

# Gender fair strategies in job advertisements in Italy: a first update on the current situation

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## Abstract

This research aims to examine the use of gender-fair language in job advertisements within the contemporary Italian job market. The study is based on a sample of 240 job announcements collected online in 2024, with results compared to those of previous research and analyzed using corpus linguistics tools. The findings will confirm the predominance of neutralizing strategies and masculine forms, while revealing a slight increase in the use of split forms and the emergence of non-binary language, such as neomorphemes. This trend underscores the persistence of linguistic asymmetries in job announcements: problematic gender-related linguistic strategies may contribute to maintaining access barriers to specific segments of the labor market for women and to the overall persistence of social and cultural stereotypes.

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## 1 Linguistic asymmetries in Italian and the purpose of this study

The use of language that disregards women is a widespread yet too often unrecognized form of discrimination. A striking example of this issue in Italian language is the use of the generic masculine when referring to certain job positions held by women, even though our language provides a lot of strategies that are not ambiguous as the generic masculine, and that can allow the female gender to emerge (not only) linguistically, as language experts are well aware. Regarding this long-standing linguistic debate,<sup>1</sup> that has increasingly gained attention in social and political debates in our country, the starting point for gender studies in Italy usually is Alma Sabatini's booklet *Raccomandazioni per un uso non sessista della lingua italiana* ('Recommendations for Non-Sexist Use of Italian Language')<sup>2</sup> (1986), later included in the well-known *Sessismo nella lingua italiana* ('Sexism in the Italian Language') (1987): a detailed study of linguistic asymmetries regarding gender, both semantic and grammatical, and based on a collection of texts and examples taken from Italian newspapers. The sample also included 748 job advertisements, and from the analysis, it emerged clear the dissymmetry: 20.19% of the offers were clearly addressed to candidates of both sexes, 1.87% to women, 34.22% to men, and 43.58% were indeterminate, formulated using the unmarked masculine form. Sabatini strongly

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<sup>1</sup> A recent and valuable contribution to the topic comes from Cortelazzo (2024), who explores the linguistic history of certain job titles in their feminine form (e. g. *avvocata* 'lawyer', *direttrice* 'director', *ministra* 'minister', *studentessa* 'student', etc.), and points out how "it is unfounded the belief that the feminization of job titles may be a recently devised problem" (ibid.: 38).

<sup>2</sup> All translations from Italian to English in this paper are by the author.

criticized the use of the so-called unmarked masculine, which could discourage women from applying for those job positions. Such a hypothesis had been proposed by Bem/Bem (1973) and reaffirmed in other psycholinguistic studies, such as Gyga et al. (2008).

The central question addressed in this study is what has changed in recent years. In fact, it is likely that some progress has been made toward adopting a more gender-balanced linguistic approach. However, to what extent has this progress been achieved? And is the generic masculine form still the most frequently used in this type of texts? This paper tries to provide an initial answer to these and some other questions with respect to job advertisements in Italy, a not-so-explored type of texts with respect to gender fair visibility. The purpose of this study would be fulfilled drawing on the existing literature and using a corpus-based approach.

## 2 A variety of outcomes

Within the broader context of the debate on gender inclusive language in Italy, few studies have specifically studied linguistic strategies in job advertisements; on the contrary, outside of Italy, this topic has been a subject of discussion for quite some time. A few examples worth citing include: Hodel et al. (2017) conducted a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural study examining the frequency of specific gendered linguistic strategies in job advertisements across different countries; Mikić (2021) analyzed the prevalence of gendered forms in employment contexts by examining a set of job advertisements in Slovenia over the years; Formanowicz/Hodel/Sczesny (2024) investigated how the use of feminine forms in Germany may be associated with a more positive evaluation of female candidates when they describe themselves. Among the notable ones available in Italy, we can mention Mucchi-Faina (2005) and Nardone (2020), the last one based on data of 2014–2016. This will be the main comparison for the present study.

