard varieties do exist and are known by their members, either explicitly or implicitly. In the case of the news agency *Presentes*, its director explained that they actively try to maintain a specific way of writing in all their articles even though many of them are written by external contributors allocated in different countries. As she described, editors give instructions to contributors on with which linguistic varieties they should write and then revise the texts because they are aware that not everyone knows how to use gender-inclusive language. The importance given by this journalist to the unification of criteria became even clearer when she was asked about her opinion on the inconsistency with which linguistic varieties seem to be used in many news outlets, and observed:

As it is under construction, sometimes we are untidy maybe... untidy<sup>11</sup> ... that is like something in which I correct to myself, like ‘are we going to talk with the *x*? then let's talk with the *x*’, but we can't drive people crazy either. I mean, if we are going to come to the agreement that we speak with *x*, then let's speak the whole story with *x*. You can [unintentionally] overlook it, because it's something we're not used to, so that's why you overlook it. But I don't want a story to have four types of inclusive language, I want it to have one. (J15)

In other activist media there is also agreement among the staff on the use of the non-standard *x*. In the case of the feminist news portal *Latfem*, this agreement is considered to be implicit and something all staff members have incorporated in their writing style as a result of being friends with each other and members of the same activist groups. In regards to the writing style used by external contributors, interviewees from *Latfem* acknowledged that they do not try to unify the linguistic criteria among their texts, at all. They explained that external

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<sup>11</sup> As a clear illustration of what the interviewee was explaining, the first time, the Spanish word for “untidy”, *desprolijos*, was said using the masculine morpheme *o* as generic, and in the second time the interviewee corrected herself and said the word using the non-standard *e*: *desprolijes*.

contributors from other countries are experiencing different stages of activist consciousness and, therefore, their own considerations when writing should be respected.

Although the variety of uses and considerations across media, at first instance, seems inexplicably inconsistent, it may be possible to uncover some of the factors producing it. Understanding each journalist's intentions and views on the usefulness of non-standard language can provide a better understanding of their practices than merely focusing on the pressures from external structures. In other words, knowing what they believe these varieties are for might explain what motivates them to use one type or another.

### **The usefulness of non-standard linguistic varieties**

Interviews did not only reveal that journalists engage in their linguistic practices as conscious agents but also that they have different perceptions of what non-standard varieties can be useful for. The examination of interviewees' views on the different types of varieties suggested that each journalist might have different reasons for deviating from the norm and that these reasons can lead to different forms of using language.

**Bypassing sexism through widely accepted varieties.** Interviewees who work at mainstream media, like *Clarín*, *La Voz del Interior*, *La Nación* and *Perfil*, tend to use the generic masculine in their articles more often than those at activist media. However, as it was mentioned above, they sometimes consciously rely on certain non-standard varieties to fulfill their intentions. As interviews suggested, these journalists regularly avoid the generic masculine by duplicating words in feminine and masculine and by using indefinite collective nouns. Both alternatives are positively valued by journalists as useful mechanisms and considered accepted at a social level. Nevertheless, the duplication of words has been judged as unnecessary by the RAE and interviewees themselves considered it repetitive and, therefore, uncomfortable for reading, especially in the online social media environment in which, they think, messages need to be short.

Despite those disadvantages, both the duplication of words and the use of indefinite nouns are considered, by interviewees, useful ways out from androcentric language. Moreover, interviewees at mainstream media believe that the duplication of words is a good strategy for making women visible, being as gender-equal as possible and “a way for everyone to feel included” (J3). However, as it was mentioned above, this is argued by activists who believe that the duplication of words maintains binary language and leaves non-binary people outside of the discourse. Without opposing that view, some journalists

explained that the wish to make women visible in stories and mentioning them, is what motivates them to use the duplication of words.

Being aware of the disadvantages of this duplication, several mainstream newspapers are suggesting the use of indefinite collective nouns to their staff, as an interviewee illustrated:

At the newspaper [*La Voz del Interior*], for the time being, it is being suggested that we start making the most generic references possible by avoiding these very masculine generics. To say *the citizenship* [la ciudadanía] instead of *the Cordovan* [los cordobeses], and forms like that, which bypass the discussion a bit. (J8)

Furthermore, the use of these nouns is considered a virtuous use of language by several interviewees. The gender-ombudsperson at *Perfil*, who used the indefinite noun “la infancia” [the childhood], instead of the Spanish word for *children* twice in one of the sampled stories, acknowledged that this variety is a good solution to “bring together any of the identities that may be being reflected” (J6). However, she also acknowledged that this linguistic usage is more complex than others and requires a certain mastery of linguistics. Similarly, J8 agreed that this variety involves “making a more creative use of what already exists”.

According to some interviewees, widely accepted varieties could be effective strategies to achieve several aims: not breaking the rules of language, avoiding binarism, and at the same time, bypassing the discussions concerning linguistic sexism. Although valuable, these motivations for using the massively accepted varieties have their limits. As interviewees suggested, varieties which avoid androcentric language while bypassing the discussion are not useful for achieving other kinds of intentions, in other words: “without that shock of effect the discussions that are important to give do not take place” (J8).

**Making sexism explicit through disruptive varieties.** Without disregarding the importance of including people in the discourse, making women visible, and avoiding linguistic androcentrism, several interviewees highlighted another type of reason for using non-standard varieties. According to interviewees who work mostly, but not only, at activist media certain varieties of non-standard language can serve as a trigger to promote debates, and to raise awareness of structural asymmetries and unequal power relations. As interviewees suggested, this is specifically the case of linguistic varieties which are less

accepted at a massive level and which they referred to as *disruptive varieties*, the endings *x* and *e*:

It is good to use forms that bypass the sexist connotation of language, it is great, but a form that bypasses it does not make it manifest. I think the process of making it manifest is good, to explain why there are people who don't feel included when we talk about masculine generics or feminine generics, why there are people who don't fit in there, who feel they don't fit in, and why there's a need for all of us to be included in these forms. And that doesn't happen with forms that bypass it. That happens with disruptive things, that generate pros, cons, anger, 'language is being destroyed'. (J8)

Interestingly, journalists who use and those who do not use these disruptive forms agreed that using a language variety which is not conventional can stand out and, thereby, make certain things visible. In the case of *x* and *e*, interviewees believe that these forms can expose the fact that society is not binary, that there are multiple diversities, people who do not feel included in standard language nor in society, and who are discriminated against in multiple ways. When asked about the use of the word "nosotrxs" (J6) [instead of "nosotros" for "we"] in one of her articles and the choice for the disruptive ending *x*, the gender-ombudsperson at *Perfil* explained:

I was precisely pointing out that there was a flaw in the gender lens. So I disturbed a little bit with the *x*. I compliment him [a male colleague from the same newspaper] on using a resource that doesn't involve violating language [indefinite collective noun] but I do violate it because what I want to say demands a call for attention on language, on the forms of inclusion. (J6)

As this shows, the usefulness attributed to disruptive forms does not end in visibilizing diverse subjectivities and their disadvantaged realities. By making these exclusions visible, users of disruptive varieties also aim at increasing readers' awareness of an existing sociocultural problem and, therefore, at simulating debates. Moreover, the debates which these varieties intend to spark are not exclusively related to the existence of non-binary groups and their struggles but, more broadly, to the fact that non-standard language, itself, is considered incorrect according to the rules of "a colonialist, patriarchal, authoritarian and binary culture" (J12). In this line, those journalists who define themselves as activist-journalists, believe disruptive varieties can serve as a tool to interrogate and denounce the hegemonic patriarchal ideology on which, they think, their language and culture are based. As the same gender-ombudsperson at *Perfil* explains:

Language has power relations, they are made visible and they are exercised. You only need to look at the Real Academia Española [RAE] and its indications to see that on the one hand, language reflects power relations and on the other hand, the academies exercise power and of course the editors of newspapers and the owners of media and the directors of schools when they forbid the use of inclusive language ... what they are doing is exercising power. (J6)

Correspondingly, disruptive varieties are considered a way to make explicit the relations of domination and unequal power relations which have always been naturalized as part of standard language. Consequently, for journalists with this opinion, using disruptive varieties is more than just a way to include people. Rather, it is also a political action, which marks an ideological stance critical of the dominant social order. Following this perspective, a journalist at *Latfem* described the disruptive ending *x*:

If you put an *x* you are expressing a somewhat rebellious political stance. I mean, somewhat critical of the social order. In addition to well, trying to be egalitarian, representative, not discriminating, but the most important thing to me is that: Well, if I put an *x* it's because I want you to be surprised by the *x*, annoyed by the *x*. So it's good when they say 'no, but you can't pronounce it', well, you can't pronounce it, it doesn't matter. It's great because when you're talking you're going to be like 'oh, and this word I can't pronounce'. Okay. Well, notice, never in the history of humanity, of the Spanish language at least, words were invented to designate this mixed or diverse human group, I mean, there was only... there was... that patriarchy, right?. (J13)

Understanding the perspectives of journalists who consider the use of gender-inclusive language to be a political action helps to understand, not only why some choose disruptive varieties instead of bypassing ones, but also how journalists explain the emergence of resistance and opposition. Both in interviews with those journalists who identify themselves as activist-journalists and in discussions during the Gender Inclusive Language Conference, resistance against gender-inclusive language from certain sectors of society was linked to the existing power relations that these varieties make explicit and to the people in power positions who see, in this language, a threat. From the perspective of activist-journalists, complaints are not against language use nor due to the fear that *language is being destroyed* but against what that language makes explicit.

