

Gender-inclusive language in university communication: a contrastive analysis of gender-inclusive guidelines in German, Italian, and English*

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Abstract

This article offers a contrastive examination of gender-inclusive language guidelines issued by universities in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, and the United Kingdom. Drawing on a corpus of 287 institutional documents – 122 in German, 34 in Italian, and 133 in English – the study identifies and quantifies specification and neutralization strategies recommended for administrative and pedagogical discourse. After manual annotation, strategies were coded into a database, enabling statistical comparison across languages and nations. Results show that German-speaking institutions favor gender-marked neographies and pair forms, whereas Italian guidelines privilege binary splitting and feminine derivation, with neographies largely proscribed. English documents overwhelmingly promote lexical and pronominal neutralization, including singular *they* and neopronouns, and eschew specification entirely. Legal framing – especially the recognition of a non-binary civil status in Germany – emerges as a key predictor of neography uptake. Despite divergent prescriptions, all guidelines condemn the generic masculine and seek inclusive representational equity. The paper concludes that cross-linguistic variation in inclusive strategies reflects structural properties of the languages, local legal contexts, and institutional ideologies, and argues for heightened intercultural dialogue in developing future policies. These findings contribute to sociolinguistic theory by evidencing how macro-social variables interact with grammatical typology to shape emergent language planning norms and practices.

* This analysis was conducted within the framework of the PRIN 2022 project “HCAI4Gend - Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence for Gender Sensitive Linguistic Simplification in German, English and Italian Institutional Communication”, funded by the European Union - Next Generation EU, PNRR Missione 4, Componente 2, Investimento 1.1, codice progetto: 2022N3EH4K, CUP G53D23003170006 (PI: Valentina Crestani). Valentina Crestani wrote paragraph 1. Paragraph 7 was written collaboratively by all four authors. The remaining paragraphs were written by the other authors under the supervision of the PI: Giulia Pedrini wrote paragraph 5, Ramona Pellegrino wrote sections 3.2, 3.3 and 4.2, Caterina Saracco wrote sections 2, 3.1 and 4.1. Paragraph 6 was co-authored by Giulia Pedrini, Ramona Pellegrino, and Caterina Saracco. All authors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers and Prof. Daniel Elmiger for their helpful and insightful remarks and suggestions.

1 Introduction

In recent years, universities (as well as other institutions) in various countries have published guidelines and recommendations on gender-inclusive language on their websites. In view of the increasing relevance of such guidelines (cf. Hennig/Niemann 2022: 14), linguistic research has started to devote more attention to their collection, also multilingual (cf. Elmiger 2024), and consequently to their study (although linguistic analyses, e. g. on German, had already been published about thirty years ago, cf. Schlichting 1997 and Hellinger 2004). With regard to German, many of the linguistic analyses of the last few years are intralinguistic (cf. among others Wetschanow 2017; Elmiger 2022; Schneider 2022; Ivanov/Lieboldt 2023; Crestani 2025), while contrastive analyses are still sporadic, both those conducted on language pairs (cf. e. g. Brambilla/Crestani 2024 on German and Italian) and those conducted on more than two languages (cf. Siegenthaler 2024 on German, English and French). The study we present in this paper concerns, on the other hand, a corpus of guidelines in German, Italian, and English (understood both as downloadable texts and as recommendations published on websites) and also considers the diatopic dimension of the first two languages, unlike previous studies (including Brambilla/Crestani 2024, which focused on the guidelines of universities in Germany and Italy): the guidelines selected for the corpus (with the exception of English) concern, in fact, Germany, Austria and Switzerland for German, and Italy and Switzerland for Italian. The study of the guidelines constitutes the initial phase of the research project on which the authors of this paper are working.¹ In the following paragraphs we therefore report the main results concerning some of the aspects investigated, first and foremost the typology of the gender specification strategies and neutralization strategies presented, the text types for which the guidelines are intended and the target audience. Common starting point of the guidelines is the generic masculine, whose use should be avoided or at least limited by resorting to strategies that, while having shared traits, may differ depending on the institution authoring the text, the language, and the country. Contrastive analysis can therefore help to highlight differences and similarities.