As known, Italian features two values of the grammatical category of gender, feminine and masculine. The category of gender and number rule all syntactic agreements between nouns and their depending elements (targets) within a sentence. The correspondence between grammatical gender and biological gender is mandatory with all lexical elements of the category Humans, which is placed at the highest degree of animacy. However, this rule doesn't consistently apply to a specific subset of nouns, namely job titles (cf. Corbett 2006; Thornton 2009): in fact, when referring to specific professions, especially high-level positions historically held by men, the prevailing use in Italian often prescribes the use of the so-called unmarked masculine form (cf. Zarra 2023). Within the marked (feminine) - unmarked (masculine) binary framework, this form is typically employed to refer to individuals in a generic sense: this practice leads to a variety of outcomes and choices, as we see every day:

- (1) Per redigere il dossier **sulla giudice** di Bologna Matilde Betti gli uffici del Viminale sono risaliti fino al 2016, anno in cui **il magistrato** fu **relatrice** a un seminario sui diritti d'asilo organizzato da Asgi.  
'To draft the dossier on Bologna **judge** Matilde Betti, the Ministry of the Interior offices traced back to 2016, the year in which **the magistrate** served as a **speaker** at a seminar on asylum rights organized by Asgi'.

(Ziniti 2019 in *La Repubblica*)

- (2) Beatrice Venezi è **un direttore d'orchestra** coi tacchi a spillo, **tra le più giovani** in Italia e ormai **famosa** in tutto il mondo.  
 'Beatrice Venezi is **a conductor** in high heels, one of the **youngest** in Italy and now **renowned** worldwide'.

(Giordani 2019 in *Cosmopolitan*)

In both (1) and (2) there is the alternate use of female and generic masculine to refer to Matilde Betti and Beatrice Venezi, the two subjects, and this affects the syntactic agreement of the sentences in a striking way: the unique interplay of anaphora and agreements is very noteworthy. First of all, in (1) what surprises is the combined presence of both *sulla giudice* (feminine) and *il magistrato* (masculine) for the same feminine referent; the agreement on the target *relatrice*, a predicate, is even more remarkable, precisely because its controller is unequivocally *il magistrato* and should therefore trigger syntactic agreement.<sup>3</sup> The alternate use of feminine forms and unmarked masculine forms within the same utterances, particularly in the case of synonymous terms like in (1), clearly highlights speakers' uncertainty regarding their use. With reference to example (2), the partitive *tra le più giovani in Italia* does not correctly establish reference to the predicate noun *un direttore d'orchestra*: while the message is partially comprehensible (namely, that Beatrice Venezi is a young renowned professional in her field), it remains unclear whether the reference pertains to the category of Italian female conductors or to the entire set of referents, including male conductors; moreover, the attribute *famosa* should agree with *direttore d'orchestra*. The reference is indeed ambiguous: the grammatical subject is feminine, the predicate noun is masculine, the attributes are feminine, undergoing semantic agreement and not syntactic agreement. Probably behind the use of *direttore d'orchestra*, followed by the feminization *con i tacchi a spillo* ('in high heels', a metaphor for female, woman) there is a willingness to acknowledge Beatrice Venezi's (2021) own preference, as she previously stated her desire to be referred to as "direttore d'orchestra" using exclusively the masculine form (Ruggiero 2021 in *Open*).

Various outcomes, of course, reflect linguistic uncertainties regarding usage, as well as the broader tendency of many speakers to rely on what sounds best to them, even at the expense of the clarity of the text. All of this occurs despite the possibilities offered by the Italian linguistic system: as stated in the beginning, it is always possible to use feminine forms for job titles, at least from a purely grammatical perspective (cf. Fusco 2019; Robustelli 2012; Thornton 2004): what is lacking, as mentioned, is the obligation to do so. And the case of Beatrice Venezi brings to light another well-known issue: the resistances to the use of feminine forms for high-ranking job titles (e. g. *ministra* 'ministry', *consigliera* 'councilor', *amministratrice delegata* 'CEO') stems from the cultural perception of masculinity as more authoritative, therefore the reference to the biological gender of the individual becomes a negligible piece of information: resistance to feminized professional titles has first of all a cultural, rather than linguistic, nature.