**Making sense of inconsistency.** The recognition of the usefulness of some non-standard varieties as a trigger for debate and reflection, allows the comprehension of the great inconsistency with which they are currently being used. While some scholars, as stated in the introduction, have found no explanation for the variability present even within one same article of a particular journalist (Álvarez de Miranda, 2018), observing disruptive varieties from journalists' points of view might lead to considering inconsistency as something desirable.

According to journalists working at feminist and gender-diversity media, the lack of consistency in the use of gender-inclusive varieties is a distinctive feature of this language which contributes to the achievement of its objectives. As they explained, the fact that the use of gender-inclusive language is not regulated nor guided by an unified criteria, pushes writers of a text to constantly think and consciously reflect on how they are calling people portrayed in their texts, and why would they choose one symbol or another. Moreover, interviewees believe that the constant alternation between different varieties in a text, can cause more surprise and discomfort to readers and, therefore, draw more attention, facilitating reflection and debate. A comment from an external contributor at the gender-inclusive supplement *Soy* illustrates this:

In principle, the possibility that it will continue bothering. It's what I told you about using it or not using it, like randomly, saying and not saying, *x* sometimes and sometimes *e*, and sometimes *i*, and sometimes *a* and *o* ... I don't know if that isn't its current situation and its current *raison d'être*, which is to disturb, isn't it? like, questioning, which is what interests me the most, what it interrogates. In other words, what it points out, which is why I was telling you, what it points out is exclusion. More than proposing an inclusion, for me, what it is doing is pointing out exclusions. (J11)

For the same reasons, journalists who value positively the inconsistent usage of varieties, considered that the regulation and standardization of gender-inclusive language might not be a desired outcome in the near future. Activist-journalists stated that, for them, these types of language are not aimed to be normalized nor to have their own grammar rules:

Gender-inclusive language does not seek to normalize itself, it does not seek to achieve its own grammar. I mean, it's permanently fluid ... it's in constant revision of itself. So, one can be using it one way or another, or even using it and then not using it

in the same conversation, and using it back, and that is not incorrect ... it's characteristic of the use of gender-inclusive language. (J14)

Moreover, these language changes are seen positively by those interviewees for attempting against the traditional view of language as something solemn and untouchable. Correspondingly, some activist-journalists consider that the usage of non-standard varieties should be done in an experimental and ludic manner. Playing with language, making mistakes, learning by trial and error, and changing one's linguistic preferences, is considered positive because it shows that the things language refers to, in reality, are permanently changing and that one needs to constantly keep learning and re-adapting their language to the occurring social changes:

I don't speak all the time with the *e* ... I even allow myself to make jokes with the *e*, because we shouldn't be afraid of language, and also because language has to do with a social energy that is all the time in motion ... The funny thing is when we ourselves can laugh and play with this, because it's also part of the same thing. Who said the language...? ... I think that until now there was a very solemn vision of language, and that right now we say, well, the language is also... I mean, it's not just for solemnity. (J15)

Remarkably and, contrary to the preliminary ideas one might have about the use of these varieties, the uncertainty many journalists said they had about what will happen with this language in the future can also be explained by their rejection to standardization. In other words, the use of these varieties in the future is not only unknown but also, not necessarily an aim. In the first place, journalists believe that the use of non-standard language is a political intervention in the present which might not work as such in the future but which might still have other effects in the times to come, as the editor of *Soy* suggests:

What I do believe is happening and will continue to happen is that there will remain a mark of annoyance, of discomfort. Will I use the *e* in the future? Is that ideal? I don't know, I don't know. I don't know if it is ideal either, I'm not convinced. But yes, I am convinced that language will never cease to have a mark of discomfort regarding the erasure of identities. I don't think... if the *e* is not going to be used, I don't think it will still be so easy to speak everything in masculine. I don't think so, it won't be possible. And that's a very important progress. (J9)

In second place, activist-journalists at *Latfem* also questioned the desirability of inclusive language being installed in society and used on a massive scale. According to them, that could be a detrimental outcome for feminist and anti-patriarchal movements, for two reasons. First, because it could happen that, when used on a massive scale, the use of disruptive varieties ceases to be disruptive and becomes merely a superficial attempt at showing respect towards minorities, without any argumentation and analysis. Second, because if people in positions of power began to use it, its value as a tool for denouncing power structures would be inevitably undermined.

It is important to note, in this regard, that the views of feminist journalists interviewed may be different, and even opposed, to those of other sectors of activism and users of non-standard varieties. According to the questions and remarks of participants at the Gender Inclusive Language Conference, some linguists and activists are actually aiming at creating a consensus, developing unified criteria and general guidelines on how to use gender-inclusive varieties in an homogeneous way and amplifying its use to the rest of society.

Moreover, these insights regarding the unwillingness to install non-standard language on a massive scale should not be interpreted as common to all linguistic expressions used by journalists. As several interviewees recalled, the expressions *femicidio* and *travesticidio* also emerged from activism. Once journalists discovered and understood the term, it began to be used in news articles with the aim of being installed in the media, law, and society. As a member of PAR<sup>12</sup> described during the Gender Inclusive Language Conference, she and her colleagues used to visit newsrooms to explain journalists why it was important to use these terms. In this case, unlike the use of non-standard varieties to generate debate, journalists believed that the massive use of these words could have immediate material effects. On the one hand, different media and activist groups could count the amount of these crimes in an equivalent way. On the other hand, the expression could be taken into account to distinguish this type of crimes from others, in legal precedents.

### **Journalistic values and the choice for standard language**

Either as a way to bypass linguistic androcentrism, to raise awareness of sexism as a structural problem, or both, most interviewees emphasized the usefulness of non-standard

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<sup>12</sup> PAR stands for the Spanish name of the organization Argentine Journalists on Network for a Non-Sexist Communication [Periodistas de Argentina en red por una comunicación no sexista]



varieties. Still, the analysis of sampled stories revealed that all interviewees have used the generic masculine, at least once, in their texts. As stated above, interviewees working at all types of media involve their self-conscious considerations when determining their linguistic choices. Therefore, these results suggest that journalists also have meaningful reasons for deliberately attaching to the standard variety.

Not only in the case of mainstream media but also in activist media from which audiences “expect the x” (J14) and other non-standard varieties, some of the classic values from journalism, to which research has pointed out in the past, appear to be taken into account and to influence interviewees’ choice for the standard variety. Among the motivations which lead journalists to use standard language, the prioritization of ease of comprehension and readability is sometimes privileged over journalists’ and audiences’ inclinations for non-standard varieties:

Of course, the masculine universal made me uncomfortable when writing, but when you write in a newspaper, when you speak at a microphone, you also have to make a pleasant use of what you are- of how you write, so that it doesn't become tedious.  
(J12)

Similarly, the briefness of texts is highly valued by interviewees working at mainstream media who despite preferring the duplication of nouns, sometimes decide to use the standard language. This is especially the case when writing headlines, as the gender editor at *Clarín* explained: “the headline has to be short, very concise and you can't put *las y los abogados* [the lawyers] in the headline” (J3). However, it is important to underline that the occasional privilege of these journalistic values (ease of comprehension, readability, and briefness) is not a mere result of something imposed or apprehended from the news-internal community. Instead, interviewees perceive it as a challenge that they undertake when writing a text, with the aim of conveying content that is non-superficial while making sure that each reader who comes across the article reads it until the end.

In this sense, pressures from new digital media formats seem to stimulate additional journalistic values in relation to language. Interviewees are especially aware that today, as audiences consume news digitally in diverse places and without too much attention, news need to be easy to read even with just “quick glances” (J10). Furthermore, the need to ensure that the audience reads the text results in another reason why journalists sometimes strategically choose to use standard language, which may not have been taken into account by older studies. Particularly in the case of online news portals, editors seem to be aware of the negative impact that the use of non-standard varieties could have on the accessibility of

articles through online search engines. According to the director at *Presentes*, whose articles are predominantly written with the non-standard *x*, there is a deliberate intention from her and her co-editor to keep non-standard varieties out of headlines, to prevent this from going against search engine optimization and impeding potential audiences from finding the article. As a result, both newer and older journalistic values lead journalists at activist media to occasionally and strategically use standard language.

