

## THE EUROPEAN UNION AND CONTROVERSIES OVER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

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*You miss your mother in your own mother tongue*  
Grigore Vieru

**Abstract.** The present article reveals that the potential sources of EU failure include the parodying of values and miscommunication. The transgender-keyed re-interpretation of the Nativity scene on the front page of the German magazine *Siegesäule* and the debate on the blasphematory gesture committed by the so-called “ambassador of the rights of the LGBT community”, Riccardo Simonetti, highlighted the existence of a strong religious identity and showed how sensitive the border between tolerance and religious aggression is. Around the same time, in the autumn-winter of 2021, there were fierce discussions on the proposal of an internal stylistic guide on inclusive language made by the European Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli. Several critical voices (journalists, politicians, high-ranking priests, people of culture) invoked in this context the EU’s forgetfulness of its Judeo-Christian roots and associated this project with neo-Marxist ideology. We aim to illustrate these aspects and to emphasize the idea that such slippages are likely to erode the intricate relationship between diversity and identity (both linguistic and religious) in the European Union.

**Keywords:** *Inclusive Language; Christianity; Identity; Tolerance; European Commission*

### *One Initiative and Many Reactions*

The document entitled “Guidelines for Inclusive Communication”<sup>1</sup> is part of a larger project of the European Commission which aims to achieve a “Union of equality”<sup>2</sup> regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or sexual orientation.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, Guidelines for Inclusive Communication, 2021, <https://www.fdesouche.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/guidelines-for-Inclusive-communication.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN>.

At least at the declarative level, the document aims to avoid any social discrimination: against women, LGBTIQ<sup>3</sup> people, ethnic groups other than ‘Caucasians’, religions other than Christianity, people with disabilities or age discrimination.

Was it necessary to draw up such a document? We won’t take the chance of responding. We will only mention a few precedents. For example, in 2018, the Council of the European Union published a brochure on “Inclusive Communication” recommending the use of impartial language, avoiding the generic male appellation, replacing the ‘Christian name’ with ‘first name’, etcetera<sup>4</sup>. In 2020 the European Parliament published a “Glossary of non-discriminatory language for internal and external communication”, in which “preferable” and “avoidable” terms appear on two columns. Thus, the terms ‘assigned sex/gender-nonconforming/non-binary gender/gender-fluid’ are preferred to ‘biological sex’<sup>5</sup>. The European Commission’s 2021 Guide is therefore placed inside a suite of EU initiatives that have the same motivation. The topic has been on the European agenda since 2008<sup>6</sup> and has been vigorously pursued ever since. Coming to such a fertile domain, we will attempt to understand why the 32 pages presented by Commissioner Helena Dalli<sup>7</sup> in the autumn of 2021 caused a major stir.

The document, justified by “the desire to illustrate the diversity of European culture”, proposes practical examples for the use of gender-neutral language in the Commission. The plea for inclusive language starts from the premise that words would build reality. Consequently, it attempts to expurgate from the language any word that may discriminate, and to propose surrogate terms: not ‘gay’, but ‘gay person’; not ‘handicapped’, but ‘disabled person’; not ‘immigrant’ but ‘migrant’; not ‘old people’, but ‘older people’ etc. The manner of writing recalls somewhat that of the famous *Appendix Probi*. But this is about conformity with egalitarian ideology, not linguistic correctness.

Beyond these types of corrections, there are also a number of nuances and some unfortunate examples. In the Gender chapter, for example, in order to integrate the fluid gender, it is recommended to avoid the masculine/ feminine pronouns in the third person singular. In communications written in English, instead of Mr./Mrs./Miss, Mx shall be indicated as approved formula. The natural address phrase ‘ladies and gentlemen’, which is considered to be non-inclusive, should be replaced by the phrase ‘dear colleagues’. That is, with no mention of any specific gender. Formulas such as ‘esteemed lady/miss’ – obsolete, retrograde,

<sup>3</sup> The acronym LGBTIQ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer people.