Over the past ten to fifteen years, several significant studies and new guidelines on gender-inclusive language have been published across various fields. This is most likely a reflection of

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<sup>3</sup> For an exhaustive analysis about agreement, cf. Corbett 2006 and Dahl 2000; for a lexicographical analysis of *direttrice d'orchestra* and other job titles, cf. again Cortelazzo (2024).

a society that is increasingly sensitive to issues of gender visibility.<sup>4</sup> Talking about initiatives in Italy, usually these guidelines are spot-initiatives and move towards two directions: specification of female gender or neutralization; a third direction, used quite more, is a mix of the first two. Each guideline<sup>5</sup> pertains to a specific sector or context, but generally are based on two core principles, criteria for feminine denomination and the use of over-extended, or neutral, masculine form. Most of them are merely suggestions and recommendations, meaning that their use is neither mandatory nor strictly regulated. More importantly, there is a lack of guidelines specifically addressing job announcements, which may increase the production of heterogeneous texts in terms of gendered linguistic strategies, as we will see in Chapter 3. An example of a study about their reception may be Bachis/Mondani (2024), that reflect on the influence of specific guidelines, written by Robustelli (2014) as part of a project involving a group of Italian female journalists named Gi.U.Li.A. Their research is conducted ten years after the publishing of these guidelines, and focuses on major traditional media (newspapers and tv news): the results are generally positive, meaning that female and male journalists largely seem to apply the guidelines found in the Guide regarding both the names of female figures and their positions; in contrast, the general masculine form is still very much common, even in those cases where it could be avoided easily (cf. Bachis/Mondani 2024).

Feminization consists in the symmetrical use of both the masculine and the feminine form (cf. Cavagnoli 2013):

Extended/symmetrical form:	Short/asymmetrical form:
a. <i>candidato/candidata, candidati/candidate</i> ; ‘candidate’, ‘candidates’.	a. <i>candidato/a</i> ;
b. <i>il/la consulente, i/le consulenti</i> ;	b. <i>candidati/e</i> ;
	c. <i>un/a consulente</i>

<sup>4</sup> Even before in Italy, this discussion emerged in the US. More broadly, gender studies and issues related to the study of gender now hold a prominent place in both public and academic debate. In this regard, the very notion of *gender* has evolved, both as a category of nominal classification in languages that feature agreement and as an aspect of individual identity, related to biological sex: “[...] there is a strong connection between the two meanings. In the 1970s, American feminists borrowed the category of gender from linguistics, transforming it into a theoretical and political tool to reveal the conventional and relational nature of women’s and men’s roles in society, rejecting the biological determinism evoked by the term sex” says Fusco (2019: 29). Cf. also Comandini (2021), Botto et al. (2022), Robustelli (2022).

<sup>5</sup> A short list of guidelines for public administrations and for the workplace, in Italy, without claims of completeness: *Misure per attuare parità e pari opportunità tra uomini e donne nelle amministrazioni pubbliche* (Ministero per le Riforme e le Innovazioni nella Pubblica Amministrazione 2007) [‘Measures to implement gender equality and equal opportunities between men and women in public administrations (Ministry for Public Administration Reform and Innovation)’]; *Linee guida per l’uso del genere nel linguaggio amministrativo del MIUR* (Ministero dell’Istruzione, dell’Università e della Ricerca 2018) [‘Guidelines for the use of gender in the administrative language of the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, University and Research)’]; *Linee guida per l’uso di un linguaggio rispettoso delle differenze di genere* (Agenzia delle Entrate 2020) [‘Guidelines for using gender-sensitive language (Italian Revenue Agency)’]; *Linee guida per un linguaggio amministrativo rispettoso del genere* (Città Metropolitana di Milano 2023) [‘Guidelines for using gender-sensitive language in administration (Metropolitan City of Milan)’]; the first gender equality certification body in Italy is UNI Ente Italiano di Normazione (‘Italian body for Standardization’), authorized by the Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri (‘Department of Fair Opportunities Presidency, Council of Ministers’) to provide the Gender Equality Certification System (Dipartimento per le Pari Opportunità 2021) for Companies.