The paper is structured as follows: paragraph 2 presents corpus, goals and method; paragraph 3 deals with the guidelines in German in Germany, Austria and Switzerland; paragraph 4 with those in Italian in Italy and Switzerland, paragraph 5 with those in English in the UK. Paragraph 6 offers a contrastive summary and paragraph 7 presents the conclusions.

2 Corpus, goals and method

This contribution analyzes guidelines and suggestions regarding the use of gender-inclusive language in the internal and external communication of universities in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, and the United Kingdom. The following criteria were adopted to select the texts for the corpus: type of university (public universities, private but legally recognized institutions, and theological faculties); type of texts (documents available for download in PDF or Word format from official websites, or guidelines published on specific sections of those websites); authors of the texts (members of the university community, such as faculty, experts in

¹ The main activities of the PRIN 2022 project HCAI4Gend are: A. construction of a comparable corpus of institutional university texts (German, English, Italian); B. construction of a parallel corpus containing source texts and texts simplified according to gender-inclusive language to carry out psycholinguistic experiments and to train an artificial intelligence-based tool with editor function.

humanities, sociology, or law, or designated administrative staff; in some cases, especially for English, some guidelines represent adaptations of documents created outside universities). The corpus of texts includes: 61 guidelines from Germany, 39 from Austria, 22 from Switzerland (20 in German, 2 in Italian), 32 from Italy, and 133 from the United Kingdom. The material collected for English is different from the corresponding German and Italian material. In fact, of the 133 documents only 10 are fully-fledged guidelines which are quite similar to the German and Italian counterparts. The other documents are brief references to the use of neopronouns in documents regarding gender identity/trans policies, or whole pronoun guidances. The corpus is imbalance, but this was not an aim of our study. This disbalance reflects the situation in the countries analyzed quite well and could in itself be regarded as an interesting outcome. It is due mainly to two factors: (1) the differing number of universities in each country and the extent to which they have developed guidelines on gender-inclusive language; (2) the varying degree to which this kind of language is embedded in the collective consciousness and culture of the countries studied.² Despite these differences, the main goal of this study is to provide an overview of how gender-inclusive language is addressed in university guidelines and to explore the strategies proposed across the five countries and their respective languages. After a detailed qualitative manual analysis, all the strategies recommended by every university were then entered into a database. In this way we were able to extract the percentages for each strategy and make a comparative analysis between countries and/or languages. Our aim is to address the following questions contrastively:

- A. What are the primary specification and neutralization strategies recommended?
- B. Do the guidelines prioritize gender specification or neutralization?
- C. Are there recommendations for the use of gender-inclusive language in specific text types?
- D. Who is their target audience?

3 Guidelines in German-speaking countries

3.1 Germany

Most guidelines criticize the generic masculine (e. g., *die Dozenten, die Teilnehmer*) and footnotes claiming to include all genders, as these forms fail to genuinely address non-male individuals (cf. Schmitz/Schneider/Esser 2023). Only two texts (Universität Passau and Helmut-Schmidt-Universität/Universität der Bundeswehr Hamburg) explicitly support exclusively the masculine-feminine binarism. In contrast, the remaining 59 guidelines emphasize strategies that promote also inclusivity in a broader sense. About the specification strategies of masculine and feminine genders, the use of pair forms is recommended. These include the long form (68%),

² Gender-inclusive language is increasingly debated in European legal contexts, with regulations varying across Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and the United Kingdom due to cultural differences. In Italy, no laws require this kind of language. Some institutions and local governments implement neutral forms, but cultural resistance remains strong. In Switzerland, the approach differs by canton and language region. In Germany, a 2017 Constitutional Court ruling revised the *Personenstandsgesetz* ('civil status law'), recognizing a third gender (*divers*) and mandating neutral options in official records. However, some regions, such as Bavaria, prohibit special characters for gender-inclusive language. In Austria, gender-inclusive language is recommended but not enforced by law, and discussions continue. The United Kingdom is among the most progressive, with the *Equality Act* (2010) prohibiting gender discrimination and promoting neutral language in public institutions.

typically in the order feminine-masculine (e. g., *Studentinnen und Studenten, Kolleginnen und Kollegen*), and the short form (38%), where the order is masculine-feminine (e. g., *der/die Sekretär/in*). More “traditional” strategies such as the capital I (*Binnen-I*, e. g., *ForscherInnen*) and brackets (e. g., *Dozent(innen)*) are generally discouraged. These are considered outdated and ambiguous, especially in spoken contexts. Instead, strategies like the gender star (e. g., *Wissenschaftler*in*), colon (e. g., *Seminarleiter:in*), and gender gap (e. g., *Kritiker_in*) are endorsed by 90% of texts and are increasingly popular, above all the gender star, partly due to its established use in modern communication as a placeholder.³ Forms or questionnaires requiring gender identification typically offer three options: *m/w/d* (male/female/other). Additionally, when addressing specific groups, such as in counseling or support services, a gender star can signal inclusivity for trans individuals.