<sup>4</sup> Council of the European Union, *Inclusive Communication in the GSC*, 2018, [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35446/en\\_brochure-inclusive-communication-in-the-gsc.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35446/en_brochure-inclusive-communication-in-the-gsc.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament, *Glossary of Sensitive Language for Internal and External Communications*, 2020, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/trad/etu/pdf/glossary\\_sensitive\\_language\\_2020\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/trad/etu/pdf/glossary_sensitive_language_2020_en.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> European Parliament, *Gender-neutral language in the European Parliament*, 2008, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/publications/2009/0001/P6\\_PUB\(2009\)0001\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/publications/2009/0001/P6_PUB(2009)0001_EN.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Helena Dalli (born 1962) is the first European Commissioner for Equality, in office since 1 December 2019; she holds a PhD in political sociology from the University of Nottingham; in Malta, she was Minister for European Affairs and Equality (2017-2019) <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/default/files/helena-dalli-cv.pdf>.

non-inclusive and fallen into disgrace – are persecuted by the Brussels vocabulary, along with all their denotative (sex, marital status) and connotative (distinction, politeness, respect) meanings: “Do not use Miss or Mrs, unless it is the explicit preference of the person addressed; use Ms universally” (p. 6). The nouns ‘chair, spokesperson, ombudsperson’ are recommended instead of ‘chairman, spokesman, ombudsman’. Finally, even when organizing a round table, for example, the principle of gender equality must take precedence (although likely to lead to positive discrimination): “Do not organise panel discussions with only one gender represented” (p. 6).

Under the umbrella of the same principle of parity, in the LGBTIQ chapter it is recommended to avoid the terms ‘mother’ and ‘father’ and replace them with the generic term ‘parent’, which has the virtue of occulting sex: “Avoid assuming that a person’s family members are their wife, husband, mother and father” (p. 14).

Attention then swings to the religious sphere. ‘Christmas’ is banned for the same reason: it is not inclusive. Suspected of offending non-Christians, Christmas should be banished from the communication of Brussels officials, invited to become “sensitive” to diversity: “Be sensitive about the fact that people have different religious traditions and calendars” (p. 19). Instead of Christmas, a neutral word is suggested: ‘holiday’. Thus, the traditional Christmas greetings should be replaced, for example, with ‘good wishes’ for the ‘winter holiday’.

This is what made-in-Brussels “newspeak” sounds like (a term consecrated by George Orwell in the famous 1984 dystopia). For all those who lived their childhood under Communism and waited for *Father Frost* during the *winter holidays* (and do not suffer from historical amnesia) such recommendations are a *déjà vu*. Referring to this recommendation in the inclusive communication guide, the President of the Romanian Academy, historian Ioan-Aurel Pop, made a correlation between the past and the present, between Communism and neo-Marxism, revealing their communion of goals and identical means of achieving them: “Today we have a neo-Marxist globalism that pursues, with the same words or with different words of identical meaning, similar goals”<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, the Sovereign Pontiff recalled the failure of such initiatives in history: “It is something that has never worked throughout history”<sup>9</sup>.

It is easy to understand, from these few examples, that the premise of inclusion caused the opposite effect of exclusion, leading to discord. In a heterogeneous European Union, united in its diversity – as the EU’s motto points out – such a document risks harming the EU’s political construct itself, its Democratic-Christian

<sup>8</sup> Remus Florescu, *Reacția președintelui Academiei Române la scandalul «interzicerii Crăciunului» de către UE: «Lăsați-ne așa cum suntem!»* – The Response of the President of the Romanian Academy to the scandal of «forbidding Christmas» by the EU: «Leave us as we are!», *Adevărul*, 1/12/2021, [https://adevarul.ro/locale/cluj-napoca/reactia-presedintelui-academiei-romane-scandalul-interzicerii-craciunului-ue-lasati-ne-asa-suntem-1\\_61a758a95163ec42712146aa/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/locale/cluj-napoca/reactia-presedintelui-academiei-romane-scandalul-interzicerii-craciunului-ue-lasati-ne-asa-suntem-1_61a758a95163ec42712146aa/index.html) [...] Today we have a neo-marxist globalism, which tends with the same or other similar words, same goals.