According to Cavagnoli, the extended symmetrical form would simultaneously convey the difference between men and women and the coexistence of both, and for such reasons can be considered the best option. Regarding neutralization, it consists of prioritizing periphrases, epicene nouns (e. g. *persona* ‘person’) or collective nouns (e. g. *il personale* ‘personnel’) that do not explicitly refer to individuals of a specific gender. Thornton (2022) provides an analysis of cases in which neutralized and feminized strategies may present limitations or create challenges depending on the communicative context and points out how in some cases<sup>6</sup> the best option is to adopt alternative solutions, such as the use of both masculine and feminine forms in either a symmetrical or asymmetrical structure, in combination with neutralizing strategies too. Within a job advertisement, but also in other types of texts, an extensive use of extended gendered forms would go against the principles of linguistic economy and should be used carefully. Of course, a task of this kind requires a deep metalinguistic competence, which is not always ensured.

At a regulative level, for what concerns job announcements, there are several laws in place that should ensure equal visibility and rights for men and women. These include Law 903/1977 “Parità di trattamento tra uomini e donne in materia di lavoro”,<sup>7</sup> Law 125/1991 “Azioni positive per la realizzazione della parità uomo-donna nel lavoro” (art. 4, comma 3),<sup>8</sup> and Decreto Legislativo 198/2006 “Codice delle pari opportunità tra uomo e donna, con divieto di discriminazione nell’accesso al mondo del lavoro”.<sup>9</sup> In particular, the last two laws are, or should be, cited at the bottom of every job advertisement published in Italy. We will later examine the extent and way this occurs.

### 3 Corpus creation and analysis

To guarantee a proper and rigorous study, I decided to build on previous research on job announcements. As mentioned earlier, only a limited number of studies are available on this topic in Italian. The most recent one, by Nardone (2020), is based on data collected between 2014 and 2016: I selected this work as the primary point of comparison for my analysis and as an initial reference for constructing a new corpus of job announcements.<sup>10</sup> With this in mind, I collected a sample of announcements published by private companies between April and May 2024: specifically, the announcements were gathered through a famous job-matching and hiring web platform (Indeed). A randomized selection criterion was applied, and data collection took place on different days to ensure variability. Additionally, the sample is internally divided among Italy’s three largest labor markets by population: the Metropolitan Cities of Milan,

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<sup>6</sup> Thornton (2022: 26f) considers at least four contexts to determine where the application of guidelines implies specific challenges: (1) when the referent is specific and known; (2) when the referent is specific but unknown; (3) when the referent is generic; (4) when there are plural and mixed referents.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Equality of treatment between men and women in employment’.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Positive actions for the achievement of gender equality in employment’.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Code of equal opportunities between men and women, with a ban on discrimination in access to the labor market’.

<sup>10</sup> Nardone (2020) collected 483 job announcements published by Italian and German companies over almost three years (2014–2016). Data related to Italian companies only are published in Somma, Maestri (2020).

