

## **LIGHTS 2018**

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**L**Inguaggio, parità di **G**enere e parole d'odio

**L**anguage, **G**ender and **HaTe** Speech

18-19 ottobre / Octobre 2018

Ca' Dolfin, Venezia

### **Keywords**

gender identity, gender perception, gender representation, gender stereotypes, gendered hate speech, gender-fair language, discourse comprehension, referential accessibility, inclusion, language policies computational linguistics, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, educational linguistics, forensic linguistics, linguistics education, NLP, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics

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Since the publication of the *Recommendations for a non-sexist use of the Italian language* (Sabatini 1987), interest on the relationship between language use and gender equity in Italy has witnessed dramatically polar reactions swinging at different times from fierce and fiery debate to total neglect. The topic has made a recent come-back on the political agenda and in the media thanks to Laura Boldrini (former president of the Chamber of Deputies) and Valeria Fedeli (minister of Education) who have accepted the guidelines for a non-sexist language use in Italian licensed by the *Accademia della Crusca* (Robustelli 2012) and required that they be used in texts and documents under their control. The recent extreme verbally heated reactions across the media and over the web serve to underscore how important and timely it is in Italy to sit down at the table and address the crucial role that language plays in creating gender equity in society (Giusti 2016). They also provide an exemplary case of what Deborah Cameron (1995/2012) defines “verbal hygiene”; namely, the natural propensity that speakers have to establish norms of language use. As such, these normative speaker judgments are to be viewed as part of

metalinguistic competence and are, therefore, also worth of being investigated by linguists, social and cognitive scientists.

Paralleling this renewed interest in gender-fair language use is the recent attention towards the manifold forms of hate-speech at an international level (Council of Europe, Resolution 384/2015). Even more recently, this has been matched by focused interest on the topic at the national level, as exemplified by the “*Joe Cox*” *Committee on intolerance, xenophobia, racism and hate phenomena*, of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, which issued a Final Report (2017) including an inventory of hate words compiled by the late Italian linguist Tullio De Mauro.

The parallel and synergistic scientific study of the social impact of gender-fair language use on the one hand, and gendered hate speech on the other, is timely and urgent in the Italian academic scene. This can best be carried out with a combined scientific approach that includes quantitative and qualitative methods.

Ca’ Foscari University of Venice has taken a proactive role over the last decade primarily building awareness on the impact of language on gender identity in academic institutions and the media. A number of research and dissemination outputs have targeted these issues in a comparative framework, comparing the Italian situation with other European countries and languages with publications (e.g., Giusti & Regazzoni 2009; Giusti 2011), events, conferences, a MOOC, and a set of guidelines.

The Venice Accessibility Lab in the Department of Linguistics and Cultural Studies wishes to take stock of the new research prospects on language and gender identity in a comparative perspective with interdisciplinary approaches across the cultural, social and cognitive sciences, (Department research and development mission, 2018-22). The conference coincides with the ten-year anniversary of the national conference *Mi fai male* (November 2008), and the 150th year celebrations at Ca’ Foscari (founded 1868).

## **Objectives**

LIGHTS [Linguaggio, parità di Genere e parole d’odio / Language gender and HaTe Speech] will bring together international experts in the areas of formal and computational Linguistics, Psychology, Pedagogy, Sociology, Legal and Political Studies to discuss inclusive communication practices, verbal and linguistic equity and fairness, verbal violence in an intersectional approach considering gender and gender-identity in a comparative cross-linguistic and cross-cultural approach.

Italian Academia is relatively new to reflections on language, gender representation and gender perception and verbal violence, therefore the call for contributions is open to a range of research questions and approaches, to a variety of languages and methodologies. Of particular interest are comparative approaches across different types of media, social and cultural environments, and transectional identities.

The conference aims to establish a link between scientists and stakeholders in the areas of communication, media and education, to foster new scientific projects on language, gender and inclusion with a strong social impact, providing the forum and opportunity for national stake holders to come into contact and discuss the most urgent needs with national and international researchers.

## **Invited Speakers**

Heather Burnett, CNRS – Université Paris Diderot  
Deborah Cameron, University of Oxford  
Mark McGlashan, Birmingham City University  
Elisabetta Rosi, Supreme Court of Cassation

**Call for talks or posters (to be specified in the proposal)**

**Please send anonymous abstracts (500 words max.) to [LIGHTS@unive.it](mailto:LIGHTS@unive.it) by June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018** for talks (20 mins + 10 mins discussions) or posters (70 x120 cm), in Italian or English. The abstracts can address one or more of the following (or related) questions. Comparative and interdisciplinary approaches are especially welcome. Abstracts will be double blind peer-reviewed. Acceptance will be notified by July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

## Research Questions

1. What is the impact of so-called inclusive or generic masculine on the representation of gender and the construction of gender identity at the individual and societal level? Can the mismatch between formal and natural gender interfere with fully accessing aspects of the content?
2. What is the impact of “gender-fair language” in the expressions used for professional roles and how does this relate to the empowerment of women in society and in social discourse? Can a perfect match between grammatical and natural gender improve the accessibility of the content?
3. What are the reactions expressed by different communities of speakers to various guidelines for non-sexist use in different languages and cultures? What are the differences across times / languages / cultures?
4. Can consistent and massive use of the feminine grammatical gender pose a threat to gender equity in the professions because of potentially derogatory connotations, uncertainties of denomination, or hostile reactions by others?
5. How can grammatical and semantic gender impact on the creation of gender identity in minority or heritage L2/L3-bilingual speakers when their L1 displays different properties from the L2/L3? Do bilinguals experience higher or lower degrees of accessibility to texts containing gender mismatches? Is it possible to foster a more inclusive approach to the social category of gender through the means of formal linguistic education?
6. What types of languages are more “gender friendly”? Is it languages lacking a formal gender category - in which the same terms apply to all genders - or is it languages that can highlight the presence of female referents in the discourse through rich gender agreement? What are the indicators of “gender friendliness” from both a cognitive and a social perspective?
7. What features and structures characterize misogynistic speech in terms of narratives, collocations, metaphors, use or neglect of gender-fair language across different types of media, political discourse, naturalistic interaction with peers?
8. What are the forms of “subtle” hate speech towards women and LGBTIQ persons that may ground the more common forms of hate speech in the cultural discourse? What are ways to pick out forms of subtle hate speech in “big data”?
9. What are the national and international laws to contrast hate speech? How can good practices be converged upon and shared at the transnational European level?
10. Is it possible to integrate educational policies for gender equity and citizenship on the one hand and linguistics education on the other hand?
11. Can we consider the wide spread “anti-gender” identity speech in Italy as a form of *gender-based hate speech*? What are the discourse strategies used by anti-gender ideology to support gender biases and stereotypes that reinforce misogyny, homophobia and transphobia?
12. How do technologies support the spread of discriminatory ideologies (including, but not limited to gender-based biases)? Conversely, how can new technologies be used as educational tools to disseminate gender equity and respect for diversity in the new generations in an intersectional approach?

## Stakeholders

The scientific and academic community, undergraduate and graduate students, school teachers, media operators in public institutions, University administrators and technical staff, journalists, lawyers and judges, policy makers.

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