<sup>9</sup> Matteo Bruno, Conferenza stampa del Santo Padre durante il volo di ritorno dalla Grecia – Press Conference of the Holy Father during the return flight from Greece, 6/12/2021, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2021/december/documents/20211206-grecia-volodiritorno.html> [...] è una cosa che non ha funzionato durante la storia.

origins (suffice it to invoke Alcide de Gasperi, Konrad Adenauer et al). Eurocrats will therefore have to clearly demarcate their boundaries and harmonise the principle of non-discrimination (Article 14) – from which Commissioner Dalli’s initiative has seemingly sprouted – with the principle of freedom of expression (Article 10), both of which are enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>10</sup>. Through this inclusive communication guide, they demonstrate that they have not yet figured out the boundary between the two principles.

Perhaps too hastily ensconced – as its promoter herself would confess – the document triggered a chain reaction. The Italian newspaper *Il Giornale* set the tone<sup>11</sup>. A high official of the Vatican immediately declared himself vexed. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, State Secretary of the Vatican, said: [...] Europe owes its existence and its identity to many contributions, but certainly we cannot forget that one of the main contributions, if not the main one, has been Christianity. Therefore, destroying difference and destroying the roots means precisely destroying the person<sup>12</sup>.

A group of Christian Democrat MEPs, led by Antonio Tajani (EPP), former President of the European Parliament, addressed a written interpellation to the Commission<sup>13</sup>. Leaders of Conservative and Far-Right political parties such as Giorgia Meloni (Fratelli d’Italia) and Matteo Salvini (Lega Nord) reacted in the press and on social media. Every one of them was accused of misinforming, distorting reality and politically instrumentalizing Helena Dalli’s initiative.

Following this controversy – triggered by the Italian press, but reflected in the entire European press<sup>14</sup> – the European Commissioner for Equality was

<sup>10</sup> European Convention on Human Rights, <https://rm.coe.int/1680a2353d>.

<sup>11</sup> Francesco Giubilei, “In Europa vietato dire «Natale» e perfino chiamarsi Maria – In Europe it is forbidden to say «Christmas» and even to call oneself Mary”, *Il Giornale*, 28/11/2021, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/follie-ue-l-inclusivit-vietato-dire-natale-e-chiamarsi-maria-1992290.html>; Francesco Giubilei, “Bufera sulla censura Ue. «Cancella la nostra storia» – Blizzard over EU censorship: «erasing our history»”, *Il Giornale*, 29/11/2021, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/bufera-sulla-censura-ue-cancella-nostra-storia-1992501.html>.

<sup>12</sup> «Un linguaggio che sradica la cultura cristiana non può essere inclusivo – A language that eradicates Christian culture cannot be inclusive». *Bioetica News Torino*, 30/11/2021, <https://www.bioeticanews.it/un-linguaggio-che-sradica-la-cultura-cristiana-non-puo-essere-inclusivo/> [...] L’Europa deve la sua esistenza e la sua identità a tanti apporti, ma certamente non si può dimenticare che uno degli apporti principali, se non il principale, è stato proprio il cristianesimo. Quindi, distruggere la differenza e distruggere le radici vuol dire proprio distruggere la persona.

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-005315\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-005315_EN.pdf). Interpellations from other MEPs followed – for example, from MEPs in the Identity and Democracy group, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-005585\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-005585_EN.html).

<sup>14</sup> We limit ourselves here to giving a few examples: Anais Ginori, “Mai dire Natale: il decalogo Ue che vuole dettare le parole corrette – Never Say Christmas: the EU decalogue that wants to dictate the correct words”, *Repubblica*, 29/11/2021, [https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2021/11/29/news/commissione\\_europea\\_linee\\_guida\\_natale\\_vacanze\\_miss\\_mrs\\_signori\\_signore-328309122/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2021/11/29/news/commissione_europea_linee_guida_natale_vacanze_miss_mrs_signori_signore-328309122/); Maia de la Baume, “Culture wars and cock-ups collide: How inclusive language divided the EU”, *Politico*, 4/12/2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-ursula-von-der-leyen-document-eu/>; EU advice on inclusive language withdrawn after rightwing outcry, *The Guardian*, 30/11/2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/30/eu-advice-on-inclusive-language-withdrawn-after-rightwing-outcry>; Marius Oprea, “Prezentul fără perdea – Present without a mask”, *Mediafax*, 8/12/2021, <https://www.mediafax.ro/editorialistii/prezentul-fara-perdea-marius-oprea-se-clatina-colonizarea-ideologica-din-europa-a-inceput-cruciada-papei-francisc-si-a-celor-multi-care-au-credinta-impotriva-celor-putini-dar-care-au-putere-20390509>.

disavowed by Ursula von der Leyen<sup>15</sup>. Maltese Helena Dalli has been determined to withdraw the internal document on the grounds that it is a draft and requires certain corrections: It is not a mature document and does not meet all Commission quality standards (...) The guidelines clearly need more work. I therefore withdraw the guidelines and will work further on this document<sup>16</sup>.