Rome, and Naples.<sup>11</sup> The final dataset consists of 45320 tokens and a total of 240 job announcements, with 80 announcements for each City gathered looking at the different Ateco ISTAT (2021) codes regarding the Italian job market.<sup>12</sup> This dataset can be regarded as pretty comparable to the one compiled by Nardone (2020). Analysis was conducted using the software Sketch Engine. Since each job posting can feature more than one strategy and contain the same substantive or pair of substantives more than once, I will focus on the relative number of job posting with at least one of each strategies/substantive or pair of substantives. Job names and all the different linguistic strategies were found searching for name suffixes using a specific query<sup>13</sup> and focusing the search only on nouns:

Masculine	Feminine	Epicene and common gender nouns
-o/-a,	-i/-e	-e, -i
-aio, -ai	-aia, -aie	-a, -i
-ario, -ari	-aria, -arie	-ante, -anti
-iere, -ieri	-iera, -iere	-ente, -enti
-sore, -sori	-sora/-sore	
-tore, -tori	-trice, -trici	

**Table 1: Suffixes for male, female, epicene and generic substantives singular and plural**

During data analysis, no instances of *m/f* or *f/m*, considered by Nardone (2020), were found, nor I could identify any occurrences of feminized forms using *-essa*.

In the following pages, a general overview of the distribution of strategies used among job ads will be given. First, we will see the occurrences of symmetrical strategies. As expected, this is a rare strategy within the corpus:

<sup>11</sup> Based on ISTAT (2023) data compiled for *Profili delle Città Metropolitane*. A future step in the research could possibly be to investigate diatopic differences in the use of inclusive strategies.

<sup>12</sup> The sample is divided as follows: industry 9% (manufacturing, energy supply, construction), commerce 25% (wholesale, retail), tourism 15% (accommodation, food service), transport 5% (logistics, shipping), finance and insurance 5%, services 34% (real estate agencies, employment agencies, administrative and accounting, professional services for businesses and individuals), and other sectors 7% (education, healthcare, personal care, entertainment).

<sup>13</sup> Example: [word="\*.iere" & tag="N.\*"].

Substantive	Use in context	Freq.	Ads
Candidati/candidate, operatore/operatrice, addetto/addetta, un/una tirocinante, un/una analista funzionale, un/una technical recruiter, un/una business & tech analyst, il/la account manager junior, il/la tech sales manager, un/una data entry	<p>-Entiende srl è alla ricerca di <b>un addetto/un'addetta</b> alla segreteria per la nostra sede di Aversa.</p> <p><b>-Operatore/Operatrice</b> che abbia una spiccata dimestichezza con il PC.</p> <p>Siamo alla ricerca di <b>un/una tirocinante</b> in ambito Ricerca e Selezione.</p> <p>-Per importante Società di Ingegneria siamo alla ricerca di <b>un/una Technical Recruiter</b>.</p> <p>-Sei <b>un/una Business&amp;Technical Analyst</b> e ti piacerebbe entrare a [...]?</p>	14	12

**Table 2: Symmetrical strategies**

Compared to the previous data available, the frequency of this strategy remained almost the same: I found 12 ads over 240 with at least one double symmetrical strategy (5%), whereas Nardone (2020: 215) found 32 ads over 483 with at least one double symmetrical strategy (6,6%).

Asymmetrical strategies presented these results:

Substantive	Use in context	Freq.	Ads
Addetto/e, addetti/e, candidato/a, candidati/e, Impiegato/a, impiegati/e, operatore/trice, gastronomi/e, segretario/a, studenti/esse, cassieri/e, una/o laureata/o, segretaria/o, addetta/i, addette/i, il/la candidato/a, un/a impiegato/a, un/a addetto/a, i/le collaboratori/trici, un/a recruiter, un/a chef, un/a stagista, un/a sales manager.	<p>-Ricerchiamo <b>cassieri/e</b> in grado di gestire sia la postazione di cassa sia la sistemazione dei prodotti.</p> <p>-Si ricerca <b>Impiegato/a tecnico amministrativo/a</b>, che risponderà all'account manager.</p> <p>-Ricerca <b>una/un segretaria/o amministrativa/o</b>.</p> <p>-Un team di esperti/e supporterà tutti/e i/le nuovi/e <b>collaboratori/trici</b> con una formazione aziendale costante</p> <p>-Agenzia seleziona <b>un/a stagista</b> contabile per nostra Azienda cliente.</p>	68	62