### **The will to change reality and the choice for standard language**

Although previous research suggests that the use of non-standard varieties can be seen as a sign of commitment with the abolition of structural inequalities (Suardiaz, 2002), two interviewees questioned the relevance of linguistic change for real action on social reality. These journalists, who are actively involved in feminism and LGBT+ activism, mentioned that those same aims that disruptive varieties seek to achieve, such as making inequalities visible and stimulating debates on structural injustices, can be accomplished through other tools and actions besides non-standard language. According to them, writing stories about transgender, non-binary people, other gender-minorities and their struggles can already be seen as a way to promote inclusion, denounce exclusion and demand equal rights. For these journalists who see language change as one more alternative among many other strategies which they are already using, linguistic change is not imperative, as the producer of a gender-diversity radio program justified on the non-use of gender-inclusive language:

We're doing all sorts of things, so it's not like on top of that I need to be thinking in inclusive language all the time to... no. I'm doing all sorts of things for diversity, so the truth is that... I don't know, I mean.. We do all sorts of things. (J11)

Moreover, a journalist at *Infobae* who specializes in writing stories about transgender people, following the same line of thought, even suggested that other available strategies for encouraging discussions about the situation of LGBT+ communities, such as writing stories about their struggles, might even be more effective than language change which can be interpreted as a fake superficial action. As a matter of fact, this interviewee explained that one of the main reasons why she does not use gender-inclusive language in her articles is because she has learned from LGBT+ activists that language change can be seen as a tool which people who are not suffering their struggles use to self-gratify and feel they are doing something positive, while in essence, they are doing nothing to change reality:

When this woman [an LGBT+ activist] told me about the issue of trans activism and everything we weren't doing I said, okay, instead of using the e, I'm going to keep writing stories about trans people, I'm going to go talk to Vidal [Governor of Buenos Aires] to see what happens with the work quota, I'm going to go in the other direction. And then, like, I solved my gender activism like that. (J4)

### **Type of media and the role of journalists**

Conversations about the relation between language change and changes in social phenomena were held with all interviewees. During these, their opinions tended to be oriented to either one or another of two perspectives. While interviewees working at large mainstream media expressed that they can only introduce linguistic changes in their discourse once these are massively installed as a part of the wide social reality, interviewees working at activist media defined themselves as setters of the social agenda and promoters of changes:

Mainstream media tend to go the other way around, they run after the agenda, don't they? I mean, once abortion becomes an important issue, then they go and look for it, but I think that as feminist journalists our role is to always be doing the opposite, right? setting, running ahead of what the mainstream media agenda dares to say, which is always too little. (J2)

**The voice of minorities and activists.** On one hand, there are interviewees who do not believe that they have to wait for social phenomena to be massively accepted in order to incorporate it in their discourse. On the contrary, these journalists stated that their role as communicators is precisely to promote positive social changes. Journalists who positioned themselves in this perspective tend to consider journalism a political activity and, that among its most important tasks are those of: promoting debates and discussions, removing certain realities from the shadows and making them visible, presenting other possible points of view to readers, visualizing the struggles and stories of minorities, “amplifying their voices” (J12) and the demands of activists. This was mainly the case of interviewees working at activist media, besides the journalist at *Infobae*. Interviewees who consider that “communicating is a political activity” (J15), believe that there are ideological aims involved when choosing how to tell stories, how to explain things and what to call people. Moreover, their opinions imply that there is no need to wait for gender-inclusive language to be installed in society because, as they see it, these varieties are already out there, being used.

It is likely that there is a difference not only between journalists who wait for social phenomena to occur and those who promote it, but also, between those who validate the voices of minorities and activists, and those who do not do it as much. Interviewees who perceived their role as a political activity believe that their position allows them to amplify the voices of gender minorities, and to stimulate debates among the rest of society, even if that means disrupting the audience: “I think now it's more like: Well, let's tell the people who are comfortable, everything that these people who are awakening, want to tell them. And if it bothers you, I'm sorry, look for something else” (J4). Furthermore, interviewees acknowledged that amplifying the voice of minorities can be responded negatively or positively by audiences depending on the type of media where journalists work at:

I guess the reader of *Página* [12] is more friendly to this agenda because of the profile of the newspaper which is a newspaper with a clear agenda for human rights, diversity, equality, etcetera, etcetera. Perhaps it would be more interesting to see the comments [from the audience] in newspapers like *La Nación*. (J12)

**The voice of *society* and the editorial line.** On the other side, interviewees working at mainstream newspapers such as *Clarín* and *La Nación* tend to interpret their journalistic role as a position of attentiveness to the things and issues that take place on a social level, once they have already been installed in the public agenda, in order to capture reality and transmit it in their news. As some interviewees working at mainstream media expressed, news media tend to go behind the pace of social phenomena and capture it once it has already taken place in the larger society:

Media often go after it. You go and when you notice a phenomenon you say okay, done, it can't be avoided. You don't propagate it, you don't propose it, you don't start it, but once it happened, you take it. (J3)

An analogous perspective, which could be interpreted as an objectivist view of journalism, grounded on the belief that there are things outside that can be captured and transmitted, is also embodied in the perception of interviewees working at mainstream media regarding sociolinguistic change. According to interviewees from *Clarín*, *La Nación*, *Perfil* and *La Voz del Interior*, journalists –like them– working at mainstream media cannot incorporate non-standard language in their discourse until these innovations become massively installed and recognized at a broader social level: “It's like something that you take for granted that it's not... that it isn't yet applied because it's not recognized as a form of writing” (J8).

Such insights suggest that journalists at mainstream media generally wait for language change to occur, become mainstream and accepted by the majority of society in order to incorporate it in their discourse. However, an experience described by a former employee at *Clarín* indicates that this is not always the case and that there might be differences between mainstream media's approach to some linguistic changes and others. As the interviewee expressed, the term *motochorro*, nowadays popular and massively used in Argentina to refer to thieves who commit their crimes while riding motorbikes, was a deliberately chosen expression and promoted from newsroom decisions to describe specific kinds of newsworthy events. What differentiates that linguistic change which was promoted from the newsroom, from others which are not yet recognized as usable (such as disruptive gender-inclusive varieties), might be that the incorporation of the word *motochorro* had a descriptive aim and not a political-ideological connotation, like the endings *x* and *e*.

In fact, interviewees described certain news organizations, such as *La Nación*, as having a rather conservative ideological and editorial line which would, according to them, preclude journalist' possibilities of using the disruptive varieties of gender-inclusive language. Considering that these current sociolinguistic changes are intrinsically related to social movements fighting for gender equality and equal rights for the LGBT+ community, a conservative newspaper will not be likely to incorporate these varieties "because of the shareholding composition of who owns it and their ideology on the subject" (J5). Although interviewees working at activist media recognized that, according to them, all media organizations respond to specific interests and ideologies, *La Nación* was reiteratively used as an example of how conservative media might have a distinctive interest in preserving the status quo due to the ideology of its owners.

From the perspective of interviewees who have worked or are currently working at *La Nación* and other mainstream media, there is a need to accept certain directions and adapt to editorial lines when being an employee at a large mainstream newspaper. Moreover, those newspaper's editorial decisions and writing styles seem to be strongly ingrained in journalists' writing practice:

The identity of the medium, yes. It's something you have to respect because it's the place you work for. And that's what they teach you - that is, when you come in and - I read the newspaper, this newspaper, every day, since ten years ago and also since before, and I know how people write here, and I think it would be very hard for me to write in another way if I left one day. (J1)

Besides the mere respect for editorial decisions, two other factors were mentioned by interviewees as influencing journalists' attachment to the conventional writing style of the newspaper. First, it was suggested that journalists at mainstream media might choose not to use disruptive linguistic varieties, in their articles nor in internal communications, due to fear of being judged by their colleagues:

I don't dare to write 'estimades' [Instead of "estimados" for "dear"] or with the x because ... when I have to send them [emails to colleagues] I feel like I'm talking to people who don't understand that, and can judge me. It's like imposing yourself in a way that's not out there in the workplace, in the newspaper where I work, I take care of that - which is - it shouldn't be like that, but maybe I'm kind of scared. So I keep the usual rules. (J1)

Second, the precarious employment situation of journalists in Argentina was pointed as a factor leading to self-censorship and attachment to the ideological boundaries of each newspaper, not only at mainstream media but at all kinds of news organizations: "With today's working conditions, every journalist has a very high self-censorship. In other words, they take care of themselves before screwing up and running the risk of getting fired" (J7).

Nevertheless, interviews suggested that even in those cases where the ideological voices of the organization and its owners seem to be highly listened to, some interviewees acknowledged that they are very mindful of activists' demands and of the influence that activism has on them. As a journalist working at *La Nación* expressed, editorial decisions are taken by the organization's leaders but staff members can have an impact on those decisions and activists can have an impact on staff members. In fact, the interviewee illustrated this idea by describing the great admiration and influence she once got from a group of feminist activists while writing an article about them. Although journalists working at mainstream media show strong attachment to editorial decisions, they also use non-standard varieties, like the duplication of words, which are not accepted by the RAE, as it was illustrated by the analysis of texts. It is highly likely that these contacts with activists are influencing journalists to find ways to be more inclusive in their language without compromising their respect to organizational writing styles and guidelines. In other words, there appear to be certain gaps, even at organizations with strong standardization pressures, which journalists who are attentive to activism perceive as margins for action to avoid the standard.