According to Eric Mamer, spokesman for the EU Commission, an improved version is being prepared. He gave assurances that it is not an EU directive, but is intended to be a package of “recommendations for internal use” aimed at encouraging inclusive language<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, a necessary back-peddalling needed for repositioning and armouring the device.

### *Springs of a (for now) Failed Project*

Given that Europe faces challenges such as migration, the pandemic, war and recession, issues related to inclusive language and language policies may seem irrelevant, and pros/cons of addressing formulas, names or phrases may seem futile. They can seem to be, but they are not. Because language is an identity factor. And so is religion. No matter how well-anchored they are in contemporary secularized society, and no matter how cosmopolitan or polyglot, people continue to lament and to raise their prayers in their mother tongue. Therefore, initiatives such as those excogitated in the Berlaymont Palace, which call into question these identity pillars (linguistical and religious), invite reflection upon their meanings and communicative intentions.

Without throwing anathemas at inclusive language and solemnly chanting diatribe against its promoters, we will try to understand what lies beyond the promotion of this kind of ‘politically correct’ language<sup>18</sup>. Can the initiative of European Commissioner Helena Dalli be reduced to a bureaucratic blunder? Or is it a step in a roadmap that aims to implement a neo-Marxist plan?

<sup>15</sup> “Von der Leyen desautoriza a la comisaria que quería prohibir menciones a la Navidad – Von der Leyen overrules commissioner who wanted to ban mentions of Christmas”, *ABC*, 05/12/2021, [https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-leyen-desautoriza-comisaria-queria-prohibir-menciones-navidad-202112050126\\_noticia.html](https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-leyen-desautoriza-comisaria-queria-prohibir-menciones-navidad-202112050126_noticia.html); “La Comisión Europea retira la guía interna de lenguaje inclusivo que pedía felicitar «las fiestas» y no «la Navidad» – The European Commission withdraws internal guidance on inclusive language that called for greeting «the holidays» and not «Christmas»”, *El Mundo*, 30/11/2021, <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2021/11/30/61a660cfffdddfcd9e8b4580.html>.

<sup>16</sup> [https://twitter.com/helenadalli/status/1465639346103533573?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1465639346103533573%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1\\_&ref\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.eunews.it%2F2021%2F11%2F30%2Fue-non-impedisce-di-scambiarsi-auguri-di-natale-ma-commissione-ritira-linee-guida-dopo-polemiche%2F163581](https://twitter.com/helenadalli/status/1465639346103533573?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1465639346103533573%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.eunews.it%2F2021%2F11%2F30%2Fue-non-impedisce-di-scambiarsi-auguri-di-natale-ma-commissione-ritira-linee-guida-dopo-polemiche%2F163581).

<sup>17</sup> Emanuele Bonini, “Dopo le polemiche la Commissione Ue ritira le linee guida sul linguaggio inclusivo con i riferimenti al Natale – After the controversy the EU Commission withdraws the guidelines on inclusive language with references to Christmas”, *La Stampa*, 30/11/2021, [https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/2021/11/30/news/dopo\\_le\\_polemiche\\_la\\_commissione\\_ue\\_ritira\\_le\\_linee\\_guida\\_sul\\_linguaggio\\_inclusivo\\_con\\_i\\_riferimenti\\_al\\_natale-871962/](https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/2021/11/30/news/dopo_le_polemiche_la_commissione_ue_ritira_le_linee_guida_sul_linguaggio_inclusivo_con_i_riferimenti_al_natale-871962/).

<sup>18</sup> See definition of *politically correct* concept in Cambridge English Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/politically-correct>. Launched by the representatives of the Frankfurt School, Americanized in the ‘70s in academic environments – where courses focusing on multiculturalism, feminism, post-colonial studies were introduced – this concept was globalized after the ‘90s.