Gender-neutral formulations avoid specifying gender to address all individuals inclusively. While these prevent stereotypes, they also obscure gender visibility. Common strategies include: 1) nominalized present and past participles (e. g., *Mitarbeitende, Beauftragte*), which avoid gender specification (90% of guidelines); 2) epicene nouns (e. g., *Person, Mitglied*), which do not distinguish natural and social gender (69%); collective and abstract nouns (e. g., *Fachkraft, Vertretung*), mentioned in 26% of guidelines; functional or institutional terms (e. g., *das Rektorat*), recommended in 84% of guidelines as alternatives to gendered terms like *der Lehrer*.

Neutralization strategies often involve morphology or syntax adjustments. For example, 85% of guidelines suggest using impersonal pronouns (*jemand, niemand, wer, alle*), paying attention to not link them with masculine pronouns (e. g., *Niemand darf aufgrund der Religionszugehörigkeit benachteiligt werden* instead of *Niemand darf aufgrund seiner Religionszugehörigkeit benachteiligt werden*). Neopronouns, such as *keinx, er_sie, ey*, and *et*, are only mentioned in 8% of guidelines. Other recommended techniques include direct reference (75%) and passive voice (72%).

These strategies primarily focus on written language. However, 12% of the universities address the challenges of using gender stars and similar forms in oral communication. The guidelines, typically developed by expert commissions with input from Equal Opportunities Offices, aim to promote gender-neutral language among staff and students.

Regarding text types, 56% of guidelines specify when particular strategies are applicable. The pair form is particularly recommended for informal texts, such as information for students, course descriptions, event invitations, and website content. However, the short pair form is best for brief texts to avoid spelling issues. Legally binding texts (e. g., statutes, examination regulations, forms) require gendered language, especially the long pair form, combined with neutral formulations to guarantee readability. These approaches are suitable for both short and extended texts, with 84% of universities endorsing their use across all formats. Finally, in three

³ Here and in the following paragraphs describing strategies adopted by universities in other countries, we consider the so-called neographies (gender star, gender gap or colon) as visibility strategies for all genders, as Siegenthaler (2021: 81f.) proposes in her study on the guidelines of Swiss universities. Cf. also Ivanov/Lange/Tiemeyer (2018: 268). We decided to adopt this viewpoint since, although neographies do not show nouns’ desinences explicitly, they still stand clearly for them – although, as already stated, in a *non*-binary way. This differentiates them from traditional neutralization strategies in our categorization.

universities (Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Universität Leipzig, and Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg), neopronouns may only be used at the bottom of emails or in personal and informal digital communication between students and professors. In three other guidelines (Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, Universität Hamburg, and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München), however, neopronouns are only mentioned as a strategy, without specifying in which types of texts they can be used.

The German guidelines are designed to offer university staff (students, professors, technicians, researchers, and secretaries) some tips for using language that is free from gender discrimination in any kind of text.

3.2 Austria

The generic masculine is the most prohibited form. However, only 59% of universities explicitly ban its use. The absence of such a ban in the remaining universities does not necessarily indicate acceptance; rather, it likely reflects the assumption that the generic masculine is already considered obsolete. Compared to Germany, Austrian texts recommend pair forms far less frequently (44%), primarily for oral communication, and usually in the full form (e. g., *Studentinnen und Studenten*). These guidelines often feature examples where the feminine form precedes the masculine one. For three universities (8%), the order of masculine and feminine forms may vary depending on the context. This variability can occur either because the order is considered irrelevant or as a deliberate choice to prioritize the less represented gender in a given setting. For instance, in contexts where women are typically more represented, the masculine form might precede the feminine one, while in contexts where men are usually more represented, the feminine form might come first. No guidelines suggest consistently placing the masculine form before the feminine one. About 31% of universities also allow the contracted variant featuring an internal capital I (e. g., *StudentInnen*) or a slash (e. g., *Student/innen*), especially in short texts such as forms.