**Table 3: Asymmetrical strategies**

In this case, the frequency of this strategy has likely increased: in the sample, 62 ads out of 240 contain at least one asymmetrical strategy (25%) with male forms as dominant, whereas Nardone (2020: 219) identified 88 ads over 483 with at least one asymmetrical strategy (18,2%) of this kind. Moreover, 9 ads out of 240 (3,75%) are formulated with feminine form predominant: Nardone showed that this strategy was found only in 5 ads (1%). Furthermore, half of these forms occur in advertisements seeking employees for retails and offices (where women are

frequently employed)<sup>14</sup>, and in one case, the title of the advertisement explicitly refers to a female figure only.

About neutralizing strategies, we can categorize them into two types: the use of epicene and common gender nouns, and the use of neutral and collective nouns. The results for the first category are as follows:

Substantive	Use in context	Freq.	Ads
Estetista, consulente/i, barista, agente/i, commerciale/i, banconista, telefonista, guardie, stagista, responsabile.	-Pizzeria al taglio, zona piazza Bologna, ricerca <b>banconista</b> con esperienza. - <b>Telefonista</b> per presa appuntamenti. -Richiesta di assunzione per <b>consulenti</b> in-bound. -Synergie Italia SpA ricerca [...] una risorsa da inserire come <b>responsabile</b> di negozio.	98	72

**Table 4: Epicene and common gender noun strategies**

In this case, I excluded all the English forms such as HR *recruiter*, *sales account* and so on. Additionally, these forms were found mostly in the titles of the announcements. 60 ads out of 240 (25%) contain at least one epicene or common gender noun, whereas Nardone (2020: 222) identified 70 ads out of 483 (14,5%). It seems that the proportion of advertisements that feature these types of nouns has increased.

Neutral and collective nouns, on the other side, occur as follows:

Substantive	Use in context	Freq.	Ads
Figura/e, risorsa/e, talenti, profilo/i, persona/e, posizione, candidatura, personale.	-La <b>figura</b> si occuperà della riconfigurazione delle camere secondo standard previsti. -Cerchiamo <b>personale</b> per la nostra sede di Roma. -GROW UP GROUP è un'agenzia di Marketing e Fundraising alla ricerca di tre <b>profili</b> da inserire all'interno del team. -La <b>persona</b> selezionata supporterà i colleghi del team nella gestione delle attività commerciali	181	160

**Table 5: Neutral noun strategies**

Compared to previous data, this strategy has most likely increased its presence too: in the sample, 135 ads out of 240 (56,25%) contain at least one of these forms, whereas Nardone (2020: 224) identified 212 ads out of 483 (43,9%). As Nardone also points out, however, it is difficult to determine whether these uses reflect a deliberate intention to neutralize the discourse and move beyond the generic masculine plural, or if they are simply nouns that can be commonly found in this type of text.

<sup>14</sup> For a more in-depth analysis about this matter, refer to note 11 and see also the INPS data compiled for Confindustria (2023) and the ISTAT (2024) data compiled for the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies.

Finally, the following includes all the occurrences I collected related to the most recent proposals on inclusive language in Italy, such as forms with \*, @, and ə.<sup>15</sup> My sample contains only 5 ads out of 240 (2%), but despite their small number, they may represent a linguistic novelty within the topic. Formulations that employ strategies like these can be found both in the wording at the bottom of the advertisements related to Law 125/1991 and both in the body of the announcement:

Substantive	Use in context	Freq	Ads
Ragionier*, addett*, un* junior account executive, i/lə candidatə, un@ consulente.	-Cerchiamo <b>Ragionier</b> * <sup>16</sup> con esperienza c/o Studi Commerciali. -Adecco Financial Services per importante Broker Assicurativo di calibro internazionale, ricerca <b>un* Junior Account Executive</b> . <sup>17</sup> -Siamo alla ricerca di <b>un@ consulente</b> <sup>18</sup> commerciale in sede.	6	5