**Type of organizational structure.** Among interviewees working at both mainstream and non-mainstream media, the openness of a newspaper towards the introduction of non-

standard varieties was also linked to the type of structure of each news organization. Although literature has pointed out to the predominant positions that men have occupied in social fields as a factor perpetuating the linguistic male-as-norm rule (Spender, 1980), interviews implied that the gender of members at news organizations might not be the most relevant factor hindering the use of non-standard language.

Interviewees working at both types of media acknowledged that “there are a lot of male journalists with a gender perspective” (J8) and that the gender of people occupying decision-making positions at news organizations does not necessarily impact journalists’ use of one linguistic variety or another. Instead, interviewees working at *Latfem*, *La Nación*, *Clarín* and *Página 12* indicated that a news organization with more participation of younger staff is more likely to accept the incorporation of non-standard varieties in its journalists’ texts:

This is a completely generational discussion ... journalists who work at conservative media but are young tend to have another communication ... the gap today is very generational ... among people who essentially are not so many years older ... to be 30, to be 45, there is not so much difference, there should not be much difference, and there is a lot. (J2)

Age of decision-makers at news organizations as a variable partially determining the linguistic styles in news texts, opens up space for potential change in how media organizations approach the introduction of non-standard varieties in the future. According to interviewees, if young journalists currently occupying lower positions at media organizations, become editors and chiefs of sections in the future, it is possible that non-standard varieties become more accepted and predominant in news language. However, interviewees recognized that this change might be particularly difficult to happen in large mainstream media like *La Nación* and *Clarín* in which job rotation is very low. As it was explained by interviewees, in these organizations: “the same people have been making decisions for thirty years” (J11), and this is not likely to change in the near future due to the negative economic situation of the country and the news industry.

### **Where things are learned: Official socialization practices**

As mentioned above, particularly in the case of large mainstream media, each newspaper's writing and editorial style appear to be solidly rooted in journalists’ writing practice. In this respect, the opinions of few interviewees about the influence of linguistic requirements from the newspaper on their linguistic choices are consistent with Cotter’s

(2010) notion of journalistic routines and socialization pressures from the organization as factors determining particular linguistic styles. However, findings from the interviews suggest that these pressures are not equally present nor strong at all news organizations and that, in many cases, official socialization practices are less strict and less determinant of journalists' language than what literature suggests.

Only two interviewees emphasized the important role of style guides and proofreaders. When describing the particularities of *Perfil*, an interviewee stated “We still have proofreaders which is a total rarity ... we are still gradually maintaining that excellence” (J5). Similarly, a journalist working at *La Nación* also described positively the importance given to style guides at the newspaper:

There are matters of style ... and you cannot go against that because the newspaper is not yours and you are an employee and you were hired ... you have to respect the style guide. ... it is good that it is like that, and I respect it ... We are very insisted on that. But *La Nación* is ... let's say, very attached to the linguistic rules and style ... But in other media it happens that it [the style guide] is not so much respected, here it is. (J1)

In line with the final comments from that quote, most interviewees from other mainstream and non-mainstream media acknowledged that in most news organizations style guides are not used, either because they are not updated: “they are extremely old and are not used” (J3) or because they do not exist: “the style guides are no longer in use. At least *Página* [12] doesn't have it” (J12). Additionally, when explaining this lack of official standards for writing, the same interviewee attributed it to the impact of the negative economic situation of news media in Argentina:

Sometimes there's a lot of fantasy about how people work in the media. I can talk about the place where I work and we are quite in a position of precarity, and each person does what they can and many mistakes are made because we are very few and we are increasingly flexibilized. (J12)

Consistently, interviewees working at *La Voz del Interior* and at *Perfil* explained that productivity pressures and the speed with which they are asked to write stories, also determine the level at which it is easier or more difficult for journalists to incorporate non-standard varieties in a text. Especially at mainstream media, interviewees explained that when writing articles for online news portals, the times and the hustle which they work with, do not allow instances of reflection and search for alternatives that are inclusive and, at the same time, respectful of the newspaper writing style. As a result, they explained, it is likely that,



when writing texts for online news portals of mainstream media, which have to be written in less time, the standard variety is more used by them than the non-standard.

The impact of the economic situation of news media on the lack of official standardization practices was also mentioned by interviewees when discussing the recruitment of external contributors. As it was mentioned before, interviewees from activist portal *Latfem* explained that they do not edit the linguistic varieties used by external contributors, who sporadically write articles, because they believe they need to respect the stage of consciousness each contributor has regarding gender-inclusive language. Yet, the diversity in writing styles that the hiring of external contributors produces was also mentioned by interviewees working at mainstream media:

The press is sustained by other resources and you cannot condition those resources telling them what the rules of publication are, which means, to whom collaborates certain freedoms are given. So it could be that in a publication you find things that are a little arbitrary, I mean, how did this come out one day, and this other thing came out another day? and what is it that gives it congruence? what gives it congruence is that they are poor, and that people who work for free do what they want [external contributors], because if they are told - if they put conditions on them they don't collaborate. So, sometimes ... we look for some theoretical reasons and at this moment I believe that the material explanations are a good part of the reasons why certain things happen. (J6)

In contrast to the ideas from previous studies which suggest that organizational routines, rules and scripts influence journalists and the texts they produce (Cotter, 2010), insights from the interviews indicate that, if weakened by economic crises, official socialization practices might not be so impactful.

However, even at organizations in which all of the above mentioned socialization processes seem to be weak, the role given to editors as “institutional gatekeepers” (Peterson, 2003, p. 182) seems to be influential, with only a few exceptions. As it was mentioned before, editors at *Presentes* who are willing to unify the usage of disruptive varieties, edit articles by changing the generic masculine *o* to their preferred non-standard variety, making sure that their, sometimes implicit, language policies are maintained. For another interviewee, who regularly uses disruptive varieties in the feminist supplement *Las 12*, editors from the main section of the newspaper, *Página 12*, are seen as deserving obedience: “I was not able to put the *x*, for example, or the @ ... Because my editor told me not to ... there was a decision. What was I going to discuss? Well, no, that's fine” (J12).

Moreover, the role of editors is also considered important by interviewees working at the gender-diversity supplement *Soy* in which, interviewees affirmed, the editor always gives them total freedom to write in their own preferred linguistic variety. When discussing this approach with the editor at *Soy* she explained that she feels she is not in a position to set standards to journalists at the supplement because they are all members of gender-minorities and activists themselves. As she sees it, journalists at *Soy* know more about gender-diversity topics than her, and have a deep understanding of the issue. As a result, she can only learn from them: “The people who write in *Soy* are people who *are*<sup>13</sup>[emphasis added]. I can learn, but there is nothing for me to discuss” (J9).

### **Where things are learned: Journalists’ contact with activism**

The attitude of openness to learning from members of gender-minorities and activists is not an exclusive characteristic of the editor at *Soy*. There are, among interviewees, other journalists who also recognize that their contact with feminist and LGBT+ activists enables them to learn new possible forms of expression and to incorporate new linguistic varieties. This is especially the case among those interviewees who are also members of activist groups and, therefore, belong to other social organizations and collective identities besides the journalistic one. As an interviewee who is member of several activist groups explained, her belonging to these communities and her relationship with fellow activists, has influenced her writing style in specific ways:

It took some time for the *e* to emerge. Because if not, you had to say ‘ellos, ellas, ellxs’... or I don't know... ‘ellas y ellos’ the whole time. Until I heard a trans comrade at a meeting, it was a trans masculinity talking with the letter *e*, using all the plurals with the *e*, and I said ‘ahh! this is the thing’... You learn from your comrades, from militancy. That's when the *e* came in. (J10)

On a similar note, the director of the news portal *Latfem* in which the *x* is used in most articles, stated that if in a meeting with feminist activists they would discuss and jointly decide to start using another symbol, then she would start using it and that would start to clash with her discourse in other spaces, including the media. The influence of activists and their language on journalists’ linguistic practices is also visible in the non-grammatical

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<sup>13</sup> The interviewee used a clever wordplay combining the name of the supplement *Soy*, which in Spanish means *I am* with the reference to how journalists of that supplement *are*.

linguistic dimensions, as the use of the term *travesticidio* illustrates. According to interviewees, this linguistic variation, made on a lexical level, began to appear in news texts in 2018. Although literature suggests that language users cannot deliberately alter language (Álvarez de Miranda, 2018), interviewees expressed that this term, as well as *femicidio* [femicide], are political expressions consciously “introduced by activists” (J4). Moreover, they explained that journalists writing LGBT+ stories learned the term from activists and deliberately started using it to define a specific kind of crimes:

I knew the term because I do these articles on diversity, it's a term that they put on the flags, and stuff, but it wasn't - I incorporated it because when you start getting into those worlds, little by little, at least I do, you start bringing in new words and you start installing or explaining them. (J4)

As this shows, each journalist's writing style does not always succumb to the standard requirements and routines of the organization. Instead, and especially in the case of activist media, the other discourse communities to which journalists belong and the people they relate with, influence their choice for particular linguistic practices.