In the name of inclusion, a clearly ideologized language is being proposed. In other words, what we are being offered is the denaturalization of language. Issues concerning religious diversity or sexual orientation are intended to be settled in the linguistic realm. Aspiring to represent and include those *who are otherwise*, we mix the ‘natural gender’<sup>19</sup> and the grammatical gender, we throw biology and linguistics into a blender and thus build the communication standard of Brussels functionaries. Their standardised language would later be converted into the model for officials from EU Member States, and thus spread across and beyond the EU. In her endeavour, however, the zealous EU Commissioner disregards the fact that language is tributary to grammatical and orthographic correctness, not to political correctness. This should prevail, especially when phrases such as “functional illiteracy” are agitated in the EU with great concern<sup>20</sup>.

Ideologizing language is a form of political abuse. The normalization of language is not the place for improvised politicianisms which disguise speech and make thoughts cringe. And yet, politicians sheltered under the Brussels dome draw up lists of forbidden words, make up a lexicon of ostracized words and forget that the language has its registers (formal/ official; informal/ colloquial), its stylistic varieties (belletristic, scientific, legal-administrative), its evolution (archaisms, neologisms, barbarisms), its nuances (euphemism, pejorative, vulgarism, bookish, obsolete, jargon, slang). All these peculiarities are recorded as such in dictionaries. Because the language is democratic, while the politically correct discourse applied to the linguistic sphere is unnaturally progressive. The language embraces various idiolects, while politically correct speech is strangled by all sorts of restraints. It is difficult to prove how, by carving out words or expressions, one could combat gender stereotypes or racial discrimination. As the writer Pascal Bruckner remarks, a reality is not denied by a euphemism<sup>21</sup>.

Stumbling into examples of inclusive language is yet another example of an emphatic discourse in which the EU is adamantly preoccupied with forms and forgets about substantive issues<sup>22</sup>. The new Pact for Migration – proposed in 2020, but not yet adopted – would perhaps have been a more favourable ground for

<sup>19</sup> In Romanian, ‘natural genus’ (instead of biological, male/ female sex) is a semantic calc taken from the English word *gender*. See Rodica Zafiu, “Gen și Sex – Gender and Sex”, *Dilema veche*, n. 905, 12-18/08/2021, <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/pe-ce-lume-traim/articol/gen-si-sex>; Rodica Zafiu, “Păcatele limbii: Genul din gramatici și cel din chestionare – Sins of language: grammar genre and questionnaire genre”, *România Literară*, n. 39/2007, [https://arhiva.romanialiterara.com/index.pl/genul\\_din\\_gramatici\\_i\\_cel\\_din\\_chestionare](https://arhiva.romanialiterara.com/index.pl/genul_din_gramatici_i_cel_din_chestionare)

<sup>20</sup> Defined by UNESCO since the late 1970s and affirmed as a concern of the European Union more than two decades ago, this phenomenon is growing. See Luca Aterini, “È l’analfabetismo funzionale «la più grande emergenza dell’Italia» – Functional illiteracy is «Italy’s greatest emergency»”, 7/09/2020, <https://greenreport.it/leditoriale/e-lanalfabetismo-funzionale-la-piu-grande-emergenza-dellitalia/>; Analfabetismul funcțional. România, rezultate de două ori mai slabe decât media Uniunii Europene – Functional illiteracy. Romania, results twice lower than the European Union average, 26/08/2021, <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/analfabetism-functional-romania-rezultate-de-doua-ori-mai-slabe-decat-media-uniunii-europene-20246076>.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Pascal Bruckner conducted by Matei Martin, *Dilema Veche*, no. 760, 13-19/09/2018, <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/la-zi-in-cultura/articol/corectitudinea-politica-e-de-fapt-o-negare-a-realitatii-interviu-cu-pascal-bruckner>.