**Table 6: Third gender or neomorphemes strategies**

A key reference, among the others, for gender neutralization strategies is the study by Comandini (2021), which examines the use of these strategies across various domains, including online meeting spaces, social media, and, notably, queer and LGBTQIA+ communities. This research provides an initial overview of the actual use of neutralization forms by analyzing the CoGeNSI corpus (Corpus of Gender Neutralization Strategies in Italian), which is composed of texts produced on the web. These linguistic forms have primarily emerged in virtual environments, particularly on social media, and, with a few exceptions, remain largely confined to these contexts. In Italy, one publisher<sup>19</sup> has notably chosen to release texts incorporating, for instance, the schwa, while some websites, particularly those focused on cultural dissemination, activism, and related fields, have adopted this language: in these cases, the use of a third gender is often described as a linguistic experiment or advocate for its use in the context of social, feminist, and anti-heteronormative discourse.

That said, the use of these forms within job announcements can be seen as a linguistic novelty: as Comandini (2021) points out, these strategies can be classified as sub-standard and, therefore, lack a well-defined pattern of use, as it will be shown in a minute.

<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of this topic please cf. Comandini (2021), as well as Giusti (2022) and Thornton (2022) regarding the potential practical applications of these linguistic proposals; for a recent study about attitudes towards this issue among Italian speakers, cf. Scotto di Carlo 2024; lastly, Esposito 2024 relates the emergence of *neomorphemes* and, in general, of non-binary linguistic forms in Italian, to the discursive practices largely originated from Latin American feminism, and focuses on translation practices adopted by Italian activists. Among the several contributions on *neomorphemes* (cf. De Cesare/Giusti 2024) in Italian, cf. also: D’Achille 2021, Gheno 2020, Robustelli 2021, Pani 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Instead of *ragioniere/ragioniera*.

<sup>17</sup> Instead of *un/una junior account executive*.

<sup>18</sup> Instead of *un/una consulente*.

<sup>19</sup> This refers to the publisher Effequ, which has chosen to introduce the use of the schwa within its *Saggi Pop* series. As De Cesare (2024: 37) says, here “the use of this symbol transcends the textual genres associated with social media and informal communicative situations”.

Regarding the closing statements related to Law 125/1991, I found that 93 ads out of 240 (38,33%) in my sample included a form of reference to this legislation. In comparison, Nardone's (2020) study reported such formulations in 98 out of 483 advertisements (20,3%), suggesting a potential increase over time and indicating that the proportion of advertisements referencing the law has nearly doubled. Additionally, formulations that employ *neomorphemes* can be found in six closing statements related to the law: three formulated with the schwa (ə) and three with the asterisk (\*). Two examples:

- (1) L'offerta è rivolta a **candidatə** nel rispetto del D.lgs 198/2006 [...];  
'The job offer is addressed to **candidates** in compliance with the D.lgs 198/2006 [...]'.
- (2) Le società sono impegnate a garantire pari opportunità di accesso al lavoro a **tutt\* i/le candidat\*** e sono impegnate nel favorire il rispetto e l'inclusione sul posto di lavoro;  
'Companies are committed to equal opportunities access in access to employment for **all candidates** and to promoting respect and inclusion in the workplace'.

Both sentences are used by two different job agencies. Moreover, in (2), the use of the asterisk reveals its morphological limitations: while the asterisk may convey a neutral representation of the noun *candidate/e*, its use cannot be extended to *i* and *le*. The phrase therefore exhibits a structural incongruence, as the agreement between the articles and the noun is not fully resolved. This sloppy result shows the purpose of overcoming gender binarism, however achieving it partially.