Although the combination of journalism with activism can be seen as a result of journalists' perception of their role as a political activity, some interviewees acknowledged that certain structural factors might be also influencing this blend. Some journalists indicated that young feminist journalists combine their work with other activities at several organizations because work is currently very scarce in Argentina, especially for journalists. Moreover, the emergence of multiple activist media in the past years was also, partly, explained as a result of the bad economic situation of news media. As interviewees described, since the change of government in 2015, many human rights-oriented female communicators working in public media organizations were dismissed. Therefore, their unemployment and their will to continue exercising communication as a human right, were factors that facilitated the emergence of feminist and LGBT+ activist media, as a journalist at *Latfem* illustrated: “*Latfem* is a media outlet that arises also from the crisis ... We lost our jobs that summer, between 2015 and 2016, we began to think and plan things, and that's where the idea of *Latfem* came from” (J14).

Still, there are also journalists working at mainstream media who identify themselves as activists. Interviewees belonging to this group, like a journalist at *La Voz del Interior* who is a member of activist group Ni Una Menos, suggested that belonging to these communities allows them to have knowledge of the issues that are being discussed within them, which they can then use as background information for their articles. Moreover, journalists who belong

to activist groups as well as those who do not but work as specialists in gender issues, stated that these positions provide them with close contact with activists, feminists, and LGBT+ people, either as peers or as their sources.

In all cases, even journalists who do not directly participate in activist spaces but who regularly interview activists and constitute minorities as sources, interviewees said they are aware of the political and strategic use of language that activists are doing. In this regard, interviewees expressed that as journalists, having some understanding on gender perspective, allows them to be more attentive to activists' and minorities' language usage, to be willing to ask them for explanations, to learn from them and to explain those insights in their articles. According to interviewees who are gender-specialists, when they gain this knowledge from activists and understand which terms they choose to self-identify, they can further use and explain these expressions in their articles, seeking to increase readers' comprehension towards activism:

Activisms are making a super-interesting use of language and if we journalists can take it, and learn, and ask them, and in the article give all those explanations ... Well, let's ask them, who are doing activism, who are reading theory, okay, why *lesbians* separated from *women*? Why *trans* separated from *transvestites*? and then you explain it in the article and from there you start learning. (J4)

### **Unofficial socialization dynamics and the role of gender-specialists**

It is worth observing, however, that within non-activist news media (mainstream media and *El Cohete a la Luna*, in the sample) not all journalists belong to feminist and LGBT+ activist groups nor specialize in writing about feminist and LGBT+ issues. In fact, interviewees working at non-activist media, who specialize in these topics, described that they are nearly the only ones at their organizations, or with few other colleagues in some cases, who know how to take a gender perspective in the way they write, as an editor at *Perfil* illustrated:

There are three of us who work on this together, we consult each other, if one is not there, the other is, if the chief editor does not see one, he goes and asks the other, I mean, that practice has become habitual. We are like 'the gender ones', the three of us. (J5)

In line with the comment describing how the chief editor asks things to "the gender ones" (J5), several interviewees working at non-activist media acknowledged that their colleagues and superiors often go to them asking for suggestions on how to write texts from a

fair gender perspective. As interviewees specialized in gender topics explained, there is a gap within news organizations between those journalists who have this kind of knowledge and understanding (for being either activist-journalists and/or journalists specialized in the subject) and those who do not. The interviewee working at *Clarín* illustrated the kind of questions that her colleagues used to ask her even before she was appointed as gender editor: “¿what do you mean that there are male trans?’ then, okay, I know it because I am in the topic but my colleagues don’t know it. They don’t know that there are male trans, female trans” (J3).

As implied by interviewees, such kind of questions and doubts which arise among their colleagues about how to write texts with a non-sexist gender perspective, are highly related to three aspects mentioned earlier: the lack of official socialization practices at most organizations, the “super-interesting use of language” (J4) that activists are making, and the non-standardized way in which linguistic varieties are being used. According to interviewees, due to that fast changing situation of linguistic uses, it becomes increasingly complex for journalists who are not specialized in the subject to keep track of how language ought to be used from a fair gender perspective:

I guess if that at some point becomes formalized like ‘okay, ... at this newsroom we agree that every time we... say with x, or every time we... say with e’ ... that rule would probably be broken the next day, because it's so dynamic ... I mean, you get lost, there's no guide that works for that. (J13)

While previous research has given a preponderant place to style guides and official socialization processes as factors influencing journalists’ writing style, insights from the interviews suggest that those official instruments are ineffective –often absent– for journalists trying to keep up with the rapid linguistic changes introduced by activism. As a result of this incapability of official learning practices, interviewees described two current situations taking place at newsrooms. First, journalists specialized in gender issues acknowledged that many gross errors are made by their colleagues for not knowing how to use language from a fair gender perspective:

Obviously it's not ideal, there are people who are completely untrained - without any training showing asses and breasts all the time, or writing ‘he killed his 14 year old girlfriend’ and you from the outside say ‘it's not the girlfriend if she's 14!’ . (J4)

Additionally, interviewees specialized in gender-related issues explained that they, as such, are fulfilling the lack of training in gender perspective within the newsrooms. By

performing what could be identified as a pedagogical role towards colleagues, interviewees at *Perfil*, *Infobae* and *Clarín*, make suggestions and give guidance to other journalists at the organizations they work at on how certain texts should be phrased, as an interviewee described:

Gender journalists are the ones who are taking handbooks to the media, they are the ones who go and say ‘hey, be careful with this title’, I mean, it's not like there's a gender handbook coming from above to everyone in the same way. Instead, those who have a gender perspective start to incorporate it and start saying ‘be careful with this title’, ‘be careful with this focus’, ‘hey, check that this is not like that’, ‘this was a femicide’, ‘check that’. (J4)

As this shows, the news making processes and real dynamics developed within the news community from which text emerge are not entirely visible through official style guides and organizational norms. Journalists specialized in gender-related issues correct their colleagues, explain them the meaning of certain terms, answer their doubts, make suggestions on how to phrase certain stories and how to call certain people in their stories. Moreover, as most interviewees described, these socialization practices and pedagogical role towards colleagues are carried out “informally” (J5), and are not part of the official organizational routines and institutional requirements, but instead, take place in unofficial dynamics.

However, two recent appointments at *Perfil* and *Clarín*, suggest that news organizations are likely to be recognizing those dynamics and making efforts for officializing them. In 2018, *Perfil* appointed the first gender-ombudsperson in the country and, according to one journalist working at this organization this was a consequence of the socialization dynamics that “the gender ones” (J5) had been performing in the newsroom: “one thing that began to take place informally was formalized through the figure of Diana [gender-ombudsperson]” (J5). A similar perception of these appointments as organizational changes implemented in a bottom-up approach, from the informal peer-to-peer relation to official decisions, was expressed by *Clarín*’s gender editor about her role:

Now it can become something institutional, yes ... With this appointment. It gives me more scope for action, let's say. It gives me more— Because before I was just a colleague who was saying ‘Look, I think that...’ and you could either do it or not. Now if I go and tell you that, maybe it's like a little bit more important. (J3)

## **Sources and people portrayed in the stories**

Besides the unofficial dynamics taking place within newsrooms which influence news practitioners' writing practices, there are other social dynamics which, in light of the interviews, also have an influence on how language is used in the news. As it was mentioned in the description of journalists' linguistic practices, interviewees working at mainstream media *La Nación* and *Perfil* have included disruptive linguistic varieties in their articles when their sources had used it, even if these varieties are not usual in the writing style of those newspapers. Interviews show that this tends to be particularly the case among journalists who are specialists in gender-related issues and who, therefore, are more aware of the importance that the use of language has for their sources who are activists. One of the sampled texts written by the editor of the society section at *Perfil* presented a case in which a source used the disruptive ending *e* and this was made visible in the article, where the phrase with non-standard language was included between quotation marks. The author, however, had previously stated that she always and exclusively uses the generic masculine in her articles. Consistently with Peterson's (2003) idea that journalists' relations with their sources have an influence on the texts they produce, the interviewee emphasized that it was important for her to maintain the source's linguistic style, mainly, because she knew her source belonged to a group of artists who usually make explicit their political position on gender issues, and publicly use non-standard language.