<sup>22</sup> We recommend in this respect the article written by Tomáš Bořicháček, “Grand ideas and empty jargon”, *Revue Politika* (Brno), 15/03/2013, <https://voxeurop.eu/en/grand-ideas-and-empty-jargon/>.



manifesting racial and ethnic inclusion, beyond the circumvention of the terms ‘immigrant’ or ‘citizen’ from the language of the Eurocrats. For, under the impetus of the principle of non-discrimination, the guide in the analysis envisages: Be mindful of stateless people and immigrants: not everyone in the EU is a ‘citizen’. Avoid ‘every citizen has the right to be safe’... if you mean ‘everyone has the right to be safe’ (p. 19).

This discrepancy between clamored principles and concrete actions, this manner of sweetening a harsh reality – in fact, a great sample of hypocrisy – is masterfully illustrated by the writer Matei Vişniec in the play *Migraaaaants*<sup>23</sup>.

Finally, if one lingers just on this one representation, one can clearly understand a reflection theatre director Andrei Şerban made on politically correct language: [...] those who speak in the name of political correctness only want to gain power; they despise the marginalized and want to dominate them. They claim that we are all equal, when in fact they seek to establish a new dictatorship<sup>24</sup>.

### *What Do People of Letters Have to Say?*

In a fluid society, even linguistic correctness risks appearing anachronistic. It is certain, however, that language cannot be normalized from the top down. Not by politicians, not even by philologists. Whenever they find innovations in current use, the latter – linguists, grammaticists, lexicologists, semioticians – record them as such in dictionaries and place them in line with tradition. Thus, if a society is misogynistic or egalitarian, the vocabulary of its language will undoubtedly reflect this. For by language men communicate both *philia* and *phobia*, sympathy and antipathy, adhesion and reprobation. Therefore, a dictionary, a glossary of terms, will never be able to validate or invalidate a stereotype. These are just a few ideas that come out of the reading of a book by the reputed philologist Darío Villanueva<sup>25</sup>.

Even so, several linguistic artifices appeared under the pressure of egalitarian ideology and the LGBT movement. Some of these even penetrated (or just attempted to penetrate) dictionaries. For example, several decades ago, the noun ‘Mx.’ – “used as a gender-neutral title of courtesy”<sup>26</sup> entered the English-speaking space. Relatively recently, a personal hybrid pronoun appeared in the Francophone space. The *Le Petit Robert* dictionary recorded the pronoun ‘iel/ iels’ – resulting from the fusion between the masculine *il* and the feminine *elle*<sup>27</sup>. The bizarre

<sup>23</sup> Matei Vişniec, *Trilogia balcanică. Migraaaaanţi sau Prea suntem mulţi în aceeaşi barcă – Balkan trilogy. Migraaaaants or Too many of us in the same boat*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2016, p. 213; p. 220.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Andrei Şerban conducted by Mălina Gîndu, *Adevărul*, 12/03/2022, [https://adevarul.ro/cultura/teatru/andrei-Serban-regizor-cei-vorbesc-numele-corectitudinii-politice-vor-doar-obtina-puterea-dispreuiesc-marginalizati-interviu-1\\_622b34e65163ec427116d30f/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/cultura/teatru/andrei-Serban-regizor-cei-vorbesc-numele-corectitudinii-politice-vor-doar-obtina-puterea-dispreuiesc-marginalizati-interviu-1_622b34e65163ec427116d30f/index.html) [...] those who speak in the name of politically correct want only power, they despise the marginalized and want to dominate them. They claim that we are all equal when, in fact, they seek to establish a new dictatorship.

<sup>25</sup> Darío Villanueva, *Morderse la lengua. Corrección política y posverdad – Biting one’s tongue. Political correctness and post-truth*, Espasa, Barcelona, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/MX>.

<sup>27</sup> Le Petit Robert, <https://dictionnaire.lerobert.com/definition/iel>.

form was immediately disqualified with philological arguments<sup>28</sup>, and the French Academy sounded the alarm: [...] in the face of this «inclusive» aberration, the French language is now in mortal danger, for which our nation is now accountable to future generations<sup>29</sup>.

In Italian, a proposal was advanced for representing non-binary persons by the symbol *scevà* (/ə/ from the International Phonetic Alphabet), i.e. replacing personal pronouns *lui/ lei* with 'ləi'. The innovation was categorically rejected by Accademia della Crusca, through the voice of Professor Paolo D'Achille.<sup>30</sup>

In turn, the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) removed from the linguistic portal Observatorio de palabras – Observatory of words the pronoun 'elle' – resulting from the masculine *él* and feminine *ella*<sup>31</sup>, due to the confusion it created. The same Academy, at the request of the Vice-President of the Spanish Government, Carmen Calvo, even drew up a Report on inclusive language<sup>32</sup>.