Despite these developments, masculine forms still appear to be dominant: a total of 173 masculine forms were identified, with 128 ads out of 240 (53,33%) containing at least one masculine form, a little over half of the total. This count includes masculine nouns both with and without an article (e. g. *cuoco*, *un professionista*) as well as English job titles preceded by an article (e. g. *un manager*, *un consultant*).

Finally, a first qualitative look at the data will be given in the last part of this paragraph. First of all, it seems that roughly one advertisement every two adopt a neutral strategy by using terms such as *figura*, *talento*, or *persona* (56,25%) and a masculine form (53,33%); then, looking exclusively at titles of the job postings, it appears that the majority employ either masculine forms (34,76%) and neutralizing strategies (49,76%) when addressing to candidates, with these two categories accounting for an overwhelming 84,52% of the total of the titles.<sup>20</sup> When analyzed by labor sector, the most linguistically inclusive strategies (symmetric and asymmetric), though less common than the other approaches (only 31 titles out of 233 featured these strategies), are primarily found in titles for positions for the third sector, such as HR and administrative services: 29 titles out of 31 (90,4%) fall into this category. In contrast, titles of job postings for positions in industry, manufacturing, and finance frequently employ masculine forms: 80 titles out of 233 feature a masculine form, and 57 titles out of 80 (72%) were related to these specific job sectors. Notably, only 4 titles were formulated using explicitly just the feminine form for the job position, and all of them were job postings seeking for office administrators, secretarial roles and, in general, office-related positions. Although these observations remain impression-

<sup>20</sup> The percentages refer to a total of 233 titles out of 240 job announcements, as some titles were excluded from the count due to their use of generic expressions (e. g. *varie mansioni*, 'various tasks'), reference to the job sector (e. g. *gestione clienti*, 'client management') or other type of formulations (e. g. *si ricerca prima esperienza*, 'seeking candidates with no prior experience').

istic, they may broadly reflect the current gendered division of labor in Italy, where certain sectors continue to be strongly associated with a specific gender<sup>21</sup>. A more detailed study in this direction would be highly valuable: a key methodological reference could be the previously mentioned study by Hodel et al. (2017), although it does not specifically consider the Italian context.

#### 4 Conclusion

The dataset indicates that strategies such as double asymmetrical forms and neutralizing strategies, epicene or common-gender nouns and neutral nouns, appear to have increased in presence compared to previously available data. Additionally, formulations related to Law 125/1991 may have increased their presence as well. Double symmetrical strategies, on the other side, continue to keep a low presence in the corpus, despite being the most recommended approach for ensuring equal gender visibility. However, the high occurrence of neutral nouns itself can be considered a valuable and positive step towards reducing the use of generic masculine forms, even though neutralizing choices may keep the female gender in the shadow. At the same time, this analysis may confirm that the generic masculine form is still widely used.

Despite the overall findings seem to be quite positive and encouraging, other studies are needed to address additional questions: for example, since an advertisement may include more than one strategy, future research could investigate possible patterns and interplay of multiple linguistic strategies. Exploring these patterns could provide important insights into the ways gender-inclusive language is applied and its potential impact on the perception of job postings. Moreover, a qualitative analysis on the texts would be essential too, in order to determine the communicative *weight* of each strategy within each text: it is possible that the use of symmetrical or asymmetrical strategies in the title or in the first lines of the job posting could be followed by other forms (e. g. generic masculine, neutral nouns) in the rest of the text.

In conclusion, it is crucial that these preliminary steps may evolve into something more. For instance, the hope is that future initiatives will include directives that mandate the implementation of gender-fair language strategies within job advertisements: I believe that making these practice mandatory, rather than leaving them as merely advisory, can help in breaking the cycle of linguistic inequality and push for a change in the representation of gender in the labor market.

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<sup>21</sup> Zunino/Stetie 2022 highlight how, typically, men exhibit a greater rejection than women of non-binary forms when referring to professions associated with mixed groups, and, in general, this rejection is particularly evident towards job titles strongly marked and associated with gender stereotypes (i. e. *plumbers*).

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