A similar situation was brought up by a journalist working at *La Nación*, a medium described by multiple interviewees as strictly tied to grammatical rules and a conservative editorial line. In 2017, the interviewee worked on an article about people of non-male genders working in traditionally male professions. Since one of her sources was transgender, she cautiously decided to respect their desire not to be called with *a* nor with *o*, and solved it in two ways. First, when a direct quote from the source was included, non-standard varieties were maintained and the author added a note explaining that: "they<sup>14</sup> ask for the inclusive pronouns ('e' and 'x' instead of 'o') to be respected" (J1). Second, in the parts of the text where the journalist narrated the story, she remembers having had to make a challenging effort to use only but expressions without gender marks, bypassing varieties, in order to

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<sup>14</sup> Since the Spanish version of this quote did not require the specification of any personal pronoun but the English translation does, the pronoun *they* was chosen by the researcher to be used as a singular since it is widely considered an alternative to linguistic androcentrism and for referring to non-binary individuals (Bjorkman, 2017).

respect both conflicting factors at the same time: those of the standardizing pressures of the medium, and those of the will of the source.

Similarly, another journalist at *La Nación* emphasized that maintenance of the linguistic variety used by sources is usually respected by editors in the newspaper. Despite using the generic masculine *o* every time she mentioned human referents, J2 included the word “todxs” [instead of “todos” for “everyone”] inside quotation marks referring to a textual quotation from an activist source. When asked about the use of this variety, the journalist described that her source had sent her comments in a written text, using the *x*, and that as a form of respecting the source’s voice, she chose to keep it in the text. The journalist celebrated the newspaper, *La Nación*, for maintaining the original linguistic variety, and suggested that there is a difference between the newspaper respecting the linguistic variety used by an external source than by a journalist:

they may have respected it because when it's a quote from a third party, then you have to respect it. If it's a quote it's something different. They can't change a quote without asking ... I think it's good that they don't change it there, I mean, if I had written it there they can change it because I'm the journalist but if it's a quote....(J2)

In the same direction, a current trend mentioned by interviewees is for news media to respect and preserve the type of language used by opinion columnists who contribute with articles in the paper under their own signature. In those cases, interviewees acknowledge that editors could, if they wished to do so, edit the linguistic style and change it towards the generic masculine. Still, this does not happen because, as interviewees see it, the author’s signature is what has most importance: “[there are] other media where what matters most is the signature, I mean, or not necessarily in the media, in certain columns or in certain texts where what matters most is the signature” (J14). This fact is reflected in the case of the mainstream newspaper *Perfil*, in which its editors conventionally use standard language but after debating it and reflecting on it together, they decided to keep without modifications an opinion column for the Economy section in which the authors used the non-standard form *e*. The opinion column includes expressions with the ending *e* like “les desocupades” [the unemployed] (Rikap & Guitart, 2019), and an endnote “clarifying that it was a decision of the authors to write like this. That we had respected the authors' decision that the text was not written in masculine” (J5). As these cases illustrate, the linguistic usages of sources and the will to respect them, open new instances of group discussions and agreements in newsrooms.



Additionally, journalists who regularly write stories on gender-related issues often establish relations with sources who belong to LGBT+ communities and other minorities. In fact, these people are often portrayed as the main characters of such news stories. As a result of the close contact some journalists maintain with these groups and the openness towards learning from them, news practitioners sometimes decide to include non-standard varieties in their references to people if they know or assume that the person portrayed in the story wants to be identified with that specific type of language. This is precisely what a journalist working at *Las 12* experienced when writing a story about a group of young people:

I knew that there were some members of the group ... with non-binary gender, they defined themselves, one - one<sup>15</sup> self-identified with ... or was in transition. So, well, I thought it was appropriate to mention it with the e. (J12)

Both at activist media and at mainstream media, people portrayed in the story and how they self-identify seem to make journalists question their linguistic practices. In the case of activist media the weight of this factor may be less apparent due to the mere fact that articles already tend to use disruptive varieties regularly. Still, interviewees working at activist media highly emphasized the need to respect the right to self-identification of people who are involved in the stories and represented in the texts. According to interviewees and participants at the Gender Inclusive Language Conference, the journalistic rigor and responsibility which are widely applied to avoid discriminating ethnic minorities, should also be applied when referring to non-binary individuals in the stories. In this sense, several journalists considered that choosing how to call someone is an action that requires a lot of responsibility and respect for people's self-perceived identities. Moreover, they suggested that, currently, the notion of responsible journalistic work must incorporate a new dimension, which is to ask people portrayed in stories how each of them wants to be identified (with feminine, with masculine, with *x*, with *e*, etc.), as a director of *Latfem* explained:

it's like a lot of responsibility to mention someone ... many times you use the e or the x, to refer to someone who is not you and who is outside the text, right? And that person is the one who demands, somehow, to be mentioned with e, or with o, or with a, right? ... to assert that person's right to be mentioned with the pronoun that she or he

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<sup>15</sup> The first time the interviewee said the word “one” she used the generic masculine *uno* and the second time she corrected herself and used the ending e: *une*

or they<sup>16</sup> want is very important, because you, I mean, you must have the consciousness, to know how that person wants to be mentioned. So, it's like a whole dimension of the question, of the journalistic work that wasn't there before. (J13)

The analyses of news articles and interviews reveal that this is not a phenomenon exclusive to the media most linked to activism and minorities, but rather, it is also present in mainstream media. In fact, journalists working at *La Voz del Interior* and the online news portal *Infobae*, expressed that being respectful to the people represented in their texts, their self-identification, and the communities to which they belong, is a factor that has more weight in their linguistic decisions than awareness of what audiences expect to read:

I think I take more into account the people involved in the story than the audiences, in those kinds of "dilemmas"... I'm thinking about the victim or the community, rather than the person who reads it. I'm thinking about who I mention. Not on how those who read it will take it. (J8)

In a similar way, a journalist at *Infobae* narrated several experiences in which she decided to mention the people portrayed in the stories as they had asked to be mentioned, and in response, received complaints and insults from the audience. Nevertheless, she did not regret her decision and considers it is extremely important to learn to listen to others and to respect how they want to be identified.

While journalists at activist media tend to use disruptive varieties when they know they are referring to a person who wishes to be identified in that way, they sometimes respect people portrayed in their stories by doing the opposite: using standard language. In some cases, interviewees working at activist media who generally write using *x* or *e*, have not done so in order to respect the ideological stances of people in the story who are not directly involved with the feminist or LGBT+ movement. In certain specific circumstances, interviewees suggested, they feel the need to prioritize the political struggles specific to the people in the story, instead of mixing it with a political manifestation that may be distant from them. This valorization of not mixing different political struggles and not mentioning with *x* those of whom journalists do not know their position on the matter, is illustrated in the following statement:

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<sup>16</sup> The journalist used the non-standard word “le” as a personal pronoun for the ending *e*.

Just as I don't bring up the political issues of the Afro community to a trans person who is not of African descent, I don't bring up the political issues of the trans community to an Afro person. I try to be respectful of their universe of representations and... let's say, each universe is different and I try to be very respectful of that ... there's something like of what is sacred, right? of what should not be touched from the other's culture. (J10)

Moreover, two interviewees also explained that they sometimes strategically choose the generic masculine in order to attribute certain characteristics to the human referents they are mentioning. A journalist at *Latfem* who predominantly uses non-standard varieties in her texts, chose the generic masculine when writing an opinion column for a news agency about the International Day of Working Women. The text reads “the work we do for free every day, at home, taking care of children [chicos] and older adults [adultos mayores], is neither recognized nor paid” (A28), and *children* and *older adults* are written in the standard variety. When asked about this choice, the author explained: “I sometimes use the masculine on purpose. To make this differentiation of roles, right? Since women are the ones who take care of people ... it has to do with the person I mention”. (J14).

### **Audiences and the virtues of (not) accommodating to their expectations**

Interviews with journalists working at mainstream and activist media suggested that, in general, there is considerable awareness of audience's expectations among journalists. Interviewees from all types of media considered that their main audiences either do or do not expect to find disruptive linguistic varieties in the news they read. When referring to activist media, interviewees indicated that these organizations maintain an implicit pact with their readers and acknowledged that they might have “a slightly more biased audience in that sense” (J14) and that it is unlikely that there will be reactionary and conservative audiences reading those media. Journalists at activist media assume that their audiences are expecting the use of non-standard varieties and, correspondingly, they tend to use them regularly without even wondering whether readers will react negatively or not. They know they will not. This preservation of the implicit pact with readers was also emphasized by an interviewee who works at *La Nación* but also at a podcast linked to an LGBTBI Civil Association:

We are already going to an audience that is elsewhere, in fact for which gender-inclusive language is like logical and there is nothing to discuss. For me, it depends entirely on the audience. Yes, for me it depends completely on the audience. In fact, I

find it ridiculous to speak in universal masculine to a certain audience because they don't speak like that, they don't care, they don't... yes, basically that's what I think, it depends one hundred percent on the audience. (J2)

The same kind of awareness of their readers' expectations seems to be present among other journalists at mainstream media *La Nación* and *Clarín*. Moreover, journalists working at these newspapers, who do not seek in the use of non-standard varieties a tool for disruption, expressed that conservative media have conservative audiences and, therefore, there is no point in using a disruptive language which would break the implicit pact with them. Rather, this would be highly convenient if disruption was the aim, but it is not so in the case of most journalists working at mainstream media. Journalists at *La Nación* acknowledged that, when writing, they pay close attention to the writing style of the newspaper which, in turn, is very related to the linguistic style of its audiences. In this regard, an interesting aspect highlighted by journalists from *La Nación* and *Clarín* had to do with their readers' age. According to interviewees, audiences who read this type of offline printed media "know what they want, [and audiences] will be outraged if they read something they do not like" (J1) and tend to be more conservative and older than readers of online news outlets.