Older still, under the impulse of the feminist movement, is the debate on nouns that name professions. The feminist argument, according to which the generic male appellation would strengthen patriarchal structures, was opposed to the philological argument – the grammatical genre is asexual and, in Romanic languages at least, the male has inclusive value when used for generic names of professions and positions. Naturally, with the transformations occurring in society, with the “feminization” of certain activities, female forms were integrated into the vocabulary. Which demonstrates, without any doubt, that reality generates words (and not the other way around). We refer here to a series of recommendations in favour of a non-sexist language in Italian<sup>33</sup> and to the viewpoint of the French Academy on the same subject<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Stéphane Chaudier, “Réflexions sur le pronom *iel*: chronique d'une mort annoncée? – Reflections on the *iel* pronoun: chronicle of an announced death?”, *Le Figaro*, 10/12/2021, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/langue-francaise/actu-des-mots/reflexions-sur-le-pronom-iel-chronique-d-une-mort-annoncee-20211210>.

<sup>29</sup> Déclaration de l'Académie française sur l'écriture dite «inclusive» – Declaration of the French Academy on so-called «inclusive» writing, 26/10/2017, <https://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/declaration-de-lacademie-francaise-sur-lecriture-dite-inclusive> [...] devant cette aberration «inclusive», la langue française se trouve désormais en péril mortel, ce dont notre nation est dès aujourd'hui comptable devant les générations futures.

<sup>30</sup> Paolo D'Achille, *Un asterisco sul genere – An asterisk on gender*, 24/09/2021 <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/un-asterisco-sul-genere/4018>.

<sup>31</sup> La RAE elimina «elle» de su Observatorio de palabras por «la confusión que ha generado» – The RAE eliminates «elle» from its Observatory of words due to «the confusion it has generated», *ABC*, 4/11/2020, [https://www.abc.es/cultura/abci-elimina-elle-observatorio-palabras-confusion-generado-202011041855\\_noticia.html](https://www.abc.es/cultura/abci-elimina-elle-observatorio-palabras-confusion-generado-202011041855_noticia.html). Lorena G. Maldonado, La lengua no tiene sexo: «Elle está cansada» – The language has no gender: «Elle is tired», *El Español*, 18/06/2017 [https://www.lespanol.com/cultura/20170617/224478043\\_0.html](https://www.lespanol.com/cultura/20170617/224478043_0.html).

<sup>32</sup> Informe de la Real Academia Española sobre el lenguaje inclusivo y cuestiones conexas – Report of the Spanish Royal Academy on inclusive language and related issues, 2020, [https://www.rae.es/sites/default/files/Informe\\_lenguaje\\_inclusivo.pdf](https://www.rae.es/sites/default/files/Informe_lenguaje_inclusivo.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Raccomandazioni per un uso non sessista della lingua italiana (estratto da «Il sessismo nella lingua italiana» a cura di Alma Sabatini per la Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri e Commissione Nazionale per la Parità e le Pari Opportunità tra uomo e donna – Recommendations for a non-sexist use of the Italian language (excerpt from «Sexism in the Italian Language» edited by Alma Sabatini for the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the National Commission for Equality and Equal Opportunities between men and women, 1987) [https://www.funzionepubblica.gov.it/sites/funzionepubblica.gov.it/files/documenti/Normativa%20e%20Documentazione/Dossier%20Pari%20opportunit%C3%A0/linguaggio\\_non\\_sessista.pdf](https://www.funzionepubblica.gov.it/sites/funzionepubblica.gov.it/files/documenti/Normativa%20e%20Documentazione/Dossier%20Pari%20opportunit%C3%A0/linguaggio_non_sessista.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> La féminisation des noms de métiers, fonctions, grades ou titres, Mise au point de l'Académie française – The feminization of names of professions, functions, grades or titles. Clarification of the French Academy, [https://www.academie-francaise.fr/sites/academie-francaise.fr/files/feminisation\\_2014.pdf](https://www.academie-francaise.fr/sites/academie-francaise.fr/files/feminisation_2014.pdf)