Almost all universities (98%) endorse the use of neographies, reflecting a general trend toward inclusivity of all natural and social genders. Interestingly, while some universities (20.5%) discourage binary formulations, none oppose the use of neographies. The most commonly suggested typographical marker is the gender star (79.5%). Some institutions (20.5%) even advocate for a more “radical” application, such as embedding it within the root of a noun (e. g., *Leser*innen*), or positioning it at the end of the word stem to replace the inflectional and derivational morpheme (e. g., *sehr geehrt** or *Lehr**, pluralized as *die Lehr***). The second most frequently recommended marker is the underscore (54%), which is occasionally suggested in its dynamic form such as in *Les_erinnen* (7.7%). The colon ranks third (44%). Neographies are advised for use across most university communication contexts, both written (e. g., internal communications like emails addressed to unspecified recipients, forms, teaching materials, as well as external communications such as websites, social media channels, and official documents) and oral (e. g., presentations, lectures). For this reason, certain guidelines (54%) provide specific instructions on the pronunciation of nouns containing these markers.

Neutralization strategies are universally recommended in Austrian guidelines, particularly for written communication, whether external (e. g., social media posts, job advertisements) or internal (e. g., newsletters). All guidelines propose the use of pluralized nominalized present

participles (e. g., *Studierende*). Abstract nouns denoting functions (e. g., *Leitung*) are the second most frequently recommended neutralization strategy (79.5%). Epicene nouns (e. g., *Person*) are also widely supported (77%). Collective nouns (e. g., *Personal*) are recommended by about half of the universities (51%).

Paraphrasing to avoid personal designations is frequently encouraged. Indefinite and relative (also called gender-neutral pronouns) such as *alle*, and *wer* are prominent (67%), followed by passive constructions (61.5%). Less commonly advised is direct reference to the audience (44%). Neopronouns (e. g., *sie*er*) play a marginal role in the guidelines (18%).

The guidelines were typically developed by the university's Center for Gender Studies or by interdisciplinary working groups or committees, often comprising linguists, gender experts, communication specialists, as well as representatives from administration and university leadership. The target audience is mentioned in approximately half of the documents (51%), though it is often not specifically defined. In most cases, the guidelines are intended for the entire university community, encompassing students, faculty, and administrative staff. Notably, only one set of guidelines (Universität Wien) is explicitly aimed at administrative staff, while another one (Universität Graz) is exclusively directed at teaching staff.

3.3 Switzerland

The generic masculine is prohibited by 90% of texts. 25% extend the ban to compound forms such as *Mitarbeitergespräch* or *benutzerfreundlich*.

All texts suggest the use of pair forms in the full form (*Studentinnen und Studenten*). There is no consensus on which form should precede the other, though: 20% of universities present both the masculine-feminine and feminine-masculine orders, while 35% provide examples exclusively where the feminine form comes first. In one guideline, the feminine form follows the masculine. Pair forms are recommended for a wide range of communicative contexts, covering oral and written communication, internal and external exchanges, as well as official documents. However, as repeated use of pair forms can render texts overly complex, 70% of universities advocate for shorter forms, particularly in concise texts such as forms and meeting minutes: the slash, as in *Student/innen* (55%), and the internal capital I, as in *StudentInnen* (40%).

85% of universities recommend the use of neographies, with most allowing multiple typographic markers but encouraging consistency by limiting the use to one marker per text. The gender star and colon are the most frequently suggested options (both 60%), followed by the underscore (45%). Due to potential readability issues, 10% of guidelines advise limiting their application in print texts, whereas neographies are generally considered more suitable for websites and social media. One university (Universität Basel) advocates for the use of neographies in the singular to avoid long and complex phrases.

All universities recommend gender-neutralization strategies, particularly for texts intended for digital platforms such as websites and social media. 90% of texts recommend pluralized nominalized participles, 85% epicene nouns (especially *Person*, and *Mitglied*), 65% collective nouns (e. g., *Personal*, *Team*, and *Gruppe*), and 65% nouns denoting functions (e. g., *Leitung*).