At other mainstream media, awareness of audience's expectations is also taken into account but in a different way and with different aims. A journalist at the news portal *Infobae* recognizes that a part of their audience is motivating new discussions within the newsroom regarding journalists' writing practices in broader terms. In the case of this online news portal which has a diversified audience, many readers are demanding a deeper and more responsible gender perspective in the way news are framed, through comments on social media. A gender specialist at *Infobae* stated that feminist audiences, particularly, play a "sensor role" (J4) by criticizing when they consider that stories are written irresponsibly from a gender equality and diversity point of view. According to her, these demands had a direct impact on journalists' writing practices by pushing journalists to develop a more exhaustive look and to question their own linguistic uses. Both individually and among colleagues, new questions began to be asked such as: "is this okay?, am I being sexist?, am I judging?" (J4) which is a practice that, the interviewee stated, did not exist before. Although the three mainstream media, *La Nación*, *Clarín* and *Infobae*, accommodate their writing styles to their audiences' expectations, there seems to be a difference in the sector of the audience which they are listening to.

Attachment to the standard language appears to be highly caused by accommodation to the requirements of a conservative audience in the case of *La Nación*. Unlike this, in other media, motivation for using the standard variety often emerges from the strategies which journalists' employ for drawing attention towards certain topics. Both in activist media and in some mainstream media, like *Infobae*, interviewees suggested that, sometimes, they consider the strength of a message and its arguments to be more important than the use of gender-inclusive language. Interviewees working at *Latfem* and *Infobae* explained that sometimes is convenient to give up on non-standard varieties when an important message needs to be transmitted and its format can take total primacy reducing the potential impact of the content. Especially in media with a diverse audience, like *Infobae*, accommodation to the standard turns out to be a strategic choice in order to have their ideas carefully listened to when trying to persuade the audience to accept an argument. This strategic accommodation to what the mainstream audience expects often leads journalists to choose standard language even if that means changing, and not respecting, the way their sources expressed. As a journalist at *Infobae* recalled, she consciously took this decision when writing an article with interviews to young women for and against legal abortion. Although her interviewees in favor of legal abortion used the ending *e* during the conversation, she strategically decided to privilege the expectations of her mainstream audience over the sources' linguistic style:

You know how I felt? that you were reading the article and instead of reading the arguments of the girl, the only thing you could see was the *e*, and you would say 'what a fool', 'what a fool', do you understand? It generated like an expulsive thing, but it also made you stare at the *e* and not listen to the arguments, which were the most interesting thing. And I made an article for and against. The young teenagers who are for and against. And those who are against it don't speak with the *e*. Then their arguments were perfectly exposed and those on the green side, it seemed, you - I don't know how to explain, like the eyes went with the *e*, and your discussion was if the *e* or not the *e*, and that wasn't the discussion ... because the article was not about gender-inclusive language. And I felt that I was making them lose on arguments. (J4)

Such strategic use of language motivated by the will to emphasize a certain argument is also visible in the practices of journalists who use disruptive varieties purposely to disrupt, take their audience by surprise, and encourage debates. Two interviewees who have used the endings *x* and *e* in articles for non-activist media, *Perfil* and *El Cohete a la Luna*, emphasized the disruptive power of such varieties and the usefulness of not accommodating to their

audience's expectations. For these journalists, not adapting to the standard variety which is preferred by their audiences, allows them to achieve the aims of disruptive varieties, sparking debate and raising awareness. The journalist at *El Cohete a la Luna* described that audiences of this news portal are, mainly, old men who would rather read texts with standard language. However, her perception of disruptive varieties as a tool to disturb readers, make them stop to think and trigger debates, motivates her to use disruptive varieties in her articles for this outlet. As she explained, drawing attention to sexism as a problem requires taking the reader by surprise and, therefore, not taking the traditional approach of pleasing the audience:

The effect it has on the reader, that I think is... I love it because it's like..., that's why, the men who read *El Cohete a la Luna*, right? I imagine they get outraged when they see an x, do you know what I mean? And I love that because it's like... It's like it's a joke that language makes, do you understand? It's like a problem... it's a problem, since it's a problem and it's uncomfortable, tac, you have to think about it. I mean, you don't have to pretend that the problem is not there. The problem is there. (J13)

## Summary

General tendencies in journalists' language usage were identified through the analysis of news articles. While interviewees working at mainstream media tend to use the standard and widely accepted varieties, journalists at activist media seem to use disruptive varieties more predominantly. Still, the three varieties are used inconsistently across media. Rather than being mere respondents of external pressures, interviews revealed that journalists engage in linguistic practices through conscious interventions which are influenced by several factors.

Among these factors, journalists' intentions and their views on what linguistic varieties are useful for explain journalists' preference for one type of varieties or the other. Widely accepted varieties are generally used by journalists seeking to avoid androcentric language and make women visible. Those functions are considered insufficient by journalists aiming at promoting debates about structural asymmetries who, instead, use disruptive varieties predominantly and positively value inconsistency in language usage. The standard variety is also used with strategic intentions by journalists seeking to facilitate audiences' reading and by those who prioritize non-linguistic strategies for promoting structural changes.

The type of media at which journalists work also explains the general tendencies towards one variety or the other. Mainstream media is characterized as going behind the social agenda incorporating sociolinguistic changes only once these are massively accepted.

In cases in which strict editorial lines are guided by the conservative ideology of media's owners, sociolinguistic changes with political connotations are less likely to be incorporated. Contrastingly, activist media is defined as promoters of changes and journalists at this type of media, who consider their work a political activity, seek to amplify the voices –and, therefore, the language–of minorities.

Socialization practices performed at each organization can influence journalists' linguistic practices in different ways. While strict socialization practices aiming at standardization are present only at few mainstream media, these are weaker and less determinant of journalists' language at most sampled organizations. Instead, results revealed, there are other social practices in which journalists engage which are influencing their linguistic uses. First, journalists' contact with activists increase their comprehension of new expressions and linguistic uses. Second, through informal socialization dynamics within newsrooms, journalists' who are activists and/or specialized in gender issues perform a pedagogical role towards their colleagues. As a consequence, journalists tend to be aware and respectful of the language that sources and people portrayed in their stories preferred them to use. Still, this awareness is sometimes overlooked in order to prioritize the strength of arguments by attaching to audiences' expectations in language use. It is therefore interpreted that journalists can strategically use language to raise awareness of a certain argument either by accommodating to their audiences' expectations or going against these expectations and disrupting them.

## Conclusion and discussion

### Major findings

In the past year, the use of non-standard varieties known in Argentina as gender-inclusive language has been criticized by the RAE, linguists, school teachers and tv presenters (Álvarez de Miranda, 2018; “La Real”, 2018; Nicolini, 2018 ; “Niña defiende”, 2018). Despite claims that these varieties are a catastrophe destroying Spanish language (Bengoechea, 2005; Mareco, 2019), gender-inclusive language has occupied a significant place both in the media agenda and in news language.

The presence of non-standard language in the news has been observed with attention by scholars since news discourse has usually been considered attached to conventional linguistic styles and standardization (Cotter, 2010). However, studies on sociolinguistic change and journalism have often been limited to the analysis of news articles and style guides. Interestingly, in the current Argentinian context, journalists themselves have been discussing the use of gender-inclusive language, as media’s coverage of the topic and several events illustrate. Their views shed light on the limitations of existing scholarly approaches and points to the need to examine journalists’ own experience and view regarding non-sexist language. This study has addressed this need through an ethnographic perspective. It has approached the news production process as a cultural practice and examined journalists’ experiences considering them agents with creative capacity to engage in their linguistic practices (Peterson, 2003).

Guided by the will to understand what the practices are in which news practitioners engage concerning the use of non-sexist linguistic varieties and what are the factors influencing these practices, this study has led to important results. It has questioned notions of journalists as preservers of standard language (Cotter, 2014) and revealed that their linguistic practices involve three different types of varieties for mentioning human referents (standard, widely accepted and disruptive). Although there are general tendencies in relation to the type of linguistic variety predominantly used and the type of news organization at which journalists work, results have unexpectedly showed that the standard variety is, at times, used in activist media and that the most disruptive varieties are sometimes used in the most conservative media. Moreover, this study has confirmed the observations of linguists from the RAE (Álvarez de Miranda, 2018) regarding the inconsistencies in journalists’ linguistic practices and has further showed that they purposively alternate between varieties, for example, when including in their texts direct quotes from sources. Furthermore, results



have revealed that these practices are not merely a result of external forces on journalists but that they, instead, involve their self-conscious considerations, individual beliefs and group discussions in their uses of language. In line with Spitzmüller's (2014) understanding of journalists as social agents who can control media's language, these results showed that journalists engage in their linguistic practices concerning the use of non-sexist language as creative actors with capacity to intervene in the language they use.