The debate on ‘politically correct’ language initially targeted, and continues to focus, not only on morphology (together with syntactically provoked chain disasters), but also on semantics. There was a lot of ink spent there... The famous writer Javier Marías, a Member of the RAE, wrote a lot on this subject<sup>35</sup> and emphasized the sterility of this language. In an article already included in several textbooks, “Sofistas de museos – Museum sophists”, Javier Marías illustrates a real repertoire of forbidden words (together with their substitutes) and concludes: [...] I believe that those who demonise these words are the real racists, xenophobes and discriminators, because what they really demonise is what they mean (the meaning and not the signifier, pedantically speaking). If I say “that black guy” to refer to someone, it has no worse intention than if I say “that blond guy” or “that one with freckles”, it is a way of identifying, nothing more [...] If we stick to, and bend to, the subjectivity and whim of everyone, and to the extreme susceptibility of our days, soon there will be no name that is not stigmatised and forbidden, and then we will not understand each other at all<sup>36</sup>.

Moreover, Javier Marías raised a key issue on which we all ought to reflect – either as simple speakers or guides of the language, entitled or not: How can we identify and combat discrimination hidden under the crust of standardized language imposed from the political rostrum?

[...] With this imposed uniformity, there is no way of knowing who is who, or what everyone is like [...] If everyone speaks in the same way and uses the same aseptic terms; if everyone declares themselves democratic, tolerant and anti-racist because the opposite is too much frowned upon; if the use of normal and precise and merely descriptive words (*negro* would be one of them) is condemned by a society as oppressive as it is sly; how can we then distinguish between the two? How can we know who is really a democrat and who claims to be one just for the sake of expediency? Who is not a racist and who is, but keeps quiet about it so as not to scare people? Who is not sexist and who is, but disguises it? What politically correct language has achieved is to give, free of charge, a marvellous instrument or manual of pretence to gangsters, scoundrels, racists, fascists, abusers and totalitarians. They now know the simple formula for not passing for such<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> See Javier Marías, *Lección pasada de moda: letras de lengua – Old-fashioned lesson: language letters*, Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona, 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Javier Marías, “Sofistas de museo – Museum sophists”, *El País*, 31/01/2016, [https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/01/25/eps/1453734500\\_316433.html](https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/01/25/eps/1453734500_316433.html) [...] Creo que quienes demonizan estas palabras son los verdaderos racistas, xenófobos y discriminadores, porque lo que en verdad demonizan es lo que significan (el significado y no el significante, dicho con pedantería). Si yo digo “ese negro” para referirme a alguien no tiene peor intención que si digo “ese rubio” o “ese con pecas”, es una manera de identificar, nada más [...] Si nos atenemos y pegamos a la subjetividad y el capricho de cada uno, y a la extrema susceptibilidad de nuestros días, pronto no habrá nombre que no esté estigmatizado y prohibido, y entonces no nos entenderemos.

<sup>37</sup> Javier Marías, “Un maravilloso manual de fingimiento”, en *Harán de mí un criminal* – “A marvellous instrument or manual of pretence”, *They will make a criminal out of me*, Alfaguara, Madrid, 2011. [...] Con esta uniformidad impuesta, no hay forma de saber quién es quién, ni cómo es cada uno [...] Si todo el mundo habla igual y utiliza los mismos terminos asepticos; si todo el mundo se declara democrata, tolerante y antirracista porque lo contrario está demasiado mal visto; si el uso de palabras normales y precisas y meramente descriptivas (*negro* sería una de ellas) es condenado por una sociedad tan opresora como taimada; ¿cómo podemos distinguir entonces? ¿Cómo podemos saber quién es en verdad demócrata y quién se lo proclama tan sólo por conveniencia? ¿Quién no es racista y quién sí, pero se lo calla para no asustar? ¿Quién no es machista y quién sí, pero lo disimula? Lo que ha conseguido el lenguaje políticamente correcto ha sido entregarles, gratis, un maravilloso instrumento o manual de fingimiento a los gangsters, a los canallas, a los racistas, a los fascistas, a los maltratadores y a los totalitarios. Ahora conocen la sencilla formula para no pasar por tales.

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