Periphrastic structures that avoid explicit personal references are widely endorsed, with 75% of guidelines recommending the use of indefinite and relative pronouns (e. g., *alle*, and *niemand*).

Direct reference to the audience is also encouraged (70%). The passive voice is slightly less commonly suggested (60%), mainly because it can make the text appear impersonal and/or overly complicated. Additionally, there are concerns about clarity: omitting the agent can obscure responsibility, as in *der Beschluss wurde gefasst* (Universität Bern). Neopronouns (e. g., *sier*) play an even more marginal role compared to the other two German-speaking countries (5%).

The Swiss guidelines were usually developed by the departments for gender equality or for diversity and inclusion. While the intended audience is explicitly mentioned in 40% of the documents, it is typically defined broadly, often addressing the entire university community, as in Germany and Austria. Only one guideline (issued by the Pädagogische Hochschule Schwyz) specifically targets teaching staff.

4 Guidelines in Italian-speaking countries

4.1 Italy

All the Italian guidelines tend to underline that the generic masculine has the effect of obscuring the presence of women – and other genders – from civil society. However, although the recommended strategies aim to avoid the use of generic masculine, 16% of the guidelines allow its use in legally binding administrative texts such as teaching regulations, statutes, staff circulars, notices, minutes, and decrees. Specification strategies primarily involve the use of pair forms. The masculine-feminine order (e. g., *studenti e studentesse*) appears in 31% of the guidelines, while the feminine-masculine order (e. g., *ricercatrici e ricercatori*) is found in 53% of them. Four universities (12.5%) do not specify an order, and only one does not mention pair forms at all. Abbreviated pair forms are also mentioned by 15.5% guidelines, with 31% preferring the masculine-feminine order (*i/le laureate/e*), 41% the feminine-masculine order (*le/i laureate/i*), and 12.5% having no preference.

The Italian language's richness in feminine suffixes influences 75% of the guidelines, which establish rules for forming feminine nouns (e. g., *rettore* > *rettrice*, *segretario* > *segretaria*). In institutional contexts, 9% advise against neographies (e. g., gender star, *schwa*), while 91% do not address these neographies, even for informal use.

Neutralization strategies are divided into lexical and morphosyntactic approaches, with 60% of the guidelines emphasizing their role in overcoming binarism. Lexical strategies include gender-neutral terms (84%, e. g., *le persone candidate* instead of *i candidati*), collective nouns (81%, e. g., *corpo docente* instead of *docenti*), and function-based nouns (59%, e. g., *ufficio di presidenza* instead of *ufficio del presidente*). Morphological and syntactic strategies involve sentence reformulation using relative and indefinite pronouns (85%), passive voice (69%), and direct reference in the second or third person (34%).

Additionally, 81% of the guidelines highlight the importance of gender agreement in nouns, adjectives, and verbs. Articles and adjectives should match the gender and number of the noun they modify (e. g., *La nuova rettrice Marta Rossi ha parlato* instead of *Il nuovo rettore Marta Rossi ha parlato*). When referring to groups, the masculine plural agreement is commonly used, though proximity agreement is an alternative, adjusting to the gender of the last noun mentioned

(e. g., *Dottorandi e dottorande sono state proclamate* vs. *Dottorande e dottorandi sono stati proclamati*).

Italian guidelines are typically written by the Comitato unico di garanzia⁴ and they target first of all the administrative staff. Faculty and students are considered only as passive users. As a result, these guidelines are highly structured, focusing on written language and providing detailed examples of gender-inclusive legal and administrative texts. Half of the guidelines recommend limiting double forms in legal texts and official press releases for readability. However, public examination announcements encourage them to reinforce gender inclusivity. In all text types, neutralization strategies are preferred, particularly passive and impersonal forms.

4.2 Switzerland

As the Italian-language corpus for Switzerland contains only two guidelines, the available recommendations provide a limited basis for establishing comprehensive gender-inclusive language practices. Only the Università della Svizzera Italiana explicitly prohibits the use of the generic masculine. Among gender specification strategies, only the Alta scuola pedagogica dei Grigioni recommends pair forms, although it does not specify which text types are applicable: the alphabetical order should be followed to avoid consistently prioritizing either the feminine or masculine form. To enhance clarity, it is advisable to minimize repetition within the same sentence, including repeated adjectives, which should agree with the second noun (e. g., *un collaboratore o una collaboratrice amministrativa*). The use of neographies is another feature recommended solely by the Alta scuola pedagogica dei Grigioni, which suggests using either the gender star or underscore for concise texts. Instead, both universities prescribe the use of feminine professional titles when referring to a woman.