Previous research has emphasized the impact of the linguistic requirements from news organizations and audiences on journalists' use of linguistic varieties (Cotter, 2010; Fowler, 1991). However, this study has revealed that news practitioners' linguistic practices regarding the use of non-sexist language are influenced by several other factors as well. The type of media organization at which journalists work, their profession-internal values, and audiences' expectations do influence in certain ways –and to different extents– journalists' linguistic practices, but these factors work in combination with numerous, and at times competing, determinants. Among these, journalists' own intentions and views of the usefulness of each linguistic variety highly influences their predominant use of one type or the other. Also, journalists' contact with activists, either as peers and/or sources, encourages journalists' learning and incorporation of non-standard linguistic varieties. Similarly, journalists' relations with the people portrayed in their stories can have an influence on journalists' choice of language when they aim at respecting people's self-identification and political stances. Moreover, through unofficial socialization practices within newsrooms, journalists' relations with their colleagues open up conversations, questions and suggestions regarding the use of non-sexist language.

In line with previous studies, which claim that journalists' language is largely determined by the values and journalistic routines of news organizations (Fowler, 1991), this study revealed that organizational pressures do have a certain influence. This is the case both in some activist media where implicit unified criteria promote the use of disruptive varieties and of mainstream media at which strict socialization practices and productivity pressures lead to the predominant use of the standard. However, this study has showed that such “organizational functionalism” (Cottle, 2000, p. 22) is not fully determinant and that journalists frequently go against the organizational criteria for reasons such as ensuring audience's reading of the message, preserving the strength of arguments, respecting their sources, and making visible the female individual in the story. Moreover, results have also exposed that the socialization practices which, according to some scholars (Cotter, 2010),

reinforce standard linguistic styles are not as present nor determinant in most of the sampled media organizations. This study has also partly agreed with scholars who described the relation between journalists and their readers as an incentive for the use of standard language to facilitate readability and “ease of comprehension” (Cotter, 2010, p.118). However, it has also pointed out that journalists’ awareness of their audiences’ expectations is precisely what allows them to make disruptive uses of language by not accommodating to those external demands.

Through the attention to disruptive uses of language, this study has confirmed that language change can be used to fight against structural asymmetries as argued by feminist linguists (Suardiaz, 2002) and that such intentions are encoded into journalists’ texts. Moreover, the examination of the “views and intentions” (Peterson, 2003, p. 163) encoded into journalists’ texts also showed that, as it happens among feminist linguists, there are discrepancies about the relevance of language change among journalists. From a view aligned to materialist feminism, some journalists mainly use standard language in their texts because they believe structural inequalities can be better fought through other non-linguistic strategies. Finally, this study has confirmed scholars’ statements regarding the view of journalists as social actors in relation to other communities and groups (Peterson, 2003). Journalists’ belonging to activist groups, contact with their sources and informal dynamics with colleagues within the newsroom, motivate changes in their linguistic practices.

### **Methodological implications**

This study has questioned the “mediacentric” (Peterson, 2003, p. 163) perspectives taken in studies of the media production process and the emphasis given by scholars to pressures from the news organization and the audience on journalists’ language. Such approaches to the study of journalism and language change have overlooked the multiplicity of factors which influence journalists’ considerations when using a linguistic variety. An ethnographic perspective, instead, has allowed the recognition of how these various factors interplay and integrate to influence journalists’ linguistic practices, and how journalists’ agency is present in their interaction with external pressures.

Moreover, the study showed that an ethnographic approach to conducting interviews with news practitioners can facilitate the identification of informal socialization practices within newsrooms, relations with sources and activists, which would go unnoticed by the mere analysis of news texts and style guides. By examining journalists’ view on these social dynamics, this study has also confirmed scholars’ descriptions of journalists as social actors

whose relations with sources can impact their texts (Bourdieu, 1998 as cited in Peterson, 2003).

Results from this study have also questioned the emphasis given by previous literature on official socialization practices and style guides and suggested that such perspective might be related to the social economic contexts in which those studies have been conducted. As this study has shown, the negative economic situation of news media in Argentina has had effect on the lack of official socialization practices. Furthermore, at the individual level, it was revealed that journalists take a position of self-censorship for fear of losing their jobs. As this suggests, previous studies' lack of a broad perspective towards diverse socioeconomic contexts may explain the over-emphasis on organizational factors.

### **Limitations**

Pilot interviews conducted in December which were recorded and for which interviewees gave oral consent, could have been used as data for this study. Moreover, the fact that the sample of pilot interviews included journalists from four news media in Córdoba, would have added more diversity to the total sample, and interesting differences could have been observed between the media from the two cities. However, these interviews were not transcribed nor coded due to time constraints, which precluded their systematic consideration for the analysis.

Moreover, considering that part of the recruitment of interviewees relied on snowball sampling among journalists who had written news on gender-issues, this might have led to a sample constituted by several individuals who know each other, share social and professional networks or belong to the same activist groups. The reliability of a sample with these characteristics could be questionable since those interviewees could have highly similar perspectives on the topics discussed, unlike journalists belonging to other networks and communities. However, having included journalists working at diverse news organizations and from two different cities might have reduced this risk.

### **Suggestions for further research**

Interviewing journalists who write articles on gender related issues was a practical decision taken to ensure that interviewees had at least some opinion and knowledge about the existence of gender inclusive linguistic varieties and the discussions about it. However, these results only reflect the views of certain kinds of journalists. Because of their area of expertise, it is very likely that these journalists would be closer to activists, either because they

themselves are activists or because they turn to them as sources for their stories. Other journalists who are not so immersed in gender related issues may therefore be more distant from feminist and LGBT+ activists, and have different positions. Despite not being part of the sample used for this study, it is very likely that there are news practitioners who do not perceive any valuable advantage in the use of non-standard varieties, neither as a way to bypass sexism nor to make it explicit. Future research could, therefore, study journalists' linguistic practices concerning non-sexist language with a broader scope of journalists included in the sample.

Considering that data collection for this study was mainly conducted among journalists at offline newspapers and online news portals, the insights gained might be particularly relevant for understanding journalists' roles regarding sociolinguistic change in these media contexts, but not in others. It might be the case that journalists and presenters working at television and radio are experiencing different motivations and constraints in regards to the use of non-sexist language in their particular fields. The comments of some interviewees also working in radio and television about how challenging and difficult it is for them to use non-standard language in orality indicate that there may be relevant differences in the practices and experiences of media workers from different fields. Therefore, future research should build on the insights acquired in this study to extend the understanding of similar processes and practices in other news media settings.

Given that the object studied is considerably new and is under process of changes and readjustments (as the very recent appointments of gender editors reflects), further research on the subject should be conducted in the future, to learn about its updates, its setbacks, its progress and its consequences. As mentioned at the beginning, discussions on the use of gender inclusive language in formal institutions are currently present in several Spanish-speaking countries. Moreover, *El País*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Spain appointed a gender correspondent in May 2018. Therefore, it would be highly valuable to extend studies of this type to other contexts that, seemingly, are going through similar processes and changes. Furthermore, since this study has mainly focused on news media with national coverage, future studies should examine how the relation of journalists' linguistic practices with other factors is experienced by journalists working at local newspapers with non-national reach.

### **Implications for society**

Contrarily to the arguments of those who oppose gender-inclusive varieties stating that language is going to be destroyed, this study has revealed that the intentions of journalists using disruptive varieties are not to modify the Spanish grammar nor to impose new rules. In consonance with their will to stimulate discussions about structural inequalities, there are other types of changes that seem to be occurring as a consequence of the widespread use of these disruptive varieties. Discussions on gender-inclusive language in the agenda of mainstream media, governmental and academic institutions, show that the debate has taken root in society, and has led certain social sectors to ask themselves questions that had been historically unaddressed.

Moreover, the debates on the importance of gender-inclusive language have led to other discussions related to the situation of transgender and non-binary people in society. The first Gender Inclusive Language Conference at UNLP, in April 2019, illustrated this. While linguists and translators had attended the event, in the first place, out of interest in the question of linguistic change itself, they found themselves in an environment full of comments and reflections on the disempowered and weak situation of transvestite, transgender and nonbinary groups. In fact, this study has revealed that, from the perspective of activist-journalists, complaints and the so-called fear of the destruction of language are not against language change itself but against what that non-standard language makes explicit and the inequalities it shows.

Based on this study, one may argue that the success or failure of these language strategies undertaken by journalists and activists should not be assessed in relation to whether current non-standard varieties are massively installed, become a new grammatical rule and a new standard. Instead, the success or failure of this phenomenon must be evaluated by virtue of whether or not discussions have deepened regarding the situation of gender minorities, whether acceptance of these groups by society in general has expanded, and what other socio-cultural changes have taken place.

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