Are sexist language assumptions empirically grounded?
A priming test of sexist language hypotheses.

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What are the sexist-language concerns in Spanish?

The Spanish is a Gendered Language

Sexist Language Concerns

Gender is encoded usually by the final vowel

Feminine: -a (e.g. “catedrática,” the Spanish for female professor)
Masculine: -o (e.g. “catedrático,” the Spanish for male professor)
Neutral: -e (e.g. “estudiante,” the Spanish for male or female student)

Masculine words change to Neutral in the plural case

The plural case is what mostly worries to anti-sexist contenders because it is preceded by masculine determinant in the neutral case: el estudiante / las estudiantes

Are these concerns empirically grounded?

Testing sexist assumptions empirically

Sexist assumptions
1. The neutral case (both singular and plural) is semantically represented as masculine
2. The masculine plural refers to only male subjects

Methodology

Press “same” or “different” key to indicate if both figures are of the same sex or not

Participants, both in the plural and singular case, behave as standard grammar hypothesis predict

Results

If anti-sexist proposals were right we should see, in the masculine case, the inverse pattern of the feminine. Nevertheless, what we obtain is a pattern which is different from the feminine and equal to the neutral. This supports the general rule of the RAE.

Our results question the anti-sexist statements. Maybe this fight against women discrimination deserves efforts in other more productive fields.

Discussion

Participates

Targets

Primes

College Students

Materials

Singular Case

Plural Case

Press “same” or “different” key to indicate if both figures are of the same sex or not

Sexist Concerns are not empirically grounded

References:
- Rosinski et al. (1975) Automatic semantic processing in Picture-Word interference task. Child development, 8, 643-647.
- «Guía de uso no sexista del lenguaje de la Universidad de Murcia». Unidad para la Igualdad entre mujeres y hombres, Universidad de Murcia, 2011.

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