Regarding neutralization strategies, only the use of collective nouns is recommended in both guidelines. The Alta scuola pedagogica dei Grigioni also mentions epicene nouns, nouns indicating functions, direct reference to the audience, and passive voice constructions. In contrast, the Università della Svizzera Italiana recommends using the impersonal pronoun *si*. Neither institution ties neutralization strategies to specific text types. Likewise, no Italian-language Swiss guideline specifies a target audience.

5 UK

British guidelines never suggest gender specification, they only recommend neutralization strategies. It could be claimed that this is due to the fact that English is a natural gender language, which in other words does not classify inanimate nouns nor most personal nouns according to different genders (cf. Gygax *et al.* 2019: 4), and not to a conscious choice. However, this neutralization preference is visible also in cases where gender specification is theoretically possible in English grammar. Binary gender specification strategies such as pair forms (*he or she, s/he*) indeed exist in the English language, but they are never recommended in the guidelines. The same goes for *nomina agentis*: guidelines specifically suggest alternatives to pair forms such as

⁴ In Italy, the Comitato Unico di Garanzia (CUG), or, in English, the ‘Committee on Equal Opportunities’, is a specialized, parity-based body established in public administrations and universities to promote equality, enhance workplace well-being, and combat discrimination. It advises on gender balance, protects against harassment, and improves work-life balance.

ladies and gentlemen and non-gender-neutral nouns such as *headmaster* and *headmistress*. Some instances are *everyone* (in oral contexts), *team*, and *staff* for the former, and the gender-neutral noun *headteacher* for the latter.

On a lexical level, epicene forms and collective nouns are regarded as useful strategies. Epicene forms (such as *colleague*, *student*, *person*, *graduate*, and the abovementioned *headteacher*) are mentioned in 47% of guidelines. Collective nouns (*team* and *staff*) are mentioned in 9% of guidelines. The use of professional titles, such as *Prof.* and *Dr.*, is recommended to avoid the use of gendered titles such as *Mr.* and *Ms.* in 13% of guidelines. On a morphological level, the use of the gender-neutral pronoun *they* with a singular referent is recommended in 89% of guidelines. The use of the pronoun *one*, instead, is explicitly recommended only in one guideline (1%). This is likely due to the fact that this pronoun is not very frequent in English, particularly in written communication, as it is perceived to be quite informal. The use of neopronouns (such as *che*, *e*, *ey*, *per*, *xe*, *ze*, *zie*, or *fey*) plays a major role: these are thematized in 59.5% of the analyzed resources, particularly in the pronoun guidances and trans and gender identity policies. Another strategy recommended in two guidelines (2.5%) is to refer to readers directly, by using the pronoun *you*. One guideline (1%) also recommends using passive constructions. Using proper nouns rather than pronouns, especially if you do not know the person, is recommended in 20% of guidelines.

The target audience of the guidelines is generally not mentioned explicitly, but it can be supposed that everyone who is working or studying at the university should respect them. Some typical subjects who are mentioned *en passant* in the guidelines are students, professors, administrative staff, conference speakers, and chairs. These are not clearly indicated as target audiences, but merely listed in sentences containing explanations on how to use gender-inclusive language or examples of strategies, as in “In minutes and reports, secretariats should also be mindful of the use of gender-neutral pronouns, such as ‘they’, ‘them’, ‘their’ or ‘themselves’, instead of gendered pronouns such as ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘his’, ‘hers’, ‘himself’, ‘herself’” (University of Warwick). One exception to this general vagueness is given by the guideline for LGBTQ+ inclusive communication prepared by the King’s College London, whose target audience is clearly described and very specific: as a matter of fact, this guideline is titled “A guide for health and social care professionals”. As for the producers of these guidelines, these are tendentially university offices called EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) or with similar denominations. The guidelines often provide instances of text types while discussing gender-inclusive strategies. Both written documents and orality are thematized. Some examples of written texts are e-mails, letters, policies, forms, recruitment documentation, minutes, marketing material, and websites. As for orality, meetings, discussions, lectures, conferences, telephone conversations with students or other people are frequently mentioned. An important aspect, however, is that these text and discourse types are listed as examples to clarify the use of gender-inclusive language, but the guidelines’ authors do not foresee different strategies for different texts, and neutralization is always preferred.

6 Contrastive summary

The present section aims at highlighting the contrastive aspects between the three languages and the several countries analyzed above. For the sake of clarity, the percentages of use of the strategies examined above are reported again in Table 1.

		GERMAN			ITALIAN		ENGLISH
		DE	AU	CH	IT	CH	UK
gender specification	pair forms (splitting)	68	44	100	97	50	/
	splitting with slash, brackets, etc.	38	31	70	84	50	/
	neographies	90	97	85	9	50	/
neutralization	epicene nouns	69	77	85	84	50	47
	nominalized participles	90	100	90	/	/	/
	collective nouns	26	51	65	81	100	9
	nouns indicating functions	84	79.5	65	59	50	/
	indefinite pronouns	85	67	75	85	50	89
	direct reference to the audience	75	44	70	34	50	2.5
	neopronouns	8	18	5	/	/	59.5
	passive voice	72	61.5	60	69	50	1

Table 1: Percentage of the mentioned strategies by language and country

The differences and similarities which were detected during the analysis can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Generic masculine: specific to the Italian guidelines is the continued use of the generic masculine, still fully tolerated in 16% of cases, especially through disclaimers which indicate that masculine forms also refer to women. In the German-speaking countries, instead, the use of the generic masculine in the formal and informal communication in the universities is severely stigmatized.
- 2) Gender specification strategies: these are the preferred strategies for German-speaking guidelines. In Germany and Austria, neographies are the most recommended strategies, while in Switzerland splitting is favored. In Italian-speaking guidelines, splitting is definitely more recommended than the use of neographies. Gender specification is never recommended for English, even in cases where it is grammatically possible.
- 3) Neutralization strategies: English is the language with the clearest tendency towards neutralization, due to its peculiarities but also to the attempts to overcome gender binarism. The most important strategies in this respect are the use of gender-neutral pronouns and neopronouns, followed by epicene forms. For German, these are the use of participles, function

nouns, epicene forms, allocutives, and passive voice. For Italian, finally, neutralization strategies consist mainly in the use of passive and impersonal forms.

- 4) Audience: the target audience is generally not specified in any of the examined countries, and the guidelines are usually intended for everyone working in or with the university, including students, professors, and administrative staff.
- 5) Text types: significant differences emerge between languages and countries. In Germany, neographies are generally restricted to informal and unofficial communication, such as websites, brochures, flyers, and emails. In Austria, splitting is recommended for oral communication (meetings, discussions, lectures), neographies are accepted in all kinds of written texts (including official documents), and neutralization is particularly suggested for newsletters, websites, and job advertisements. In Switzerland, splitting is used for both oral communication and official written documents, while neographies are mostly found in websites and social media. In Italian guidelines, gender-inclusive strategies are mostly discussed in relation to administrative and bureaucratic language, particularly in legal texts such as job offers, contracts, regulations, and statutes. Neographies are explicitly prohibited, and there is no mention of inclusive spoken language. British guidelines address both written and oral contexts, but without suggesting specific strategies for different text types.

7 Conclusions

This study has highlighted significant cross-linguistic differences in gender-inclusive language strategies in German, Italian, and English. German and Italian share many of the strategies discussed, distinguishing themselves from English primarily through the use of gender specification strategies, as person designations in these languages frequently make the referent's natural gender explicitly visible. In German, however, the preference for gender specification varies by country: Austria predominantly recommends neographies, Switzerland relies on pair forms, and Germany integrates both. Neographies appear more widespread in Germany and Austria than in Switzerland, possibly due to differences in legal frameworks: while Switzerland lacks official recognition of third gender, Germany and Austria introduced it in 2017 and 2018, respectively, allowing non-binary registration in official documents.

In contrast, English shows the clearest tendency toward neutralization, a preference shaped both by its linguistic structure and by broader efforts to move beyond the gender binarism.

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